
Latitudes: For student visas, no September reprieve

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Latitudes



By *Karin Fischer*

In this week's Latitudes: A judge won't toss a lawsuit challenging the Trump administration's student-visa revocations. Legislation to codify OPT. International education's reality-TV connection. But first ...

NO SEPTEMBER MIRACLE

Many colleges relaxed rules to allow late arrivals of international students because of worldwide visa delays. But visas awarded in September did little to make up for precipitous summertime declines in issuances.

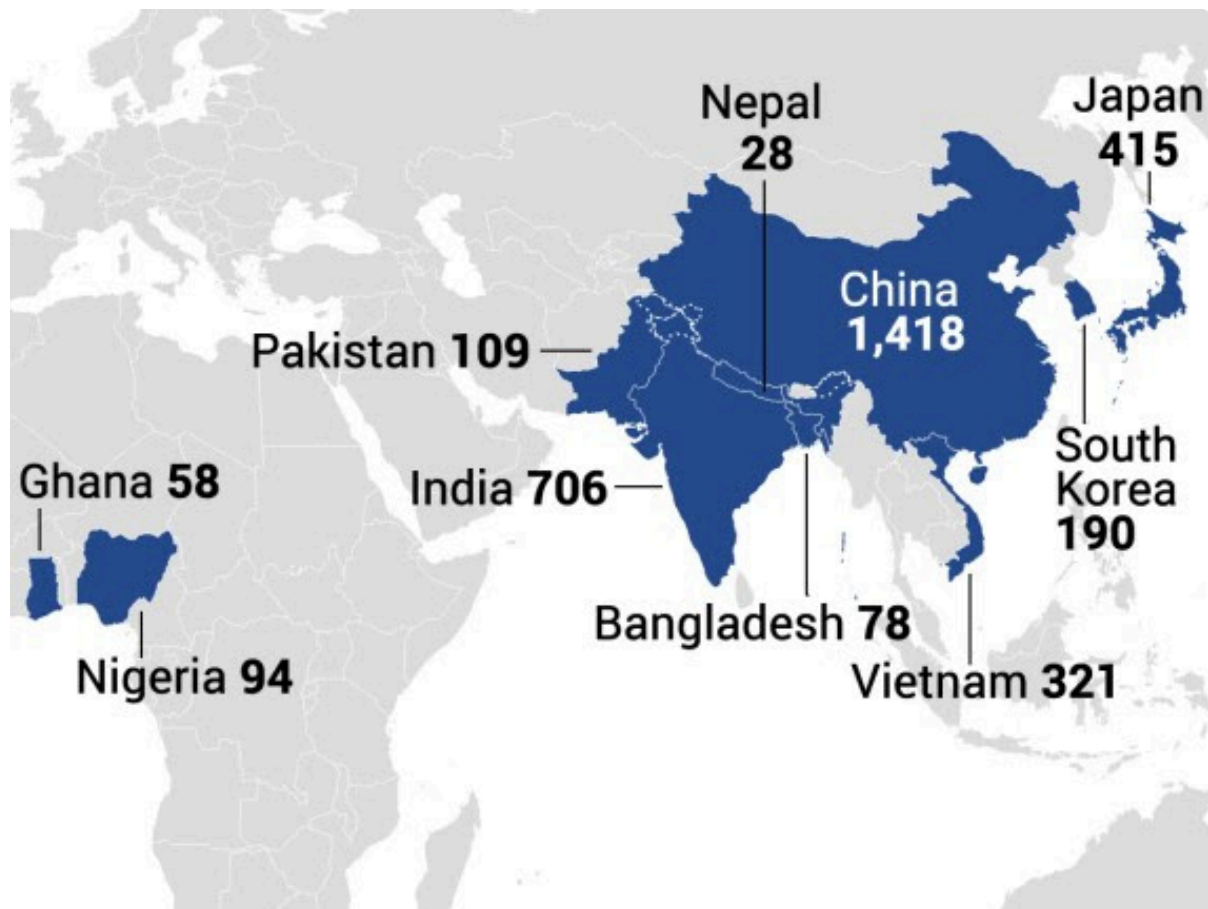
The 7,536 F-1 student visas issued in September 2025, down 18 percent from the same time the previous year, made no dent in the 97,000 visa deficit, according to a *Chronicle* analysis of [U.S. Department of State data](#).

Over all, the number of new foreign students dropped by more than a [third](#) for the current academic year — the largest annual decrease outside of the pandemic.

September is typically a slow month for student visas. But because of a bottleneck caused by a monthlong State Department freeze in student interviews near the start of the [busy summer visa season](#), many institutions hoped consulates would continue to process applications into the fall to [clear the backlog](#).

There's no sign that occurred. American consulates in India, the top sender of students to the United States, awarded just 706 visas in September. Visa issuances there had fallen by 62 percent over the summer.

Other countries with major declines, such as Nepal and Nigeria, also did not see a September rebound.



As the clock ticks toward the start of this year's visa-application cycle, the international-enrollment picture remains unsettled. Visa issuances aren't a perfect proxy for new enrollments, but because most students receive multiyear visas, they largely reflect trends in first-time students.

Interviews were suspended last year in order to put in place an extensive social-media-vetting policy for applicants, which could increase visa-processing times. And

the impression that it is difficult to get an American visa could itself depress student interest.

As always, I'm interested in the perspectives of colleges, counselors, and others involved in international admissions. Email me at karin.fischer@chronicle.com.

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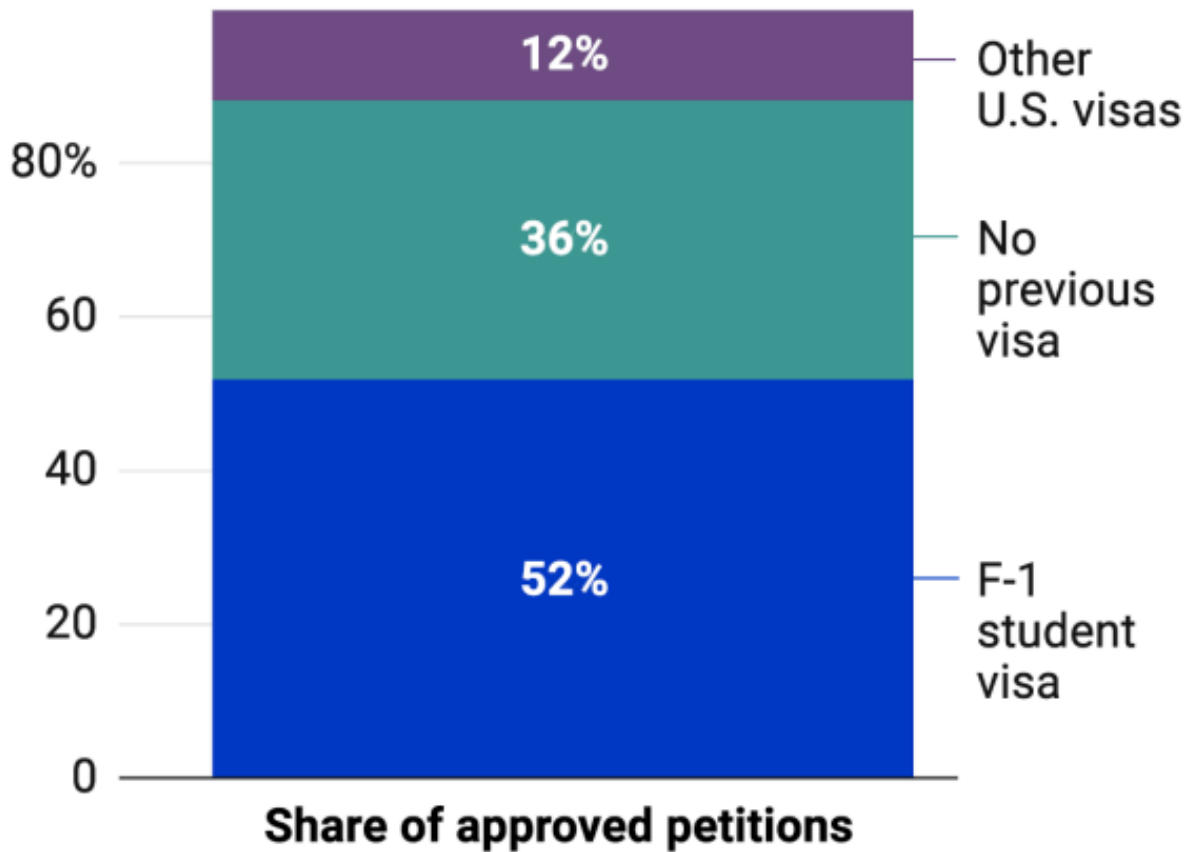
BILL WOULD MAKE OPT LAW

A bipartisan trio of congressmen have introduced legislation that would codify optional practical training, the popular postgraduate work program for international students.

The [bill](#), which is supported by a raft of education and business groups, would include the employment authorization in immigration law.

Readers might be surprised to learn that the three-decade-old program was created and expanded through administrative rulemaking. After all, the opportunity to stay in the United States for up to three years after graduation has become a major recruitment tool, attracting students who want both a degree and work experience. Earlier this year, I [reported](#) that eight in 10 prospective students said they would reconsider their study plans if OPT was not available.

The program isn't just embedded in overseas recruitment — it's become a major steppingstone to long-term work in the United States. Data shared with me by analysts with the Economic Innovation Group, a think tank, show that more than half of recent recipients of H-1B skilled-worker visas first came to the country on student visas. The share rises to nearly 60 percent if high-tech outsourcing firms are removed from H-1B totals.



A third of recipients of the H-1B lottery from 2021 to 2024 had no previous American visa.

While the proposal to codify OPT has sponsors on both sides of the aisle, it's far from a guarantee of passage. In fact, some lawmakers have pushed to kill the program, and the Trump administration has said it is reviewing it for possible reform or elimination.

You can read more of the Economic Innovation Group's OPT analysis in the organization's [Substack newsletter](#).

LAWSUIT OVER VISA REVOCATIONS WILL PROCEED

A federal-court judge has rebuffed the Trump administration's effort to dismiss a lawsuit filed over last spring's widespread student-visa revocations.

The government had argued that the case was moot after the U.S. Department of Homeland Security reversed itself and reinstated thousands of international students' legal status. But Judge Patti Saris of the U.S. District Court for Massachusetts [wrote](#) that the policy could reasonably recur and that issues raised in

the lawsuit, such as the [mass cancellation](#) of visas based on matches with a federal criminal database, have not been resolved.

The complaint was filed by the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts.

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AROUND THE GLOBE

Academic freedom has deteriorated in 50 countries over the past decade — and the erosion has been especially steep in the United States, according to a new [report](#).

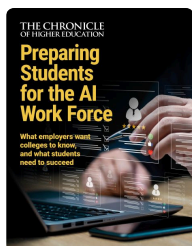
Researchers in Bavaria will no longer have to [cooperate with the German military](#) after a constitutional court overturned a policy directive by the state government.

Foreign applications to Armenian universities increased by 90 percent last year, the country's education minister [said](#).

The children of several Iranian leaders are academics at [American colleges](#).

“Preparation is possible, and it works.” Two lawyers [write](#) in the *Review* about how colleges can plan ahead to deal with immigration officers on campus.

FROM THE CHRONICLE STORE



Preparing Students for the AI Work Force

Today's colleges are tasked with preparing their students to enter a work force that has been reshaped by artificial intelligence. [Order this report](#) for insights on what employers want — and what students need to succeed.

AND FINALLY ...

Fans of both international education and *Survivor* — the two seemingly unrelated spheres intersect! No, not the long-running reality-TV show's exotic locales or the decision to finally allow (extremely capable) Canadian players to compete. It's financial analyst Emily Flippen, currently a contestant on its all-star 50th season, who is a graduate of New York University's Shanghai campus. In fact, Flippen has **credited** being part of the **overseas-branch campus's** inaugural class as the experience that most prepared her to play in a cutthroat reality-show competition.

Thanks for reading. I always welcome your feedback and ideas for future reporting, so drop me a line at karin.fischer@chronicle.com or message me confidentially at [Signal](#). You can also connect with me on [X](#), [LinkedIn](#), or [Bluesky](#). If you like this newsletter, please share it with colleagues and friends. They can [sign up here](#).

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