
Latitudes: Is China expertise evaporating?

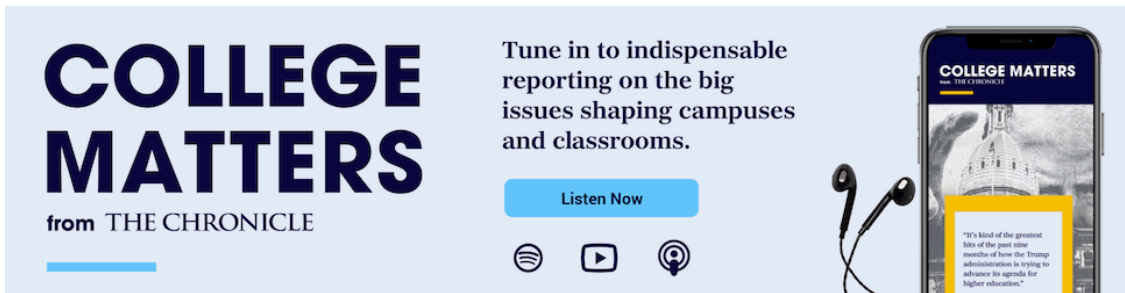
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Latitudes



By *Karin Fischer*

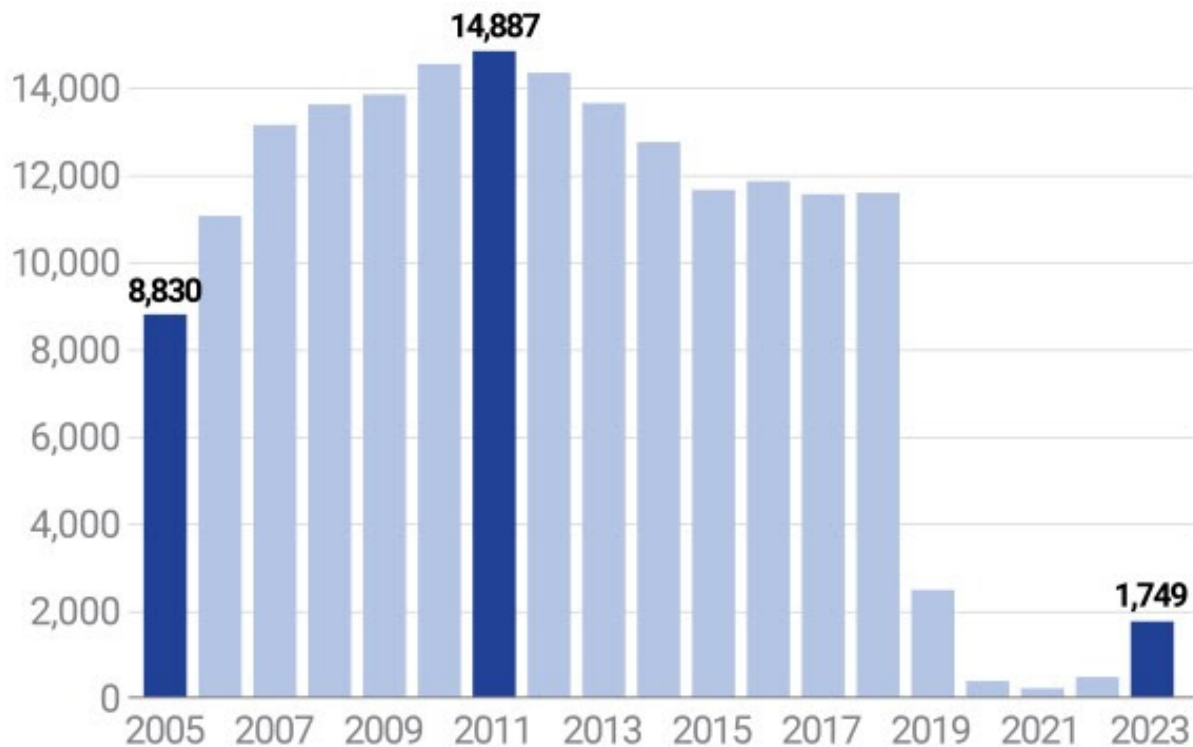
In this week's Latitudes: Trump proposes cuts to international education, again. No more in-state tuition for undocumented students in Kentucky. Back to classes in Gaza. But first ...

A LOST GENERATION?

The United States will face a “critical shortage” of China experts with on-the-ground experience within a decade if the number of Americans studying there continues to be perilously low.

That's the alarm being sounded by a working group assembled by the U.S.-China Education Trust, an organization that supports education and exchange.

Just 1,700 Americans studied in China in 2023, a far cry from a high of 15,000 in 2011. (Data on education abroad lags because a census is not taken until after students return home.)



Certainly, many of the 2011 cohort were not destined to become China experts, which is the subject of the [USCET report](#). But talk to almost any China scholar, and they'll share stories of [formative experiences](#) as a student there. Now, there are worries that the United States will lose a generation of knowledge about a critical geopolitical and economic power as current China specialists begin to retire.

After the pandemic, American students were especially slow to return to China, which maintained quarantines and lockdowns after they had been lifted elsewhere. The report makes clear, however, that while Covid was an accelerant, the cooling of interest began earlier.

The authors, drawn from academe, government, and nonprofit organizations, spread the blame around. Among the causes they cite: a sharp decline in federal funding for China programs, security restrictions on research collaboration, and American colleges' wariness of engaging in a politically sensitive part of the world. Students and scholars may also fear that spending time in China will prevent them from passing security checks for government jobs.

The report offers prescriptions for the ailing relationship between the two countries:

- American officials should voice support for educational exchanges and restore U.S. programs, like the Fulbright scholarship, that have been suspended in China.
- College leaders should work with policymakers to develop guidance and best practices for students and scholars traveling to China.
- Research-security rules should be crafted to protect American intellectual property without creating “insurmountable barriers” to connections with China.
- Expansion of American academic centers and joint campuses in China should be encouraged.

But will the recommendations, which also include regular bilateral talks on education, be enough to prevent a lost generation of China experts?

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CHINESE INTEREST IN U.S. EDUCATION DECLINES

The academic decoupling could go both ways: The United States has slipped to third as a top overseas-study destination, according to a [survey](#) of Chinese students and parents.

American higher education was long the biggest draw for Chinese families, but they now prefer Britain and Hong Kong, due to policy uncertainty in the United States. New Oriental Education and Technology Group, a Chinese-based education agency, polled nearly 7,000 students and parents.

TRUMP BUDGET CUTS INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

The Trump administration is threatening a new round of cuts to international-education programs.

In a [budget proposal](#) released on Friday, the administration said it would “reprogram” funding from international and foreign-language education to other activities, accusing the Department of Education programs of supporting “woke and wasteful projects.”

The budget would also strip 68 percent of spending for [educational and cultural exchanges](#) run by the State Department. In a [social-media post](#), Mark Overmann, executive director of the Alliance for International Exchange, called the proposal “deeply disappointing” but noted that the administration had sought even-deeper reductions last year. In final appropriations bills, Congress largely [reversed the earlier cuts](#).

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U.S. BRANCH CAMPUSES IN THE MIDDLE EAST REMAIN CLOSED

Schools and colleges in Qatar resumed in-person classes last week, but branch campuses of American colleges in the Persian Gulf country are continuing remote instruction.

Foreign campuses were excused from the [reopening](#) push, which is meant to minimize further learning disruption despite ongoing fighting in the region between Iran and the allies, Israel and the United States. Francisco J. Marmolejo, president of the Qatar Foundation’s higher-education arm, said universities in Education City, including outposts of Georgetown, Northwestern, and Carnegie Mellon, weighed home-campus policies and safety concerns for students and staff members, in addition to Qatari government guidance.

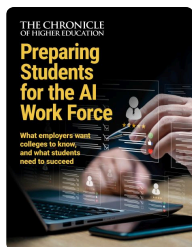
“In the midst of the disruption caused by the threats, it is assuring to see how quickly the universities have adapted to online and hybrid instruction,” Marmolejo wrote in an email to *The Chronicle*.

Iran has [warned](#) that it could attack American colleges in the Middle East.

In other news about the war in Iran:

- Iranian officials said at least 30 Iranian universities have been affected by U.S. and Israeli [strikes](#) since the end of February, including [Sharif University of Technology](#), in Tehran, which has been compared to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- An [Iranian college student](#) was one of two people hanged by the government for their part in anti-regime protests.
- The U.S. State Department has [terminated](#) the legal status of a former Emory University professor who is the daughter of a late Iranian leader.

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AROUND THE GLOBE

A federal judge’s ruling will [prohibit Kentucky](#) from providing in-state college tuition to some undocumented students. Meanwhile, Gov. Laura Kelly of Kansas, a Democrat, [vetoed](#) legislation that would have repealed the state’s longstanding policy of offering in-state-tuition rates to graduates of Kansas high schools, regardless of their citizenship status.

McDaniel College, a small Maryland liberal-arts institution, has continued to operate a satellite campus in [Hungary](#), despite attacks on higher education by the government of President Viktor Orbán. Central European University, founded by the financier George Soros, was forced to relocate under pressure from Orbán, whose crackdown on colleges has been [praised](#) as a model by Vice President JD Vance and others in Trump's orbit.

An American blockade has caused Cuban scientists to put clinical trials [on hold](#) and pull back on other research.

In-person classes are resuming at a [temporary campus](#) in Gaza after two years of online learning during the Israel-Hamas war.

War and politics intrude into the laboratory and classroom for Iranian students and scholars in the United States, a professor from Iran [writes](#).

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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