

Latitudes: Trump sends mixed messages on Chinese students

1 message

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THE
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Latitudes



By *Karin Fischer*

In this week's Latitudes: Tracking worldwide growth in globally mobile students. A new congressional caucus for international exchange. Join Latitudes in conversation at NAFSA. But first ...

'NOT EVERYBODY AGREES WITH ME'

President Trump went to Beijing last week, and although research policy and academic engagement were not part of official discussions with China's leader, Xi Jinping, he did have Chinese students on his mind.

Not only did the president say in a [Fox News interview](#) that he welcomes students from China, he seemed to complain about immigration law that makes it difficult for foreign graduates to stay in the United States.

“It’s a very insulting thing to tell a country, ‘We don’t want your people in our schools,’” Trump told Sean Hannity, implying it could push China to expand its higher-education system to retain talented students. American colleges would be “dying all over the place” without tuition revenue from Chinese students, he added.

Trump appeared to push back against Hannity’s suggestion that there could be national-security risks from international students with “nefarious” intent. “I frankly think it’s good that people come from other countries and they learn our culture, and many of them want to stay here. I think it’s good,” the president said. “Not everybody agrees with me.”

“Everybody” in this case includes Republican members of Congress who used Trump’s overseas trip to elevate concerns about scientific collaboration with China. Lawmakers [introduced a bill](#) last week to further restrict U.S.-funded research with Chinese entities and [opened an investigation](#) into the ties between nine universities, including MIT and Georgia Tech, and China.

Trump’s own administration tried to block Harvard University from enrolling international students, proposed foreign-admissions caps as part of a national compact, and is expected to [publish a rule](#) any day now that could upend the student-visa system.

This isn’t the first time Trump has made [comments at odds](#) with the hard line his administration has taken on international education and engagement. In the past, such statements have done little to sway policy. Despite the mixed messages, there’s not a lot of reason to believe recent remarks augur a change in direction.

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CONGRESS STARTS INTERNATIONAL-EXCHANGE CAUCUS

International exchange now has an official champion in Congress. A pair of Republicans and a pair of Democrats have started a [Congressional International Exchanges Caucus](#).

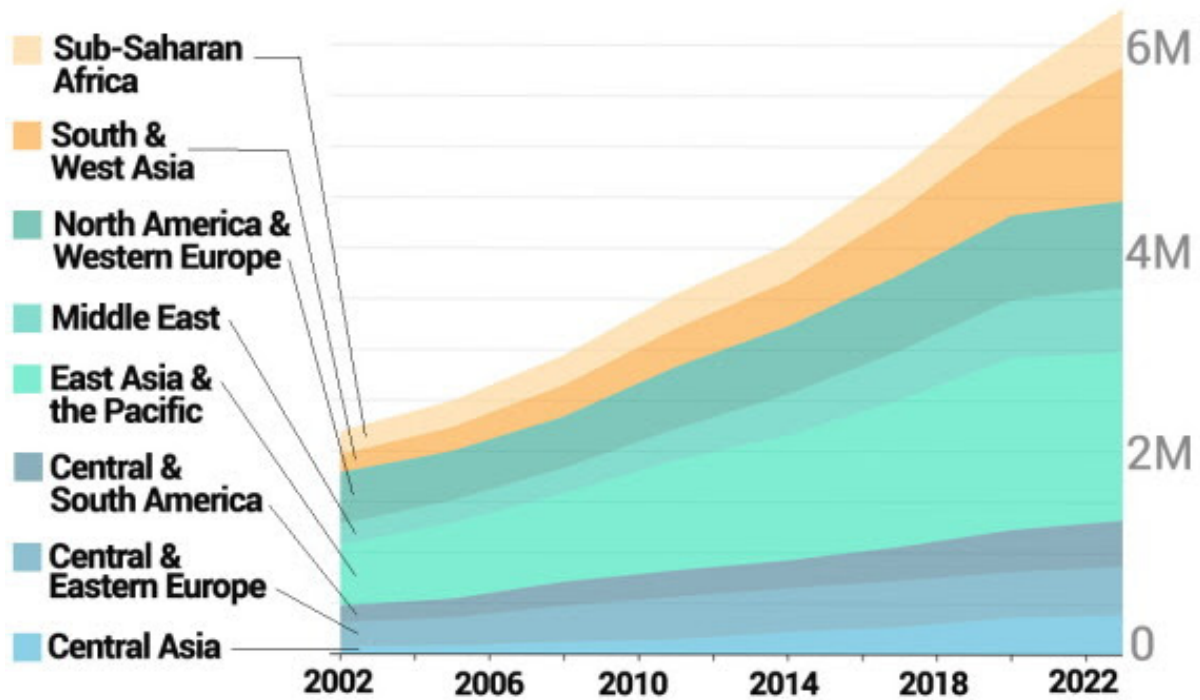
The caucus, open to members of both the House and Senate, will advocate for academic and cultural programs, in particular those run by the U.S. Department of State. The Trump administration has proposed major cuts in funding to the programs in its budget request.

“Cultural exchange is foundational to effective diplomacy, and strengthening our nation’s investment in these initiatives will encourage greater collaboration and mutually beneficial relationships for generations to come,” said Sen. John Boozman, an Arkansas Republican and one of the caucus’s founders. The flagship American exchange, the Fulbright Program, was founded by and named for late Sen. J. William Fulbright, also from Arkansas.

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MORE STUDENTS LEAVING HOME COUNTRY TO STUDY

The number of internationally mobile students worldwide has nearly tripled over the past two decades, increasing from 2.5 million in 2002 to 7.3 million in 2023, according to a report from [UNESCO](#).



East Asia sends the most students overseas, one-quarter of the total. But the region with the fastest rate of growth over the period was South and West Asia. The number of students leaving the region, which includes India and Nepal, to earn a degree has surged sevenfold.

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AROUND THE GLOBE

The “**Stop the Brain Drain Act**” would amend immigration law to [codify](#) optional practical training, the work program for recent foreign graduates of American colleges.

Prospective students report they are being asked in U.S. visa interviews whether they fear persecution in their home countries. Under a [new policy](#), applicants who answer yes can be denied a visa.

A former visiting scholar from China at the University of Michigan has been charged with [lying to border agents](#) when he tried to leave the country in 2023.

An investigation found that Illinois public colleges are [failing to protect](#) international and immigrant students, despite a state law passed in December that requires institutions to develop protocols to deal with immigration enforcement on campus.

A pro-Israel group wants the government to [investigate](#) Georgetown University, alleging the institution acted as a foreign agent for Qatar.

Academic boycotts of Israel are becoming a “[strategic threat](#)” to its universities, a higher-education group warns.

Mass protests of government cuts to higher education have erupted across [Argentina](#).

FROM THE CHRONICLE STORE



The High-Stakes Hunt for Research Funds

The second Trump administration’s slashing of support for academic research has left universities in disarray. [Order this report](#) to explore how institutions are recalibrating their research agendas in an uncertain funding climate.

CATCH UP WITH LATITUDES AT NAFSA

Heading to Orlando next week for the NAFSA annual conference? How about that — me, too!

I’m joining the international-education group’s Joann Ng Hartmann for a conversation on “**What’s International Education’s Next Story?**” We’ll be chatting about the forces reshaping the field, the stories influencing how it is understood, and what comes next. The talk is at **12:45 p.m. on Wednesday at the NAFSA Pavilion** in the expo hall.

I’ll also be part of a panel, “**The Long View: Interpreting Changes in International Student Engagement,**” at **2:10 p.m. on Wednesday in room W110B**. Clay Hensley of the International Baccalaureate organized the discussion, which also

includes Sherif Barsoum of New York University and Federico Ling Sanz Cerrada of Northeastern University.

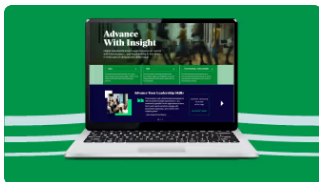
If you can't make either session, say hello — I'll be the one shivering in the convention center's sub-arctic air conditioning.

As always, I'm interested in your conference recommendations. Send your suggestions for can't-miss panels, speakers, and events to me at karin.fischer@chronicle.com. I also welcome feedback on the newsletter and ideas for future reporting. Message me confidentially at [Signal](#) or 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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