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# Latitudes: Will foreign academics skip American conferences?

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**Karin Fischer at The Chronicle**  
<newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com>

Wed, Jun 10,  
2026 at 11:00  
AM

Reply-To: latitudes@chronicle.com  
To: amadorsapo@gmail.com

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The advertisement banner for Singapore Management University (SMU) features a dark blue background. On the left, the SMU logo is displayed above the text "SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY". Below this, the slogan "BOLD IDEAS BIG IMPACT" is written in yellow and white. The central text asks, "What if research was measured by lives changed?" in white. A gold button with the text "Discover SMU" is positioned below the central text. On the right side of the banner, there is a photograph of a man in a blue blazer and glasses standing in a modern, brightly lit interior space, possibly a research lab or office.

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# Latitudes



By *Karin Fischer*

**In this week's Latitudes:** International students are no longer banking on a single destination. Visa defeats for the Trump administration. The State Department's shrinking footprint in Africa. But first ...

## STEERING CLEAR OF 'TRUMLAND'

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Can you hold an international-education conference if international delegations are no-shows?

The recent NAFSA meeting avoided that fate — nearly half of the attendees in Orlando were from overseas. Yet some regulars skipped this year's [gathering](#), deciding for personal or political reasons that they were unwilling to travel to the United States (or to Florida in particular, where Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, has led a crackdown on higher education).

It's not unique to NAFSA — since President Trump's return to office, academic groups have grappled with members who balk at attending conferences in American cities. More than 2,500 people from 75 countries signed a [petition](#) pledging to boycott the International Congress of Mathematicians if it is held as planned this summer in Philadelphia.

Still, for an organization like NAFSA whose *raison d'être* is global engagement, declines in foreign participation could be an especially tough blow.

Doug Ronson, an international-education consultant from Ontario, said that the president's threats to Canada made attending "a firm NO this year for myself and many other Canadians." He noted that friends and neighbors were also avoiding visiting the United States for work or vacation.

“Canadians are refusing to spend their conference money in Trumpland,” Ronson said.

Another regular attendee, from Britain, said he sat out this year’s gathering because of social-media vetting by American authorities. The educator — who asked not to be named out of concern that speaking publicly could itself be a red flag on future trips to the United States — said he isn’t political. “But I can’t spend all this money and come all this way only to be turned back because of some random decade-old comment on a Facebook post,” he said.

Roger Ying, a founder and managing director of the Global Dreamer Foundation, which places students in summer and short-term programs abroad, was at NAFSA. But none of his colleagues from China (Ying is based in Los Angeles) were able to get visas in time. The delays mirror the challenges his students face applying for U.S. visas.

For Ying, attendance trends could determine his company’s presence at future conferences. He estimates it costs about \$10,000 for travel and a small booth in the expo hall. “I’m not pessimistic,” he said, “but I am cautious.”

Indeed, politics isn’t the only factor that could affect turnout for NAFSA and other academic conferences. Colleges could limit travel because of broader belt-tightening or concerns about environmental impact.

Except for the pandemic, an administrator from Australia hasn’t missed a NAFSA conference for more than a dozen years. Like many institutions, her university uses the gathering as a one-stop shop to connect with partners in the United States and around the globe. (She asked not to be identified because she doesn’t have approval to comment publicly.)

This year, though, the administrator stayed at home, while her institution sent a smaller-than-normal crew to Florida. As research restrictions and visa policies make academic collaboration with American colleges more difficult, she is working to deepen connections in Europe and Asia.

In fact, she is looking forward to doing just that at the annual conference of the European Association for International Education in Glasgow in September.

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## AFRICAN STUDENTS FACE A NEW VISA HURDLE

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The U.S. Department of State is closing embassies and [consolidating visa services](#) in Africa, the latest obstacle for a region once seen as [promising](#) for colleges' international-student recruitment.

A directive from Secretary of State Marco Rubio will shrink the number of visa-granting consulates from 50 to just 20. That means many students will have to travel for visa appointments, some to a neighboring country.

President Trump last year issued an order banning travelers from three dozen countries, in Africa and elsewhere. In some cases, the executive order specifically barred visitors with student and scholarly visas, including Nigeria, which is the eighth-largest source of international students at American colleges.

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## SETBACK FOR TRUMP ON H-1B, TRAVEL-BAN CASES

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The Trump administration suffered a pair of legal losses in the past week on policies with implications for international education.

In one case, a federal judge struck down a freeze on work authorization for visa holders from the travel-ban countries who were already in the United States. District Court Judge John McConnell of Rhode Island [ruled](#) that the [pause](#) — which affected a popular training program that allows recent graduates to stay in the U.S. — violated both immigration law and government processes.

A second judge, Leo T. Sorokin of the Federal District Court for Massachusetts, [blocked](#) the administration from imposing a \$100,000 fee on employers applying to sponsor foreign workers on skilled work visas. Colleges use [H-1B visas](#) to hire overseas researchers and other personnel with high-demand skills.

The government is expected to appeal the decisions.

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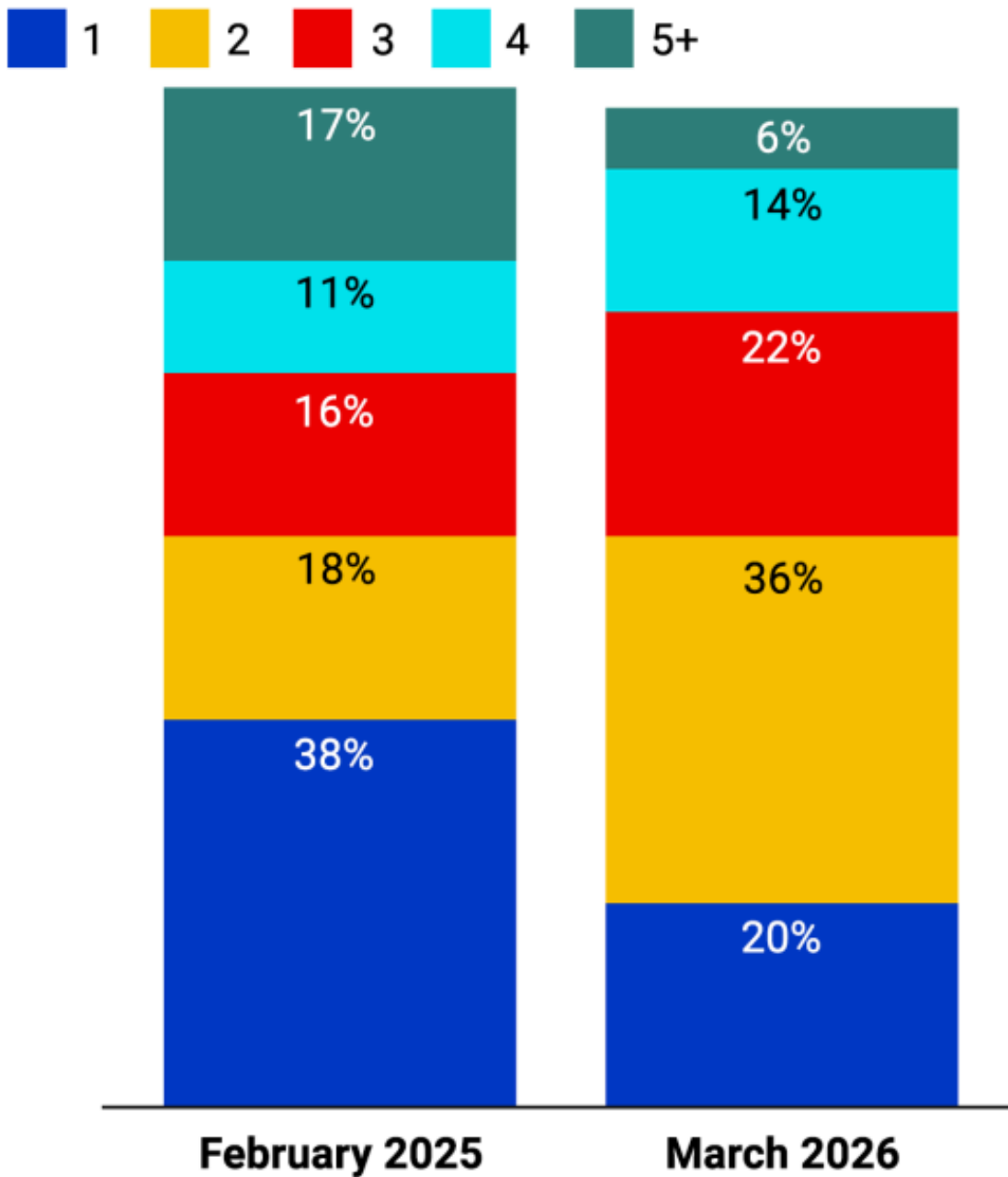
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## FOREIGN STUDENTS CONSIDER MULTIPLE COUNTRIES

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International students often choose the country as much as the campus when studying abroad. Now they're hedging their bets: A year ago, nearly four in 10 students applied to college only in a single country; today, 78 percent of students are considering two or more destinations, according to an IDP Education survey.



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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.

## AROUND THE GLOBE

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**A federal judge has** voided a [longstanding Nebraska law](#) that allowed some undocumented students to qualify for lower in-state tuition rates. Nebraska is one of several states where the U.S. Department of Justice has filed [legal challenges](#) to immigrant benefits, with mixed results.

**Researchers at the University of California at Berkeley who have** been accused by the National Science Foundation of [failing to disclose foreign funding](#) said they had not received overseas financial support.

**British universities could** lose their authorization to enroll international students if too many drop out, part of a government effort to tamp down on [asylum claims](#) by student-visa holders.

**Hungary could regain** access to [European Union funds](#) for research and student mobility that had been frozen because of the previous government's attacks on higher education.

**Students in Iran are** [protesting](#) new rules for college-entrance exams.

**A virtual symposium for international educators** later this month will give participants tools and strategies for navigating [career upheaval](#).

Thanks for reading. I always welcome your feedback and ideas for future reporting, so drop me a line at [karin.fischer@chronicle.com](mailto: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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