

Latitudes: Is Trump a rankings albatross?

1 message

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Latitudes



By Karin Fischer

In this week's Latitudes: China culls "obsolete" degrees. A proposed rule would limit overseas research. Threats to Fulbright funding. But first ...

A TRUMP EFFECT ON RANKINGS

At first glance, American higher education is sitting pretty in two international university rankings released in the past week: Its colleges are atop the lists compiled by *U.S. News & World Report* and QS Quacquarelli Symonds, a global-education company based in Britain.

Six of the 10 highest-ranked institutions are American, according to *U.S. News*, while they hold four of the top 10 places on QS's assessment. The United States is even

more dominant on two other global standings.

But [QS's newly released data](#) comes with a cautionary note attached: American colleges are losing ground on two major metrics of global engagement. Of some 180 U.S. institutions analyzed by QS, just 14 improved on a measure based on the ratio of international students to overall students.

	U.S. News & World Report	Times Higher Education	QS	Shanghai
 U.S.	6	7	4	8
 U.K.	3	3	4	2
 China	1	-	-	-
 Switz.	-	-	1	-
 Singapore	-	-	1	-

More than 40 other countries and territories outperformed the United States in their share of international enrollments.

This is not exactly news to anyone paying attention to American higher education. Policy changes, the political environment, and hiccups in visa issuances have combined to depress foreign enrollments.

And while the United States attracts the most students over all, the sheer size of the higher-education system here means that they are dispersed rather than concentrated in a handful of institutions.

The ratio of foreign-born faculty members increased at 47 American colleges while dropping at 69 others. But the data may not fully account for professors recently lured away by countries promising more research dollars and less political interference, QS notes.

The United States fared better on a third global benchmark, of international research networks, with one college in the top 10 and an additional seven in the top 50.

But some experts, like Richard Holmes, who writes the *University Ranking Newsletter*, [argue](#) that the four major global rankings are lagging indicators because they weigh citations heavily, which favors more-established researchers and institutions.

Most of these rankings also significantly factor in institutional prestige as judged by other academics, which can privilege older universities in the United States and Europe. That reputation could be up for reassessment, though, in the current climate.

I'm not making a case for rankings but rather suggesting that they can act as a mirror, reflecting the world's perception of American education.

I'm interested in knowing whether you find rankings a useful tool or if there are other measures you look at when benchmarking your institution, and the country, to the rest of the world. You can reach me by email at karin.fischer@chronicle.com.

Another ranker, Britain's *Times Higher Education*, is out with [yet another ranking](#). The upshot: Colleges in Australia, Britain, Canada, and Malaysia do well on sustainability.

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A NEW RULE WOULD LIMIT INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

Researchers would be forbidden from using federal funds to collaborate on projects with scientists from countries that are considered foreign adversaries or are of “particular concern” because of national-security risks.

The White House is proposing a [new rule](#) that would set a governmentwide standard for joint research and ensure that taxpayers’ dollars are not “wasted or misused.” The regulation reflects public officials’ fears that countries like China may be taking advantage of American academic openness.

The measure would also apply to multilateral cooperation. That could shut off grant funding to scientists and institutions participating in high-profile work like the Large Hadron Collider project for high-energy physics, in which some of the partners could be from flagged countries. The deadline for public comment is July 13.

Meanwhile, a Republican congressman from Texas has introduced [legislation](#) to strip federal spending to colleges that work with organizations believed to have ties to China’s Communist Party.

CHINA OVERHAULS A THIRD OF ITS DEGREE PROGRAMS

Chinese universities have revoked or suspended more than 12,000 “obsolete” degrees over the past five years to better align with national economic-development goals.

As part of the [sweeping overhaul](#), institutions have added some 10,000 new undergraduate degrees in high-tech fields like artificial intelligence. One third of all academic programs were affected by the changes, which are also meant to reduce unemployment among recent graduates.

The cuts have been concentrated in programs in the arts, humanities, foreign languages, and management.

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AROUND THE GLOBE

The White House budget office has cleared a [rule](#) that would set fixed time limits on student visas. The approval is the last step before the [regulation](#) is made public.

An amendment to legislation funding the U.S. Department of State would eliminate all spending on the flagship [Fulbright Program](#).

U.S. government agencies should work together to streamline visa processing, provide more policy stability, and modernize postgraduate work opportunities, Shorelight, an international-education company, argues in a [brief](#).

Authorities in Belarus are carrying out a “[countrywide intimidation campaign](#)” against current and former students of the European Humanities University, Human

Rights Watch said. The liberal-arts institution was founded in Minsk but now operates in exile in Lithuania.

Fewer scientists are leaving [Russia](#) because of visa difficulties, research-security concerns, and a tough academic job market. There had been an exodus of researchers at the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

A report accuses Israel of “[scholasticide](#)” in Palestine.

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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.

AND FINALLY ...

Fearful that their periods could disrupt their concentration, some students in China have turned to contraceptives or home remedies to [block menstruation](#) during the all-important national college-entrance exam, the gaokao.

“Menstruation has bad influence on my problem-solving abilities. I must make sure that nothing goes wrong with my exams,” one woman wrote on social media, noting that she postponed her period by drinking a glass of apple-cider vinegar per day for about two weeks.

Another posted a photo of a half-empty pack of contraceptive pills with the comment, “*Gaokao* and I have a baby.”

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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