
Latitudes: What to know about big changes to student visas

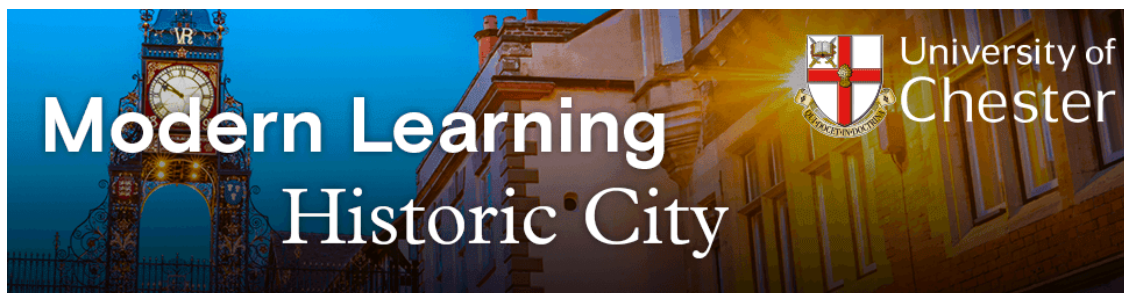
1 message

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THE
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Latitudes



By *Karin Fischer*

In this week's Latitudes: The federal government opened a new probe into Harvard's China ties. A win for Fulbright. Foreign-language programs get the axe. But first ...

LONG-EXPECTED REGULATIONS ARE FINALLY HERE



To paraphrase REM, it's the end of duration of status as we know it (and I feel fine).

Well, maybe not that last part. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security [published](#) the final version of a rule imposing fixed time limits on student visas late last week. For international students and colleges, the change, which will go into effect on September 15, is nothing short of seismic.

There are plenty of good explainers out there about the departure from a longstanding policy that allows students to stay in the United States until they complete their studies, otherwise known as duration of status. I'll link to a few of them below. Instead, I want to use this space to highlight some less-covered aspects of the new regulation that could shape its impact going forward. In no particular order ...

Choice. The rule will prevent undergraduates from changing their major during their first year, unless they get an exemption. Graduate students won't be able to switch at all. In the notice, the department said the provision will "provide more stability in the admission process."

I routinely hear from students from countries with more rigid educational systems that the flexibility to explore academic interests and follow new passions is something they value about American colleges. Does the rule undercut that selling point?

Transfer pathways. Under the current system, the original visa is the entry point to the broader American higher-education system: Students can spend time in English-language programs before they begin their degrees. Here in California, many foreign graduates of top campuses like UC-Berkeley originally enrolled at one of the state's community colleges, thanks to strong articulation agreements. American master's-degree programs recruit from the pool of international undergraduates who are already in the country and don't need new visas.

The idea of flow between different parts of the system is baked in for many students and colleges. Movement between institutions or between study and postgraduate work will still be possible — but a lot more complicated.

Paperwork. The new requirement to approve extensions will fall on an agency, the U.S. Immigration and Citizenship Services, that already has an enormous backlog of applications for work approvals and changes of immigration status. In the final rule, the government said the burden of longer processing times is outweighed by improved compliance and reduced national-security risk. It also said it would monitor application volume and potentially increase resources.

Last year's changes to social-media vetting for student-visa applicants are a reminder that adding to the workload of an already-strained system can stress it further, slowing processing for everyone.

Some additional resources:

- [International Student Resource Center](#)
- [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#)
- [Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration](#)
- [The Brookings Institution](#)
- [An analysis of the rule change and why it matters, from me](#)

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PROPOSAL TO CUT FULBRIGHT DEFEATED

A bipartisan majority of lawmakers rejected a U.S. House amendment that would have zeroed out funding for the Fulbright Program.

The proposal was introduced by Rep. Lauren Boebert, a Colorado Republican, who called the flagship American educational and cultural-exchange program financially wasteful and an “[unacceptable risk](#)” to national security. Fulbright backers countered that the program cultivates relationships with future foreign leaders, making the United States safer and stronger. The [amendment](#) was defeated 348-79.

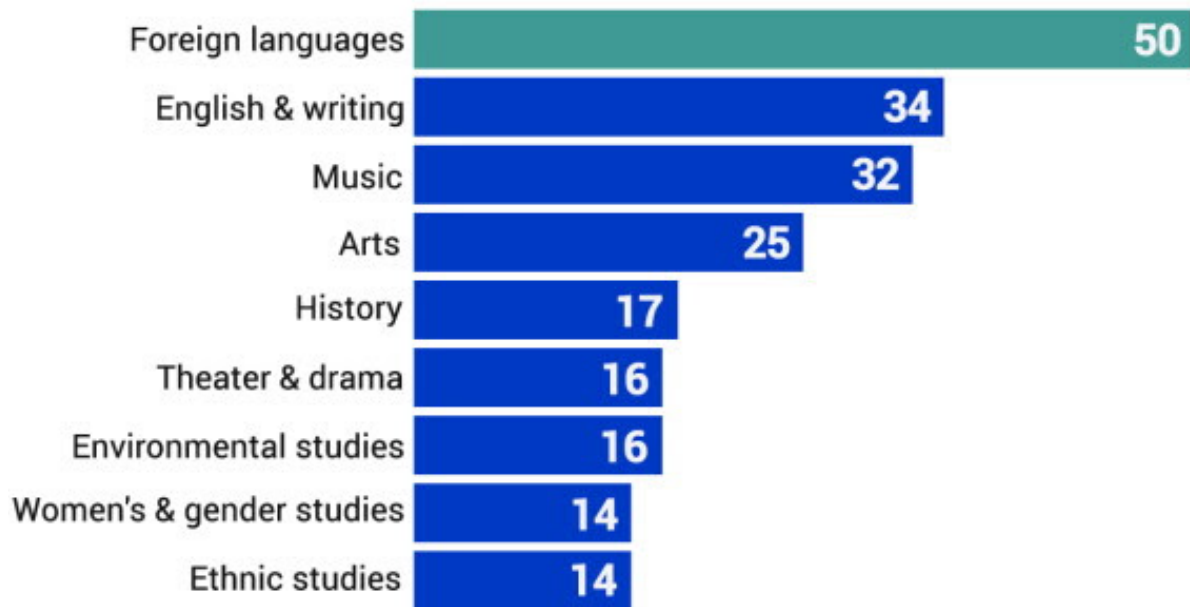
The House also rejected deep cuts to international-education programs proposed by the Trump administration, although the funding levels included in a State Department spending bill were lower than those advocated for by supporters.

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES ARE THE BIGGEST LOSERS

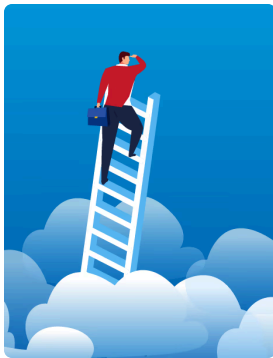
Foreign-language majors are the top target for program cuts at American colleges, according to [CollegeWatch](#), a news site run by Columbia University that tracks attacks on higher education.



Reporters examined publicly announced reductions in course offerings at 95 institutions since April 2024. In addition to foreign languages, majors in English and writing, music, and the arts were axed with greater frequency. The number of students studying a foreign language has tumbled in recent years, according to the [Modern Language Association](#).

CollegeWatch announced earlier this month that it was ceasing publication after Columbia decided not to renew its funding.

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JUSTICE DEPT. INVESTIGATING HARVARD OVER CHINA-LINKED FINANCIAL AID

The U.S. Department of Justice opened an investigation into whether Harvard University violated federal civil-rights law by giving preferences in some financial-aid programs to foreign students.

The government is looking into whether the university accepted gifts from Chinese donors to establish or support aid programs with strings attached. A college spokesman [told The Harvard Crimson](#) that Harvard “does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, or national origin in allocating financial aid.”

The Justice Department said it opened the probe after reviewing mandatory foreign-funds disclosures filed by Harvard. A [CBS News analysis](#) of recently released records found that top research universities collectively accepted nearly \$28 million in the second half of last year from overseas entities included on at least one government watch list.

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.

AROUND THE GLOBE

The president of the University of New England called for a “thorough and transparent investigation” of a [deadly shooting](#) by immigration agents just miles from one of its Maine campuses.

Maryland joins the club of states [sued](#) by the Trump administration over state policies or laws that offer lower in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students.

Officials from Tokyo’s municipal government and New York University are talking about the possibility of [opening a campus](#) in the Japanese city.

Australia has tripled fees for student visas, raising concerns about foreign enrollments.

The number of international students studying in [India](#) increased by 19 percent.

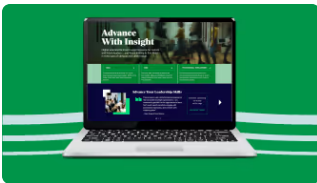
Readers, I’ve been so overwhelmed by your response to last week’s [flash survey on study abroad](#) that I need more time to get through your comments. Thank you, and I hope to have more to share next week.

Thanks, too, 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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