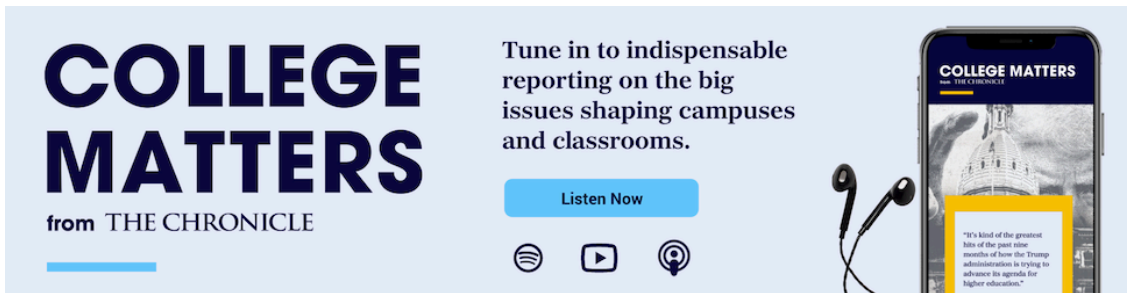

Latitudes: Words or action?

Karin Fischer at The Chronicle
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Wed, Aug 19,
2026 at 11:00
AM

Reply-To: latitudes@chronicle.com
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Smartphone mockup showing the College Matters podcast cover with a quote: "It's kind of the greatest hits of the past nine months of how the Trump administration is trying to advance its agenda for higher education."

THE
CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER
EDUCATION

Latitudes



By *Karin Fischer*

In this week's Latitudes: College-agent relationships. Congress accuses Harvard of furthering Chinese interests. Is Greece a new education hub? But first ...

COLLEGES WARNED ON CPT



The U.S. Department of Homeland Security signaled it will apply a more expansive interpretation of regulations governing curricular practical training, one that could make it difficult for international students to engage in academic-related work like co-ops, internships, and practicums.

In a [broadcast message](#) sent to colleges last week, the department said that administrators should approve students' work experience through the federal program, known as CPT, only in cases "without which, they would be unable to complete their degree."

"Only authorize CPT if its absence would make the attainment of a degree an impossibility and if the work associated with CPT is required for *all* students pursuing that degree," the message directs administrators.

CPT carves out an exception to a federal prohibition against international students engaging in off-campus work, allowing them to do so if the work is an "integral part of an established curriculum." In practice, college officials said the definition of "integral" has been understood as related to a specific credit-bearing course and its learning objectives, supervised by a faculty member, and recognized by the institution through a designation such as a co-op placement.

It has not been seen as a universal graduation requirement for all students in a program. "It is a VAST departure from our understanding," one administrator wrote me, asking to remain anonymous because of political sensitivities.

Broadcast messages are meant to be guidance memos to campus officials, not changes in policy. “Nothing about these regulations has changed,” a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security said in an emailed response to a list of questions posed by *The Chronicle*. “However, schools and employers should consider themselves on notice: Under President Trump, abuse of this generous system will no longer be tolerated.”

Here are some key takeaways about the announcement:

It could eliminate CPT as an option for most students. I heard from dozens of Latitudes readers, and almost all said that they do not have a single course or learning experience that is mandatory for all students in a program — the strict standard the new interpretation appears to apply.

“Read literally, it would exclude nearly every internship-for-credit model I’m aware of at a liberal-arts college, where an internship course is typically an elective option within a major, available to interested students, faculty-supervised, credit-bearing, but not a box every single student in that major must check to graduate,” another college administrator wrote.

The Trump administration has been making noise since before the 2024 election about restricting or doing away altogether with CPT as well as [optional practical training](#), a related work program for recent graduates. The broadcast message could be a back-door way of achieving the same goal.

The message’s timing is potentially disruptive. With the start of the new academic year, many students are set to begin CPT as early as this week. Some college officials said they were taking a wait-and-see approach, but others said they would cancel or deny CPT for students as a precautionary measure.

CPT has been misused. There has been controversy about colleges that approve CPT for students from day one of their enrollment, raising questions about how much the work truly relates to their studies. And my colleagues and I previously did an [investigation](#) of so-called visa mills, sham colleges that used CPT to bring foreign workers, not students, into the United States.

The alert, however, is a warning to all colleges, not just targeted bad actors.

Colleges are unnerved. The message was couched as a “reminder of liability” to designated school officials, or DSOs, the staff members on each campus responsible for overseeing student-visa records. “Improper CPT authorization, such as for non-integral purposes, may subject both the institution and individual DSO to

administrative or legal consequences,” it warned. The tone seems to have rattled many readers.

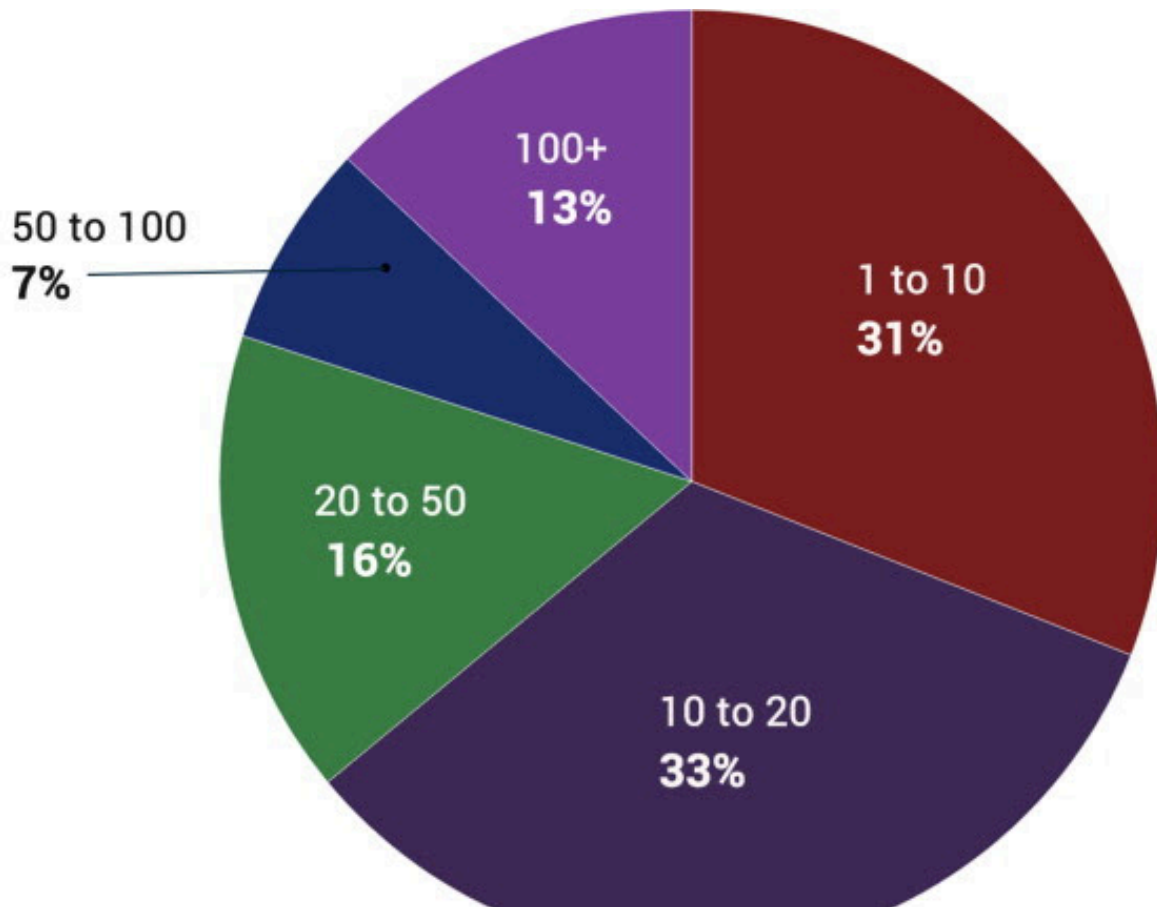
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A SNAPSHOT OF COLLEGE-AGENT RELATIONSHIPS

Managing overseas student-recruitment agencies can be a big job — AIRC: The Association of International Enrollment Management found that two-thirds of its members worked with 10 or more commission-based agencies worldwide.



Read more about other recruiting trends in the organization’s new [benchmarking survey](#).



AROUND THE GLOBE

A new policy limiting student visas to four years faces a lawsuit from higher-education advocacy groups.

A professor who was acquitted on espionage charges is [suing](#) the University of Kansas for workplace discrimination related to his firing and reinstatement.

A congressional investigation accuses Harvard University of “furthering the interests” of [China’s Communist Party](#).

American universities have been approved to set up [branch campuses](#) in Greece.

Schools and universities in Colombia could be required to participate in an “[anti-Communist week](#).”

Check out a new collection of *Chronicle* reporting and commentary on the trends buffeting American colleges and their international students. You can find it and other collections and reports in the [Chronicle Store](#).

I’m off swatting black flies, roasting marshmallows, and playing cutthroat games of TransAmerica. But when I’m back from vacation, drop me a line at karin.fischer@chronicle.com or message me confidentially at [Signal](#). You can also connect with me on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), or [Bluesky](#). If you like this newsletter, please share it with colleagues and friends. They can [sign up here](#). Thanks for reading!

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