



By: Anne O. Krueger

Trump is undermining one of America's crown jewels



US President Donald Trump's attacks on Harvard University and its international students have shocked the world, not just because of their crudeness but also because of their blatant short-sightedness.

For decades, leading universities like Harvard have been a cornerstone of American "soft power." Many of the world's brightest students have aspired to attend US institutions, and top researchers have sought to join their faculties.

Harvard itself represents the pinnacle of American – and global – higher education. Even Chinese President Xi Jinping chose to send his **daughter** there.

Now, the tide is turning. Prominent scholars are leaving the United States to escape the paranoid atmosphere fostered by Trump's policies, and top-tier international students who once aimed to attend universities like Harvard, Columbia, or Northwestern – all recently **targeted** by Trump – are choosing other countries, fearing their education might be disrupted.

The consequences could be severe. Since 2000, US-based researchers have won around two-thirds of the Nobel Prizes in chemistry, physics, and medicine – and 40% of those laureates were **immigrants**.

Notably, nearly half of immigrant US-based Nobel Prize winners **completed** their graduate studies at US universities.

These scholars not only advanced groundbreaking research and enhanced their institutions' prestige but also served as teachers and mentors to both American and international students, attracting a new generation of academic talent.

Moreover, these cross-cultural interactions help American students gain a deeper understanding of other societies while giving their international counterparts firsthand experience of life in the US.

Many of those who study in America later return to their home countries and rise to

prominent positions in government, academia, and the private sector. As of 2024, 70 heads of state or government had **completed** part or all of their higher education in the US.

Decline in international-student enrollment

Until recently, these benefits were widely acknowledged across the US political spectrum. A well-functioning system – the Student and Exchange Visitor Program – allowed certified institutions to admit foreign students.

SEVP enabled graduates on student visas to remain in the country for up to three years to gain work experience.

But in a stunning display of ignorance and malice, the Trump administration tried to **strip** Harvard of its ability to enroll international students and even instructed US consulates not to process visa applications for those planning to attend the university – a move that was recently **blocked** by a federal court.

This uncertainty is deeply unsettling for current and prospective students.

A decline in international-student enrollment will weaken the global pipeline of future scientists

Those who had planned to begin their studies in September may now find it is too late to enroll elsewhere for the upcoming academic year.

A decline in international-student enrollment will not only hinder research at US institutions by shrinking the pool of talented assistants; it will also weaken the global pipeline of future scientists, diminishing the depth and quality of research worldwide.

A significant share of

international students pay full tuition

What Trump and his acolytes fail to grasp is the strong link between the excellence of American universities and the country's record of innovation.

An **analysis** from 2022 found that more than half of US startups valued at over \$1 billion had at least one foreign-born founder, and in half of those cases the founder first came to the country as a student.

Some Trump supporters have argued that barring foreign students from enrolling at Harvard and other private universities would create more opportunities for American students.

Since a significant share of international students pay full tuition, their absence would reduce the resources available for financial aid

But while a few additional spots might open up, the impact will likely be minimal. In fact, since a significant share of international students pay full tuition, their absence would reduce the resources available for financial aid.

Foreign students have been effectively subsidizing American students receiving assistance – a vital source of financial support that would now be lost.

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Those lost revenues pale in comparison to the broader contributions of Harvard and the higher-education system.

University education has long been a major US export, with far more international students **coming** to the country than Americans going abroad.



By attacking leading universities, the Trump administration is dealing an unprecedented blow to the engine of US competitiveness – Anne O. Krueger

In the 2023-24 academic year alone, foreign students **contributed** an estimated \$44 billion to the US economy.

To be sure, Harvard and other universities are not immune from criticism. But discouraging or restricting foreign enrollment would be a profound loss for American and international students and faculty alike.

By attacking leading universities, the Trump administration is undermining one of America's crown jewels and dealing an unprecedented blow to the engine of US competitiveness.

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