

Federal Policy Developments Digest

June 5, 2025

Trump Administration's New Travel Ban Impacts International Students and Scholars from Specific Countries (6.4.25)

President Trump signed an executive order this week establishing a long-anticipated [travel ban](#) that [targets](#) 19 countries, effective June 9th. The travel ban blocks citizens from 12 countries from entering the US: Afghanistan, Chad, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. Additionally, seven countries have partial restrictions (which means their citizens cannot come to the US permanently or apply for certain visas): Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan, and Venezuela. Students and scholars are both [included](#) in the full and partial restrictions, which specifically suspends F, M, and J visas, even for countries with partial restrictions. Along with other categorical exceptions, the travel ban does not apply to individuals with visas who are already in the US.

Implications/next steps: The State Department issued 170,000 visas last year to people from the 12 countries with a full ban. This ban – plus the recent [executive order](#) aiming to prevent Harvard from enrolling international students – create “more uncertainty, more chaos, and more confusion” for students and colleges, according to [Miriam Feldblum](#), executive director of the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration. She also noted that international students are more closely vetted and monitored than other visa holders. [Experts](#) say that this ban is more likely to withstand legal scrutiny than the ban that Trump introduced during his first term targeting Muslim-majority countries, in part because of the longer lead-up to the ban as well as the range of countries impacted.

Education Department's FY26 Budget Request Would Decrease Pell Grant Awards and Increase Employers' Payment Responsibilities for Federal Work Study (5.30.25)

The Education Department (ED) released its FY26 [budget request](#), which contains more details about ED funding reductions than the earlier “[skinny budget](#)” request. The proposal [includes](#) a 15.3% reduction to the ED, intended to reflect the “winding down” of the agency - and [includes](#) details about Federal Work Study (FWS) and Pell Grant changes. FWS funding would be reduced to \$250M, a loss of \$980M. The ED wants to alter FWS contributions from the federal government and employers. The federal government currently covers 75% and employers 25%, but the ED now wants employers to cover 75% while the federal government's contribution would be reduced to 25%. Additionally, maximum Pell Grants would be cut by about 23%, or \$1,685, such that the maximum award would be \$5,710 for the 2026-27 award year. This budget request includes eliminating the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant programs, TRIO programs, and GEAR UP.

Implications/next steps: The ED's budget request is a proposal without the force of law, and Congress will have final authority on the allocation of federal dollars. Education Secretary Linda McMahon is testifying before the Senate and House Committees this week regarding the proposal. [NASFAA](#) is opposed to these cuts for student aid programs, and the American Council on Education has warned about the impacts of other cuts to student aid outlined in the budget reconciliation bill. Importantly, these cuts target [programs](#) designed to support low-income students' access to and retention in higher education.

State Department Announces They Will “Aggressively Revoke” Chinese Students’ Visas (5.28.25)

Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced in a brief [press statement](#) that the State Department will work with DHS to “aggressively revoke visas for Chinese students, including those with connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields.” Rubio did not define “critical fields” or explain how US officials would determine which students had ties to the Chinese Community Party. Rubio also announced that the State Department will “revise visa criteria to enhance scrutiny of all future visa applications from the People’s Republic of China and Hong Kong.” China has condemned the statement, calling it “politically motivated and discriminatory.”

Implications/next steps: This announcement builds on anti-China sentiments from Trump’s first term and the administration’s continued targeting of international students. The announcement also comes amid the administration’s trade war, in which [China](#) has been a top target. David Weeks, who advises overseas universities on recruiting Chinese students, [says](#) that identifying students’ ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will be hard to implement logistically, as large numbers of Chinese citizens have CCP ties, and many join for reasons besides direct political involvement. Rosie Levin, executive director of the US-China Education Trust, [says](#) that depending on how this policy is enforced, “it could catch up probably every Chinese student interested in coming to the United States who could have some Communist Party connection within their background.” Chinese students account for one quarter (277K+) of international students in the US, and many institutions rely on international students’ tuition. If punitive policies persist, then Chinese students may turn to universities in other countries, according to experts. Plus, the US may lose skills and expertise that are valuable to the economy. Many Chinese students have [expressed](#) fear and confusion about the press release, given the uncertainty as to how the administration will apply these new criteria.