

UC sees 40% drop in new international grad students. What it means for Cincinnati

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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

The University of Cincinnati saw a major drop in new international graduate students this year.

Changes in visa policies under the Trump administration are cited as a major factor for the drop in enrollment.

The decrease in international students could negatively impact local economies, university research and school budgets.

Tens of thousands of students at the University of Cincinnati went back to school Aug. 25. But a chunk of the typical campus demographic was missing.

The number of new international graduate students took a dive this year at UC, a decline that's happening across the country.

UC officials say there are 40% fewer international graduate students beginning studies at the school, shrinking the school's international class by 16%, to 3,879 students this year. The school's number of international undergraduate students stayed the same from the 2024-25 school year to the current one.

Other schools have reported a similar decline. Northern Kentucky University saw a 25% drop in its total number of international students from last year to this year, university data shows. Ohio State University, which enrolls the most international students in Ohio, reported a **37% drop in first-year international students** and a slightly smaller number of total international students this year.

Some experts predict it's the **start of a more significant downward trend** in international student enrollment, which could impact the local economy, slow research and cut a slice out

of universities' budgets.

The drop comes amid ongoing visa guideline changes made by the Trump administration, upending immigration policy and leaving students and university staff uncertain about what lies ahead.

In April, more than 4,700 international students across the country [had their immigration status revoked](#) before it was unexpectedly restored weeks later. At least a dozen of these students were in Cincinnati. The administration's focus pivoted to prospective students at the end of May when it [halted scheduling new appointments for student and exchange visitor visa applicants](#) while the State Department put in motion [stricter social media vetting procedures](#) for applicants.

Then, earlier in September, the Trump administration announced a new [\\$100,000 fee for companies](#) hiring college-educated foreign professionals on H-1B visas.

The turbulence surrounding U.S. visas could be deterring foreign individuals from even considering studying here, university officials say.

Jack Miner, UC's vice provost for enrollment, said the university has little control over the perception students have toward studying in the United States.

"The question of whether or not you feel welcome in the United States, or whether the U.S. education system is welcoming to you, is a message that goes through multiple filters," Miner said.

Meanwhile, State Department officials say they are prioritizing the proper vetting of international students through the visa process, according to a spokesperson. The Trump administration's policies are intended to protect the nation and enhance national security, they said.

Local economy, research could be impacted by loss of talent

International employees are an integral part of the workforce, particularly in STEM fields where foreign-born workers [make up a larger portion](#) than U.S.-born workers, a report from the U.S. National Science Foundation shows. That might soon change.

A UC international student who recently earned his doctorate in aerospace engineering told The Enquirer that he found it difficult to find work after graduation because of the current political climate.

The student, who asked that his name be withheld as he is in the process of securing a work visa elsewhere, returned home to India after graduation.

He had planned to stay in the United States under a [work visa program](#) known as optional practical training. But the job search proved futile, partly due to visa uncertainties and the impacts of the [Department of Government Efficiency](#).

"I got in touch with professors who said, 'We don't have funding for research positions because of DOGE cutting down funds of academic programs.' One professor said, 'I would hire you today, but we don't have the funding.'"

And even among U.S. companies unaffected by DOGE cuts, the student found that there was a general hesitation around hiring "new internationals," he said.

UC takes pride in its ability to attract international students that stay to work in the city's top industries, Miner said.

"Whether they're coming to Cincinnati from Cleveland or Beijing, they come to the University of Cincinnati and then they stay here because they work for GE Aviation, or they work for Procter & Gamble, or they work for Fifth Third," he said.

With the Trump administration's recent changes to H-1B visas, local immigration expert Bryan Wright said it will present a new hurdle for students and employers alike.

Employers will be required to pay a \$100,000 fee per international employee they plan to hire under an H-1B visa. Wright, who is the director of the immigration economic advocacy group [Cincinnati Compass](#), projects this change will likely reduce the number of international employees being hired.

That loss of talent will carry upstream. As international students recognize there are less opportunities for them after graduation, they will be less inclined to study in the United States in the first place, Wright said.

Unlike schools where the number of spots for both American students and international students are more limited, Miner says the dip is felt more at UC in a growing city such as Cincinnati.

"We're not an elite, Harvard kind of school where there's a thousand applicants for every spot," Miner said. "We have an unlimited amount of spots if we have people qualified to take them."

Research by graduate students and doctoral candidates is pivotal for UC, a school that spends a large amount of money on research [compared to its peers](#). A number of graduate students are funded on research grants, [\\$2.6 million of which have already been cut](#) so far amid federal policy changes.

University budgets at risk

International students [typically pay significantly higher tuition rates](#) compared to their American peers, often becoming a large part of a university's bottom line.

President Donald Trump said he likes that other country's students come to the United States. Without them, he said [during an August cabinet meeting](#), "our college system would go to hell very quickly."

"It wouldn't be the top colleges," Trump said. "It would be colleges that struggle on the bottom."

This academic year alone, UC's tuition and fees will cost an international undergraduate student just [more than \\$30,000](#), with living expenses and health insurance bringing the final total to over \$50,000.

Residents within the Greater Cincinnati region, who make up nearly three-quarters of the school's student body, [will pay a fraction of that](#) at around \$15,000 in tuition and fees for the 2025-26 school year.

Miner did not say whether a decline in international students would hurt UC's finances but indicated that administrators are shifting enrollment efforts to other areas abroad.

Growth in some of UC's newer markets such as Vietnam and Nepal has offset the hearty drop in graduate students – about 600 to 700 less from India and 200 less from China, Miner

estimated.

Those two areas have, in a normal year, remained the No. 1 and 2 top countries of origin for international students.

"We have a little bit of a different reliance on different populations of students than other schools may," Miner said.

Still, the school hopes the significant decline in graduate students is a "one-time blip" and not a sign of what's to come.

The shift in graduate enrollment is not all bad news for UC. International undergraduate enrollment stayed the same, with a slight increase in international freshmen, Miner said.

Those numbers set the decline in total international students from last school year to the current one at 16%.

International student says US news was 'made to scare us'

For the international student who spoke with The Enquirer, receiving his doctorate this August was the culmination of six years studying highly specialized STEM topics, teaching graduate-level courses and conducting cutting-edge research on space robotics.

But his final summer in Cincinnati felt different from the rest.

A lot of the information being funneled to him and his peers from news sources wasn't clear.

"The news that did come to us was exaggerated and made to scare us. I've never met anyone whose visa was revoked," the student said.

A scramble of information relating to visas made its way to the soon-to-be graduate from the same university support services that shepherded his life here since 2019.

"Nobody could tell you what to do about the policy changes, because a lot of it was uncertain. Even UC staff are no experts on what the (new) government policies were all about (because) there were new changes every day," he said.