

EDUCATION TOURISM: U.S. LOSING FOREIGN STUDENTS

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Bad news for the future of inter-American relations and educational tourism: the influx of Latin American students to US colleges is diminishing. It is going down at a faster rate than that of foreign students in other countries.

According to a new report conducted by the United States Institute of International Education (IIE) and the Department of State, titled “Open Doors”, Latin American student enrollments fell by 3.7% this year. **Some of the biggest drops happened in countries such as Argentina (10%), Brazil (9.3%), Mexico (5.3%) and Uruguay (25%).**

By comparison, number of foreign students from China and India, which are the countries with the highest number of students in the United States, grew slightly by 1.3% and 0.5% this year, respectively.

The drop in new international students since President Donald Trump took office two years ago is negative news for the United States from an economic, political and academic point of view.

Regarding economy, the 1.1 million foreign students from all over the world who enroll in US colleges contribute 42 billion USD a year to the country. Many of these foreign students pay their full tuition, which allows universities to use part of that money to support American students.

But the long-term political damage could be far greater. International students often return to their countries and become involved in political, business, or academic activities. In addition, they help many of their American classmates to learn more about the world.

Is it by chance that international student enrollments have dipped since Trump assumed the presidency? And that one of the biggest drops was of Latin Americans? Probably not.

If a young Mexican listens to the President of the United States constantly belittling Mexican immigrants, portraying most of them as criminals and rapists, he probably would prefer to study somewhere else than in the United States.

Trump's attacks on immigrants, images of families separated on the border and children imprisoned in cages, cause many Latin Americans to feel unwelcomed in the United States.

Incidentally, international tourism in the United States fell in 2017 despite a general increase in tourism worldwide, according to the U.S Travel Association and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

American university authorities confirm that the decline in new Latin American students is partly due to

local factors, such as the economic crisis experienced in Brazil.

“The latest data released by Open Doors should be a cause for concern,” said Julio Frenk, president of the University of Miami. “Although some local factors of the countries are involved, it’s difficult to believe that the current speech of the United States (against immigration) has nothing to do with the decrease in new enrollments from Latin America”.

Frenk also mentioned that many Latin American students may be considering the possibility of finishing their university education in other English-speaking countries, such as Canada or Great Britain.

After Trump’s election, there was a spike in online searches of Canadian universities, which may have come from foreign students. Additionally, an increasing number of European universities are teaching courses in English, in order to draw international students who may not want to visit the United States.

To put things in context, **US colleges are still classified as the best in the world, and the country remains the largest destination for educational tourism.**

However, Trump has created difficulties by announcing the false immigration crisis – in fact, the amount of illegal immigrants is far below that what it was 10 years ago – and driving away many students and visitors.

Date: 2018-11-19

Article link: <https://www.tourism-review.com/educational-tourism-in-the-us-decreasing-news10831>