



Immigration and Racial Equity for Immigrant and International Students

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As the U.S. and its campuses continue to pay greater attention to the longstanding impacts of racial and social injustice, there is also an increasing focus on how campuses are tying together racial equity efforts and immigration issues—areas that often intersect and can lead to cumulative marginalization for certain student groups. The growing attention to these issues is timely and urgent: U.S. colleges and universities serve diverse populations of immigrant-origin and international students.

The category of immigrant-origin students is itself very heterogeneous. **First-generation immigrant students** refers to all those born outside the U.S. and who were not U.S. citizens at birth, including naturalized citizens; lawful permanent residents; and other documented and undocumented students, refugees, and others who have immigrated to the U.S. seeking asylum and protection. **Second-generation immigrant students** refers to students born in the U.S. with a parent or two who were born outside the U.S.

According to [current estimates](#), 5.3 million first- and second-generation immigrant students—which we define as immigrant-origin students—now constitute 28 percent of U.S. higher education enrollment, and 80 percent are students of color. The [Higher Education Immigration Portal](#) provides additional analyses on these student populations by estimating the numbers of undocumented and immigrant-origin students in higher education. In doing so, it disaggregates the population by race and ethnicity to call attention to the [powerful diversity of undocumented and immigrant student populations](#).

While **international students** initially arrive in the U.S. as non-immigrants on a student visa for a period of study or international exchange, many turn out to be prospective immigrants who pursue employment and residency in the U.S. post graduation. In addition, at this point, refugee or other displaced students outside the U.S. seeking to pursue education in the U.S. must also apply as international students on non-immigrant visas.

The remainder of this post focuses on two of the student groups described above: immigrant-origin students and international students.

Detangling the Complexities of Marginalization



The complex interplay of race and immigrant status and experiences applies not just to first- and second-generation immigrant students in the U.S., but also to international students who arrive at U.S. campuses from over 200 countries. While international students are not considered immigrants, they are nonetheless viewed as belonging to specific racial and ethnic groups often based on their country of origin and their physical appearance. As we have seen, when hate crimes, racial harassment or discrimination occur, Black, Brown, and Asian students, staff, and faculty are disproportionately affected. This is true regardless of whether they are citizens, immigrants, or international students. And the 14th amendment prohibits the denial of life, liberty, property and equal protection of the laws to “any person” in any state. In other words, equal protection is designed for everyone, not just U.S. native-born or naturalized citizens.

Marginalization for international students from certain countries and societies can be further complicated by structured discrimination patterns that often follow them across borders, such as the recent concerns around [caste-based discrimination](#) against Indian students. Conversely, international students and newly arrived first-generation immigrant students often [lack a context for and an understanding of racial dynamics](#) and the history of race in the U.S., and might themselves be prejudiced about different racial groups in the U.S.

For many postsecondary students of color—immigrant and international alike—there are additional vectors of discrimination based on gender and gender identity; religion; and sexuality that further compound the negative experiences that students might already be facing due to their immigrant and racial identities. Taking the case of gender and gender identity, international students and immigrant students of color who identify as female face potential discrimination not only due to the dual factors of race and minority status, but are additionally subject to many of the broader social and economic inequities faced by those who identify as women or as non-binary. Further, for those immigrant and international students who identify as female and who belong to primarily patriarchal cultures, there might be tensions related to varying gender norms and expectations between U.S. society and the home country or community culture. However, while the triple, intersecting disadvantage of gender, race, and immigrant status is widely acknowledged and documented anecdotally, much more research is needed on the specific ways in which these three areas interact and how they affect students with marginalized gender identities.

The Way Forward

Recognizing that both race and the experience of being an immigrant are inextricably intertwined for a large and growing population of their students, many campus leaders have [called for making equity and diversity central](#) to everything, recognizing that it is necessary to



rebuild our economy, serve our students, and keep our institutions vital. In 2020, the Presidents' Alliance also [released a statement](#) with the explicit affirmation that Black Lives Matter and reiterating that our immigration priorities and our nation will not advance without true justice for all through purposeful action on the intersections between race, immigration, and higher education. Additionally, one of the principles guiding the Higher Education Immigration Portal's [underlying theory-of-change](#) on how to effect change at the campus, state, and federal levels, is the recognition of the intersectionality of immigration and racial equity.

Righting injustice is not just a moral imperative but is also deeply tied to global relations and international goodwill: we know that what happens at home very much affects how the world sees us. When people of color are discriminated against, assaulted, or treated unjustly, doubt is cast around the world about whether the United States is a safe place to learn, live, and thrive. For example, in the wake of the Muslim travel ban implemented by the Trump administration in January 2017, Chinese students expressed anxiety, wondering if they were next on the list, and tensions between China and the United States also have reignited unfounded suspicions of all Chinese students and faculty. Violence against Indian immigrants routinely makes headlines in the Indian press, and the anti-Asian shootings that took place in Atlanta reverberated both at home and abroad. The racist violence at the Texas border against Haitian migrants is yet another reminder of the ongoing systemic racism so often seen in our immigration policies.

Against this backdrop, many U.S. campuses have begun to take the following types of steps to address the intersections of racial and ethnic discrimination and immigration:

- Comprehensive efforts to account for immigrant perspectives in diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice efforts.
- Educating students, faculty, and staff focused on immigration injustices experienced by Black, Brown, Asian, and other immigrants of color.
- Internationalization efforts focusing attention on the racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity of international student experiences.
- Engaging faculty whose academic work is at the intersection of immigration and racial justice.

In this post, we have collected resources for campuses that engage directly with racial and immigration equity issues. The curated list below reflects a combination of research; narratives; best practices; and webinars/events and the intention is to offer resources that higher education leaders and other campus stakeholders may find helpful in understanding and addressing issues of racial equity and immigration, If you have other resources you have found valuable, please send them to portal@presidentsalliance.org.

Resources

- **International Students**

[Diversity Without Race: How University Internationalization Strategies Discuss International Students](#), by Buckner et al., Journal of International Students, 2021.

This article examines how a sample of 62 higher education institutions in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom discuss international students in their official institutionalization strategies, focusing on how ideas of race and diversity are addressed. The authors argue that a first step to creating more inclusive and anti-racist campuses is to acknowledge international students' racial identities and experiences with racism in official discourses and strategies.

[America Calling: A Foreign Student in a Country of Possibility](#) by Rajika Bhandari, She Writes Press, 2021.

A deeply personal memoir and first-hand account by a former international student and immigrant to the U.S., Bhandari's book reveals the multilayered experience of being international or "foreign"; being a woman; and being Asian in the U.S. Based on the author's professional expertise as a researcher of student mobility, the book also includes an analytical lens on the value of international students and skilled immigrants in the U.S.

[The Diversity Conversation College Are Not Having](#), by Karin Fischer, Chronicle of Higher Education, June 2020.

With protests bringing new attention to America's struggles with racism, a lack of diversity training for students from abroad could be a critical blind spot for colleges. This article explores the incomplete or inaccurate understanding of race and racial identity in America that many international students might have, and how institutions need to pay specific attention to the gaps in international students' awareness of race as well as their experience of being viewed through a U.S.-based framework of race and ethnicity.

[International Students and Experiences with Race in the United States](#), by Bryce Loo, World Education Services (WES), March 26, 2019.

Discussions about diversity and inclusion within U.S. higher education typically revolve around domestic students, particularly racial and ethnic minorities, and often exclude international students. This article explores some of the scholarly and professional research on international student experiences navigating race in the U.S. and Canada. It also examines some helpful practices for creating a more inclusive and aware campus experience for international students.



[Learning Race and Racism While Learning: Experiences of International Students Pursuing Higher Education in the Midwestern United States](#) by Mitchell et al. AERA Open, 2017.

While researchers have documented how race and racism influence the college experiences of U.S. citizens, the ways that race and racism affect international students have received less attention. This qualitative study explored how international students learned about U.S. concepts of race and racism and how such concepts shaped their college experiences.

[Foreign Students and Tolerance](#) by Chris Glass and Larry Braskamp, Inside Higher Education, October 2012.

The authors argue that colleges have responsibilities to prevent the racist incidents and isolation that many international students encounter. Based on an analysis of student data gathered through the Global Perspective Inventory, they offer three "educational encounters" that make a positive difference in the lives of international students and that campus leaders might consider in order to create more inclusive campus environments.

- **Undocumented Students**

[Promoting Equity for Undocumented Students in Postsecondary Education](#) by J. Geiman, The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), 2021.

This fact sheet explains why and how undocumented and immigrant youth should have equitable access to an affordable, high-quality postsecondary education.

[Undocumented Students in Higher Education: How Many are in U.S. Colleges and Universities, and Who Are They](#), New American Economy and Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, Updated March 2021.

This data estimate includes a demographic portrait of undocumented students in higher education, highlighting the intersection of immigration status and race/ethnicity.

[Immigration Status and Postsecondary Opportunity: Barriers to Affordability, Access, and Success for Undocumented Students, and Policy Solutions](#), by Victoria Ballerini and Miriam Feldblum, American Journal of Economics and Sociology, 2021.

This article provides an overview of issues at the intersection of immigration and postsecondary education, including examining relevant policies; identifying barriers facing undocumented students in accessing postsecondary education; state- and institutional-level solutions to address these barriers; and policy recommendations to improve affordability, access, and success for undocumented students.



[Investing in Social Support Systems will Enhance the Higher Ed Experience for Students Directly Affected by Immigration](#), FWD.us, 2021.

This resource focuses on institutional support for undocumented students of varying racial, ethnic and social identities, and highlights the importance of culturally-specific support systems. The guide proposes three types of social infrastructure that institutions could consider implementing to support their students who are directly affected by immigration: peer support, mentorship, and family engagement.

[Promise Programs: An Avenue to Expand College Affordability, Access and Success for Undocumented Students](#) by Research for Action and the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2020.

The advancement of race-conscious postsecondary attainment goals should include a focus on the postsecondary affordability, access and completion of undocumented students, given the substantial number of undocumented high school graduates and the racial and ethnic diversity of these students.

[The Administration of Diversity and Equity on Campuses and its Relationships to Serving Undocumented Immigrant Students](#), Barnhardt et. al., Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 2017.

Undocumented college students in the United States face many obstacles as a function of their immigration status. This article considers the organizational and administrative practices associated with the work of campus diversity administrators (CDOs) in contributing to the educational experiences of undocumented college students, while also offering recommendation for how CDOs can advance inclusion for undocumented students.

- **Resources on Black Immigrants, Black Immigrant and International Students, and Anti-Blackness in Immigration Policy**

[The State of Black Immigrants: A Statistical Portrait of Black Immigrants in the United States](#), Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), 2022

This background report aims to provide basic descriptive statistics regarding Black or African American immigrants based on the American Community Survey (ACS), the 2014 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics published by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and immigration data available on the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) website developed by Syracuse University.



[Key Findings about Black Immigrants in the US](#), Pew Research Center, 2022

Black immigrants have contributed significantly to the growth and diversity of the overall Black population in the United States. A new Pew Research Center report examines the size and characteristics of the nation’s Black immigrant population, as well as its projected growth in future years.

[Black Immigrants in the United States Face Hurdles, but Outcomes Vary by City](#), Migration Policy Institute, 2022

Using poverty, work, and education-related indicators from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Surveys (ACS) from 2015 to 2019 as well as a unique methodology developed by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) to assign immigration status, this article analyzes Black immigrants’ socioeconomic outcomes, with emphasis on low-income immigrants, in the five largest metro areas of residence—New York, Miami, Washington, DC, Atlanta, and Boston—and describes how their experiences compare to those of the native-born Black population.

[Floating in a Most Peculiar Way: A Memoir](#), Louis Chude-Sokei, 2021.

The personal story of a scholar of African American studies about his journey as a bright, displaced boy, from the short-lived African nation of Biafra, to Jamaica, to the streets of Los Angeles. A searing memoir, the book is a reflection on the politics of race and belonging across the landscape of the African diaspora and what it means to be Black, a Black immigrant, and a Black male in America.

[“There is a Target on US” The Impact of Anti Black Racism on African Migrants at the Mexico Southern Border](#), by S. Priya Morley et al., Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), 2021

African and other Black migrants rarely form part of the narrative of migration through Latin America, or in Mexican society in general. Based on interviews with 20 Black migrants about their experiences, this report situates those interviews, and African migration to Mexico in general, within a broader discourse of anti-Black racism in the country.

[Five Black Voices on the Importance of Discussing Racism](#) by Charlotte West, International Educator, August 4, 2020.

When protests against racism and police brutality spread across the United States in 2020, conversations in the public and private spheres spurred many international educators to confront their own biases and actions. This article is based on interviews with five professionals in the field to discuss their experiences as Black international educators and why talking to international students about racism is important.



[Being Black \(and\) Immigrant Students: When Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity Collide](#) by Chrystal A. George Mwangi and Shelvia English, *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 2017. While Black immigrants share some of the racialized experiences of native-Black Americans, they also have distinctive experiences. This paper provides a systematic review of the growing body of literature centering on Black immigrants across the U.S. P-20 pipeline (preschool through graduate school).

Resources on Asian Immigrants, Asian Immigrant and International Students, and Anti-Asianness in Immigration Policy

[Scholars Call for Academia To Address Anti-Asian Bias With Structural Change](#), *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, 2021

Against the backdrop of the surge of anti-Asian violence across the U.S., this article discusses the impact on U.S. campuses and the steps that some are taking to decry the violence and implement anti-hate initiatives.

[Addressing Asian American/Pacific Islander College Students' Mental Health Needs: Expert recommendations](#), National Center for Institutional Diversity, University of Michigan, 2021

Amidst increasing reports of anti-Asian hate crimes, the Steve Fund and the National Center for Institutional Diversity at the University of Michigan convened a group of eight experts in Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) history, college students, and mental health to offer recommendations to address the needs of AAPI students on campus.

[Anti-Asian hate touches international students](#), *Voice of America*, 2021.

The rate of anti-Asian hate crime has soared in the United States since the coronavirus pandemic started in early 2020, with international students in the U.S. reporting isolated incidents.

[Chinese Students in the US Grapple With the Rise in Anti-Asian Hate Crimes](#), *The World*, 2021

Chinese students make up the largest number of international students in the US, but that number is dropping. The rise in anti-Asian hate crimes fueled by the pandemic may be a contributing factor to this trend.

[Increasing Inclusivity for undocumented Asian Pacific Islander \(API\) Students on Your Campus](#), *Immigrants Rising*, 2020.



Undocumented Asian Pacific Islanders make up the fastest-growing population of undocumented immigrants in the United States. This resource serves as a template for educators to recognize undocuAPI presence, increase advocacy, and create safe spaces to provide support to this underseen community.

[The Land of Opportunity Doesn't Apply to Everyone: The Immigrant Experience, Race, and Asian American Career Choices](#), by OiYan Poon, *Journal of College Student Development*, 2014

Despite their popular portrayal as high achieving, race continues to shape the career choices of Asian American college students. The findings of this article reveal that as second-generation Americans, Asian Americans negotiate a constellation of factors when deciding their career choices, most notably, pressures from immigrant parents, awareness of labor market discrimination, fear of being tokenized in particular occupational fields, and influences from peer networks.

- **Resources about all immigrant and international students**

[Immigrant Identity and Experiences in U.S. Higher Education Research: A Systematic Review](#) by Mwangi et al. *International Journal of Multicultural Education* (2021)

As immigrant students continue to enter the U.S. educational pipeline at growing rates, it has become increasingly important for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to understand these students' pathways into and through college as well as the factors impacting their success. Using a systematic review, this analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how global mobility shapes and is shaped by U.S. higher education, particularly in how immigrant identity and immigrants' experiences are depicted in U.S. higher education scholarship.

[Consistently Engaged: An Exploration of the Intersection of Justice, Equity, Inclusion and Internationalization](#), AIEA Thematic Forum, 2021.

Based on an AIEA thematic forum, this report explores how justice, equity, inclusion and internationalization intersect, and gives higher education professionals tools and strategies for enhancing global-mindedness and for deepening their community's understanding of discrimination and prejudice. Hosted by Ohio State University, other partners for the forum included the American Council on Education (ACE), Pennsylvania State University and Tampere University, Finland.



Webinar: [Educating for Action: How Your Students and Campus Can Advance Immigrant Justice](#), Presidents' Alliance, February 25, 2021.

This one-hour webinar presents concrete steps campuses can take to support immigrants and asylum seekers. With 1.2 million pending cases in immigration courts, there is a national shortage of advocates prepared to guide immigrants through this complex system. Speakers share cutting edge approaches to expanding education about immigration law and community-based opportunities for students to represent immigrants and asylum seekers in immigration proceedings.

[Social Justice and International Education: Research, Practice and Perspectives](#), edited by LaNitra M. Berger, NAFSA, 2020.

This edited book brings together educators, scholars, and practitioners doing innovative work promoting social justice, confronting inequality, and fostering social responsibility in a global context. The book explores research, social justice in practice, and different perspectives from practitioners across the field.

[Immigrant-origin Students in U.S. Higher Education: A Data Profile](#), by Jeanne Batalova and Miriam Feldblum, Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and the Migration Policy Institute, 2020.

Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, this analysis highlights the growing and important presence of immigrant-origin students in U.S. postsecondary education. Examining the demographics, geographic distribution, and enrollment characteristics of these students can help higher education practitioners and state education policymakers more fully understand their relevance to institutional and state goals of equipping residents to meet the evolving demands of the U.S. and local economies, including during the post-pandemic recovery.

[From High School to College: Gender, Immigrant Generation, and Race-Ethnicity](#) by Charles Hirschman, The Russell Sage Foundation, 2016.

Sociologist and author Charles Hirschman analyzes the period between leaving high school and completing college for nearly 10,000 public and private school students across the Pacific Northwest. With a growing number of young adults seeking college degrees, understanding the barriers that different students encounter provides vital information for social scientists and educators. *From High School to College* illuminates how gender, immigration, and ethnicity influence the path to college graduation.