

Canada could be a safe haven for US graduate students

By [Trevor Potts](#), [Thomas Bailey](#) & [Ian Wereley](#) | Opinion | May 2nd 2025



The Trump administration's cuts to university funding and crackdowns on research grants have left many graduate students in limbo as the US' universities rescind their admission offers — creating a rare opportunity for Canada to recruit a wealth of world-class talent. Photo by Concordia University/Flickr (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

As a result of the Trump administration's efforts to [freeze federal dollars](#), [cut university funding](#), and [crack down on research grants](#), many US universities are now rescinding their [admission offers to graduate studies](#) — leaving thousands of students in limbo. With [3.2 million American graduate students](#) now facing serious uncertainty in the US, many are [looking to pursue their studies and careers in Canada](#). In fact, some [American scholars](#) have already started this process.

Seizing on this opportunity, [some have pitched](#) the idea of rapidly [welcoming American researchers and students](#) into Canada. However, while currently only a [small percentage](#) of Canada's international graduate students come from the United

States, Canada is not at all ready to welcome hundreds or even thousands of new American students. Yes, there is a huge opportunity for Canada to [recruit more top talent](#) – but only if we get our house in order first.

Canada's universities are facing a [historic financial crisis](#), with many of Canada's top research universities facing budget deficits of millions of dollars, including [York](#) (-\$132 million), [Waterloo](#) (-\$75 million), [McGill](#) (-\$45 million), and [Alberta](#) (-\$38.8 million). In Canada's worst-affected province of Ontario, its top 20 universities are expecting a [\\$330 million drop in revenue this fiscal year](#), followed by \$600 million next year.

This spiraling crisis stems from [decades of provincial funding cuts](#) (for instance, Ontario's per-student funding has dropped 40 per cent since 1990), worsened by federal caps on the number of [international students](#) that have [stripped \\$1 billion from university budgets](#). As [Alex Usher](#) from Higher Education Strategy Associates [notes](#): “underfunding created dependence on international fees; removing those fees created collapse.”

These impacts extend well beyond balance sheets — slashing research jobs, weakening research capacity and causing [program cuts that threaten everything](#) from lab infrastructure to mental health services. In fact, this instability is [driving many international students](#) to seek alternatives to Canada as a study destination.

Unfortunately, Canada is also struggling to support its own graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. Many of these highly skilled individuals receive stipends or federal scholarships to support their full-time work contributing to new scientific breakthroughs and innovations. However, the [average minimum stipend](#) for graduate students in Canada is [thousands of dollars below the poverty line](#) and only 2 per cent of Canada's graduate students receive a federal scholarship.

In addition, like so many Canadians, graduate students struggle with the cost and [availability of housing](#), worsened by the fact that many of our top research universities are located in the [most expensive Canadian cities](#). However, Canada's graduate students are often excluded from institutional support, including [housing aid](#). Without a concerted effort to address these issues, it would be irresponsible to allocate resources to recruit American students — many of whom would also face these same challenges upon their arrival.

While we have seen encouraging progress in recent [Budget 2024 investments](#), there is still a long way to go. Until these conditions are improved, it is likely that many potential American graduate students will decide that Canada isn't the safe haven they had hoped it could be, and instead look to [other countries](#).

Canada has a unique opportunity to become an academic safe haven for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars from the United States and beyond. However, to fulfill this potential, Canada must do far more than simply open its doors to new influxes of talent. If Canada is serious about attracting top American talent, we must

take urgent, intentional steps to strengthen and invigorate our existing research community now.

That means provinces need to restore per-student funding levels to universities. The federal government must increase investments in graduate scholarships and the research-granting councils, and universities need to [support graduate students](#) as talented, valued individuals rather than financial assets.

Donald Trump's war on science presents an incredible opportunity for the Canadian research community. While these impacts represent a chance for us to recruit top talent and strengthen our economy, it would be irresponsible for Canada to prioritize [attracting new American students](#) without first focusing on supporting and protecting the graduate students already here.

Trevor Potts is the director of research and policy at Evidence for Democracy.

Thomas Bailey is a PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa and executive council member of Support Our Science.

Ian Wereley is the executive director of the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies.

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[Trevor Potts](#)



[Thomas Bailey](#)



[Ian Wereley](#)