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BLOG POST · JULY 8, 2025

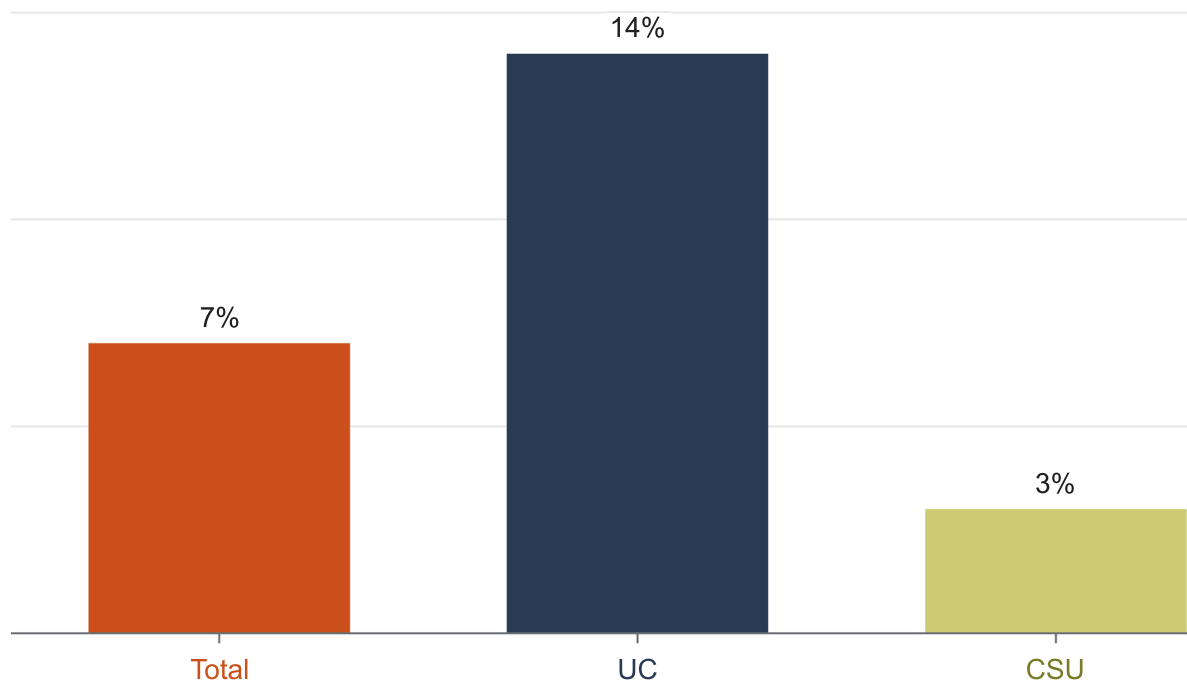
What Do International Students Contribute to California's Public Universities?

Valerie Lundy-Wagner

International students are integral to higher education in California, bringing diverse and critical skills to the postsecondary arena and contributing to the fiscal health of public and private institutions. Since spring 2025, the federal government has modified policies related to new international student visas, introducing uncertainty to individuals abroad seeking to attend US institutions. Debate around these policy changes raises an opportunity to investigate the contribution of international students across California's universities.

International students represent 7% of California's total four-year college and university enrollment. At public institutions, international students make up 14% of total enrollment at the University of California and 3% at California State University. In California's private nonprofit institutions, international students make up 9% of total enrollment.

International students make up a large portion of enrollees at California colleges and universities



SOURCES: Integrated Postsecondary Data System

NOTES: Fall enrollment counts from 2023, total nonresident international enrollment and total enrollment. Total enrollment includes California community colleges with bachelor's programs.

FROM: PPIC Blog, July 2025.

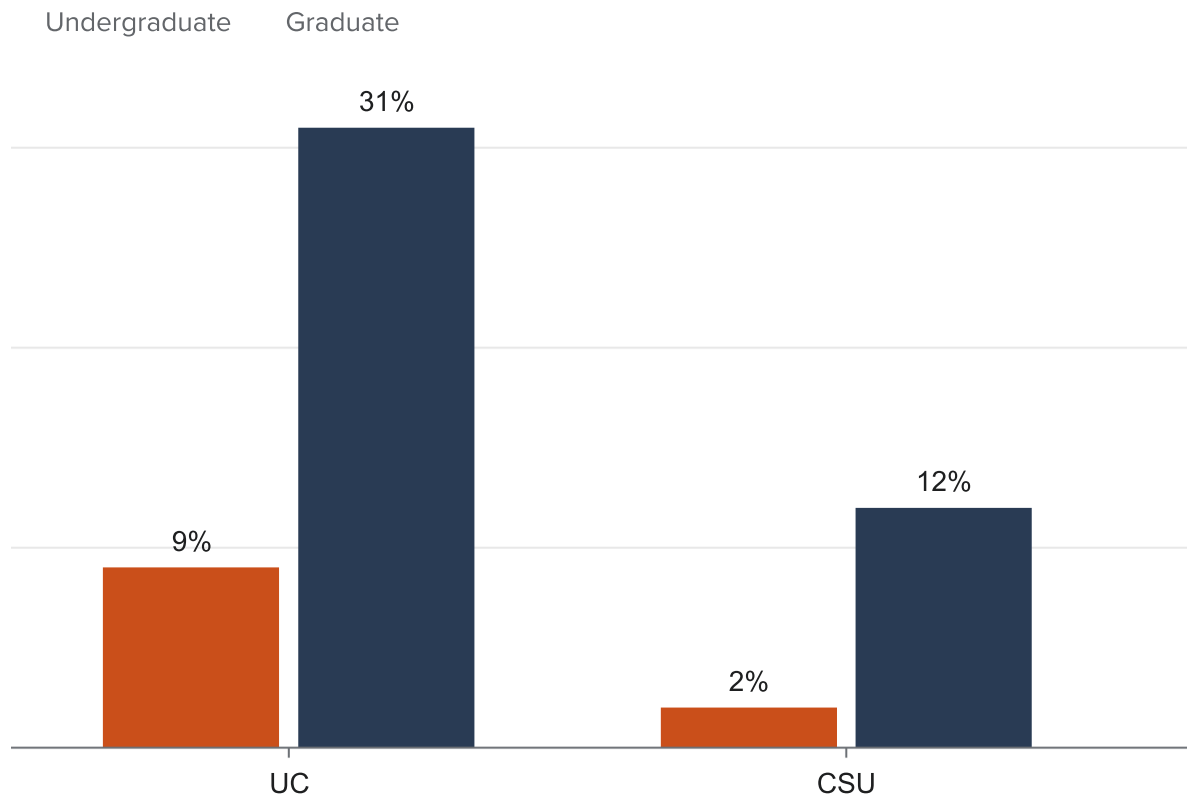
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At the four-year undergraduate level, international students pay far more tuition than Californians do. Nonresidents at UC (which includes international students and nonresident domestic students from other states) have the same base tuition cost (\$14,934) as residents while also paying an additional \$35,394 in supplemental tuition, for about \$50,000 total. At CSU, nonresidents pay \$7,618 base tuition and supplemental tuition of about \$32,990, or just over

\$40,000 total. In general, the supplemental tuition paid by international students helps to lower tuition costs for many California residents attending public four-year institutions.

In graduate programs, international students make up a more notable portion of total enrollment across California's universities. Nearly a third of graduate students in the UC system (31%) are international, followed by 15% in private nonprofit institutions, and 12% in the CSU system.

International students are a large share of California's graduate students



SOURCES: Integrated Postsecondary Data System

NOTES: Fall enrollment counts from 2023, total nonresident international enrollment and total enrollment.

FROM: PPIC Blog, July 2025.

The number of international students enrolled in California's four-year colleges and universities has fluctuated over time and across institutions. Although these students have helped generate revenue during state budget deficits, they also have been a focal point of discussion about access to public four-year institutions for California residents.

Over the last ten years, the California Legislature and governor have enacted legislation to limit the number of nonresident students at three UC campuses (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and San Diego). In the past three years, the state budget provided \$31 million annually to support the replacement of 902 nonresident undergraduates with California residents. Facing mounting deficits, the current budget defers ongoing replacement funding to 2027–28. UC fell short of resident enrollment targets last year—the proposed deferral of these funds has added to an already challenging budget reality.

California is entering another period of fiscal uncertainty. Rather than reducing funds for UC and CSU in 2025–26, the current budget defers the governor’s proposed 3% cut to the institutions to the 2026–27 fiscal year while providing access to zero-interest short-term loans. Though these changes have no short-term fiscal impact, they suggest a future budget cut.

Going forward, California’s public institutions and their private, nonprofit peers will need to take stock of the role that international students play in the schools’ capacity to deliver higher education and pursue innovative graduate research—as well as the impact these students have on the fiscal health of California universities.

TOPICS

