

# Columbia Crisis: Trump's crackdown sends chill through Indian students

By Neil Ghai & Prachi Verma, ET Bureau Last Updated: Jun 07, 2025, 06:44:00 AM IST

## Synopsis

The Trump administration has questioned Columbia University's accreditation. This action creates uncertainty for international students, particularly Indians. Visa prospects and financial aid may be affected. Degree recognition could also suffer. Experts advise students not to panic. Universities are offering support. Legal challenges are anticipated. The situation remains fluid, requiring close monitoring by students and institutions.



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New Delhi: A recent notification by the Trump administration that [Columbia University](#) failed to meet the standards for accreditation could have far-reaching consequences for students, particularly international students, many of whom are from India, experts said.

Loss of accreditation could mean that securing a visa for studying at Columbia will not be possible. Students may become ineligible for scholarships and grants, and those graduating could struggle for jobs as their degrees would lose recognition.

The US Department of Education announced on Wednesday that it formally notified the [Middle States Commission on Higher Education](#), Columbia's accrediting body, that the university may have violated federal anti-discrimination laws by allegedly failing to protect Jewish students on campus. The move, which comes after Trump's order restricting Harvard University from enrolling international students, suggests the US administration is escalating its scrutiny of elite universities. Indians form the second largest student community at Columbia University.

In the 2024-25 academic year, 1,241 Indian students were enrolled at Columbia. While the latest US action may face legal obstacles, as in the case of Harvard, it does raise uncertainty, said study-abroad experts.

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**Accreditation Row**

**Prove your Credentials**  
US flags Columbia for alleged discrimination, threatening its ability to host foreign students

**Visas, Aid at Risk**  
Loss of accreditation may halt new visas, block students from financial aid

**Indian Students in Limbo**  
With 1,241 Indians at Columbia & 788 in Harvard, there are fears of further drop in enrolment

**Legal Recourse**  
The threat may be challenged on grounds of academic freedom and institutional autonomy

"This sends a chilling message to Indian students and families," said Adarsh Khandelwal, cofounder of Collegify, a college-admissions consultancy. "These students are not just numbers; they represent dreams, aspirations, and significant investments."

Sukanya Raman, country head at immigration law firm Davies & Associates, explained the risks in stark terms. "Accreditation is a prerequisite for issuing student visas and serves as a foundational eligibility criterion for participation in federal financial aid programmes. Should an institution lose its accredited status, international students may become ineligible for scholarships, grants, or financial assistance that require enrolment in an accredited academic institution."

The absence of institutional accreditation may render academic degrees unrecognised by employers, professional licensing authorities and other educational institutions, said Raman. "This lack of recognition can materially impair a student's ability to pursue gainful employment or advanced academic study, thereby affecting long-term professional and educational outcomes."

Columbia may challenge the threat legally, arguing it undermines academic freedom and institutional autonomy, said experts.

On Thursday, a federal judge in Boston granted a temporary restraining order on Trump's directive banning US entry of

foreign nationals seeking admission at Harvard for six months. In her order, US District Judge Allison Burroughs said Harvard would face “immediate and irreparable injury” if the proclamation were to go into effect. A hearing has been scheduled for June 16, giving the university a narrow legal window to push back. Judge Burroughs had last month blocked another Trump order prohibiting Harvard from enrolling international students.

Despite the uncertainty, [education consultants](#) are urging students not to panic.

“We have come across some natural questions and concerns around visa validity,” said Manisha Zaveri, joint managing director at education consultancy Career Mosaic. “We are reassuring them that such proclamations often undergo legal review and clarification, and universities typically step up support mechanisms when such uncertainty arises.”

Many US institutions are already reaching out to students, clarifying their visa status, providing legal assistance where needed, and even exploring credit transfers or deferral options, she said.

Rajiv Khanna, managing attorney at Immigration.com, cautioned against alarm. “The government’s authority to revoke institutional certification under the Student and Exchange Visitor Program is not unlimited. The legal vulnerability of these actions lies in their arbitrary nature,” he said. He urged students who receive visa revocation notices to act swiftly but stay calm. “The key is not to self-deport out of fear. Many provisions of the Constitution protect all people, regardless of their status, meaning students still have the right to defend themselves under due process and can’t be deported without it.”

Khanna also dismissed the administration’s broader accusations, including claims of antisemitism and links to the Chinese Communist Party, as “lacking substantive evidence” and politically motivated. “These broad, unsupported allegations appear designed to justify predetermined actions rather than address specific security concerns,” he said.

In the 2023–24 academic year, more than 331,000 Indian students were enrolled in US institutions, a 23% increase from the previous year. However, recent policy shifts, according to Khandelwal, have already triggered a 13% decline in new enrolments from India. Meanwhile, the active student count has dropped 28% between July 2024 and March 2025.