

US Universities Face Sharp Decline in Indian Students Amid Deepening Visa Crisis



American universities are bracing for a drastic reduction in Indian student enrollment for the upcoming fall semester, with reports indicating a potential 70-80% drop. This significant downturn is primarily attributed to a deepening visa crisis characterized by a severe freeze on appointment slots and an alarming surge in visa rejection rates. With less than two weeks until the fall semester begins, thousands of Indian students and their families are facing immense anxiety and uncertainty.

Education consultants across India are reporting an unprecedented level of distress. Sanjeev Rai of Hyderabad Overseas Consultant described the situation as "the worst in years," noting that by this time, most students would typically have completed their visa interviews and be preparing for departure. Instead, aspiring students are continuously refreshing online portals, desperately hoping for interview slots to open. Even when a few slots briefly appeared, many who managed to book them have yet to receive confirmation, adding to the confusion. Ankit Jain from Window Overseas Education Consultancy suggested that US authorities might be testing systems, as there appears to be no logical reason for such limited, unconfirmed slot releases.

Adding to the crisis is an unusually high rate of visa rejections, even for students who applied as early as March and secured interview appointments. Many who typically would have received smooth approvals are now being denied, with the common reason cited being Section 214B of the US Immigration and Nationality Act. This clause indicates that applicants failed to demonstrate sufficient ties to their home country, raising doubts about their intent to return after completing their studies. According to Arvind Manduva from I20 Fever consultancy, the situation is critical: "If slots aren't released in the next few days, thousands of dreams will be shattered."

We are seeing about an 80% drop. We're getting panic calls every day from students and their parents."

This crisis comes after India surpassed China in 2024, sending over 330,000 students to the US, the highest number yet. However, the current bottlenecks threaten to reverse this trend dramatically. While a spokesperson from the US Consulate General in Hyderabad stated that visa slots have resumed and advised applicants to check embassy websites, the lack of widespread availability and the high rejection rate continue to fuel concern.

The US authorities have stated they are working to "fully vet visa applicants to ensure they do not intend to harm America or our interests" and to ensure applicants "credibly establish their eligibility." They encourage early applications and anticipate additional processing time. Nevertheless, the immediate impact on Indian students is forcing many to withdraw applications or explore alternative study destinations, such as Germany, to avoid losing an academic year. The ongoing visa challenges underscore a critical period for US universities, which rely heavily on international student enrollment, and for the thousands of Indian students whose academic aspirations now hang in the balance.