# The Uneven Decline of Students from China in U.S. Higher Education

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## U.S.-China tensions reshaping globalization

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- "Small yard, high fence" (Jake Sullivan, NSA)
- ► COVID-19
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- Despite migration being one of three main pillars of globalization
- $\sim$  To what extent & how have tensions  $\rightarrow$  cross-border people flows?

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  - Tuition & higher education
  - Scientific knowledge production & collaboration
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- ▶  $\downarrow$  CHN sensitive-field Ph.D. students by  $\approx$  40%

- Policy Context
- 2 The Effects of Geopolitics
- Oata & Measures
- Students from China vs. The Rest of the World
- 5 The Effect of Tensions on Sub-national Allocations
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- Pressure on student visas from China (Oct. 2018–)
  - Oct. 2018: Financial Times story: Trump considers bans
  - 2020: Trump limits visas for PLA institution-affiliated CHN students
  - 2023: Florida restricts public institutions from hiring CHN students

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- U.S. demand side: increased entry barriers
  - Restrictions on students' past institutions
  - ► Additional screening for sensitive fields ↑ visa delays or denials
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- → Students/departments may hedge where tensions are particularly salient (public institutions, red states)



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## International Students

- ➤ FOIA of all F-1/M-1 student records in SEVIS, 2003-2021 ≈ 6 mil. unique students, 9.2 mil. student-school-program records
- ► Info on students' country, school, program major, start/end, etc.
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- 16 Critical Fields in State Department's Technology Alert List
- Provides guidance for consular officers adjudicating visas
- ► Classify CIP 6-digit fields (n = 2325) using description similarity

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- Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2004–
- Fuzzy match institution names to FOIA schools, manual check all
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- → Fine-grained data: all students by origin, level, field, institution, year

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- → Enables a wide variety of design-based tests

#### I-20 Form

Department of Homeland Security U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status OMB NO. 1653-0038

#### SEVIS ID: N0004720633

SURNAME/PRIMARY NAME Sample PREFERRED NAME Student Sample, II

COUNTRY OF BIRTH T.AOS DATE OF BIRTH 04 MAY 1995 FORM ISSUE REASON CIVEN NAME Student PASSPORT NAME

COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP T.AOS ADMISSION NUMBER

LEGACY NAME

Class of Admission

ACADEMIC AND LANGUAGE

#### CONTINUED ATTENDANCE SCHOOL INFORMATION

SCHOOL NAME SEVP School for Advanced SEVIS Studies SEVP School for Advanced SEVIS Studies

SCHOOL OFFICIAL TO CONTACT UPON ARRIVAL Helene Robertson

SCHOOL ADDRESS

03 APRIL 2015

9002 Nancy Lane, Ft. Washington, MD 20744

MAJOR 2

None 00 0000

SCHOOL CODE AND APPROVAL DATE BAL214F44444000

PROGRAM OF STUDY EDUCATION LEVEL

BACHELOR'S PROGRAM ENGLISH PROFICIENCY MAJOR 1 History and Philosophy of Science and Technology 54,0104 ENGLISH PROFICIENCY NOTES

EARLIEST ADMISSION DATE 04 APRIL 2016 Student is proficient

START OF CLASSES PROGRAM START/END DATE 01 JUNE 2016 04 MAY 2016 - 30 MAY 2020

FINANCIALS

PDSO

ESTIMATED AVERAGE COSTS FOR: 9 MONTHS STUDENT'S FUNDING FOR: 9 MONTHS Tuition and Fees \$ 15,000 Personal Funds 19,000 Living Expenses 4,000 Funds From This School Expenses of Dependents (0) n Funds From Another Source Other On-Campus Employment TOTAL \$ 19,000 TOTAL \$ 19,000

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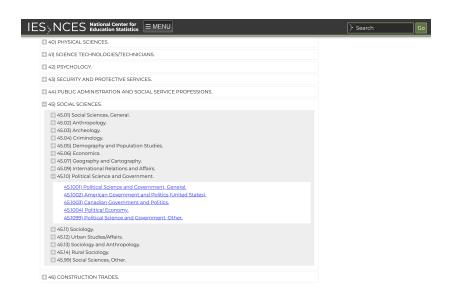
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- Can merge with other data at Zip Code level
  - U.S. Census

## 6-digit CIP Fields



## Critical Fields in DOS' Technology Alert List (TAL)

#### Technology Alert List (TAL)

- Advanced ceramics: Technologies related to the production of tanks, military vehicles, and weapons systems.
- Advanced computer/microelectronic technology: Technologies associated with superconductivity supercomputing, microcomputer compensated crystal oscillators.
- Aircraft and missile propulsion and vehicular systems: Technologies associated with liquid and solid-rocket propulsion systems, missile propulsion, rocket
  - staging/separation mechanisms, aerospace thermal and high-performance structures.
- Chemical and biotechnology engineering: Technologies associated with the development or production of biological and toxin agents, pathogenics, biological weapons research.
- Conventional munitions: Technologies associated with warhead and large caliber projectiles, fusing and arming systems.
- 6. High-performance metals and alloys: Technologies associated with military
- applications.

  7. Information security: Technologies associated with cryptographic systems to ensure secrecy of communications.
- Lasers and directed energy systems: Technologies associated with laser-guided bombs, ranging devices, countering missiles.
- Marine technology: Technology associated with submarines and deep submersible vessels, marine propulsion systems designed for undersea use and navigation, radar, acoustic/nonacoustic detection.
- 10. Materials technology: Technologies related to the production of composite materials for structural functions in aircraft, spacecraft, undersea webicles and missiles.
- 11. Missile/missile technology: Technologies associated with air vehicles and unmanned missile systems.
- 12. Navigation and guidance control: Technologies associated with the delivery and accuracy of unguided and guided weapons, such as tracking and homing devices, internal navisation systems, webicle and flight control systems.
- 13. Nuclear technology. Technologies associated with the production and use of nuclear material for military applications.
- 14. Remote imaging and reconnaissance: Technologies associated with military reconnaissance efforts, such as drones, remotely piloted or unmanned vehicles, imagery systems, high resolution cameras.
- 15. Robotics: Technologies associated with artificial intelligence, computer-controlled machine tools.
- 16. Sensors: Technology associated with marine acoustics, missile launch calibration, night vision devices, high-speed photographic equipment.

Source: International Students and Scholar Services, Temple University

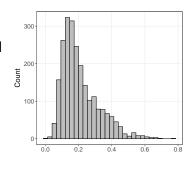


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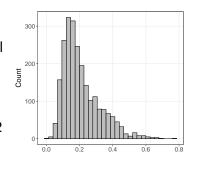
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Cosine Similarity Score

- 6-digit CIP field (title) vs. TAL
- Use pretrained DistilRoBERTa model (a version of BERT) to get sentence embeddings
- Measure pairwise cosine similarity
- Manually check every CIP with ≥ 0.2 cosine similarity and code fields with military-related text as sensitive



Cosine Similarity Score

## Sensitive Fields: Examples

*	cip_6d_2020 <sup>‡</sup>	cip_6d_2020_title ÷	cip_6d_2020_def	† sim_max_title †	sim_max_title_def *	sensitive_manual ‡
		Missile and Space Systems Technology.	A program that focuses on the principles, technology		0.6136492	1
		Nuclear/Nuclear Power Technology/Technician.	A program that prepares individuals to apply scientifi		0.7428619	1
	15.0806	Marine Engineering Technology/Technician.	A program that prepares individuals to apply basic en	0.6342970		1
	29.0403	Aircraft Armament Systems Technology.	A program that focuses on the principles, technology			1
		Nuclear Engineering Technology/Technician.	A program that prepares individuals to apply basic en			1
		${\bf Marine\ Maintenance/Fitter\ and\ Ship\ Repair\ Technolog}$	A program that prepares individuals to apply technica			1
		Nuclear and Industrial Radiologic Technologies/Tech	Any instructional program in nuclear and industrial ra	. 0.5970840		1
	15.0405	Robotics Technology/Technician.	A program that prepares individuals to apply basic en	0.5942150	0.5960751	1
		Air and Space Operations Technology.	A program that focuses on the principles, technology			1
	29.9999	Military Technologies and Applied Sciences, Other.	Any instructional program in military technologies an		0.4872288	1
		Nuclear Engineering.	A program that prepares individuals to apply mathem		0.5803382	1
		Aeronautics/Aviation/Aerospace Science and Technol	A program that focuses on the general study of aviati		0.4635155	1
	40.0806	Nuclear Physics.	A program that focuses on the scientific study of the $\ldots$	0.5684505		1
	47.0608	Aircraft Powerplant Technology/Technician.	A program that prepares individuals to apply technica		0.4899784	1
		Aeronautical/Aerospace Engineering Technology/Tec	A program that prepares individuals to apply basic en			1
		Aerospace, Aeronautical, and Astronautical/Space En	Any program in aerospace, aeronautical, astronautical.		0.4685789	1
		Military Systems and Maintenance Technology, Other.				1
	15.0899	Mechanical Engineering Related Technologies/Techni	Any instructional program in mechanical engineering	0.5450487	0.4341844	1
		Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering.	A program that prepares individuals to apply mathem	0.5447689		1
	51.0905	Nuclear Medical Technology/Technologist.	A program that prepares individuals, under the super	0.5433998	0.6574612	1
		Aerospace Ground Equipment Technology.	A program that focuses on the principles, technology,			1
	14.2001	Metallurgical Engineering.	A program that prepares individuals to apply mathem	0.5358078	0.4753950	1
		Materials Engineering.	A program that prepares individuals to apply mathem	0.5346251	0.6586419	1
		Materials Chemistry.	A program that focuses on the synthesis and study of			1
		Airframe Mechanics and Aircraft Maintenance Technol	A program that prepares individuals to apply technica	. 0.5328065		1
		Aerospace, Aeronautical, and Astronautical/Space En	A program that prepares individuals to apply mathem		0.5214686	1
		Cytotechnology/Cytotechnologist.	A program that prepares individuals to work with pat			1
		Materials Science.	A program that focuses on the general application of $\ldots$	0.5297986		1
		Military Technology and Applied Sciences Management.	A program that focuses on applied military science, $\dots$			1
	14.4201	Mechatronics, Robotics, and Automation Engineering.	A program that prepares individuals to apply mathem	0.5238811	0.4950992	1

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## **DID Model: Aggregate**

- Unit of analysis: country-education level-year
- Split Sample: level (BA, MA, PhD)
- Model:

$$Y_{c,t} = \beta(China_c \times Post_t) + \alpha_c + \gamma_t + X_{c,t-1} + \epsilon_{c,t},$$

- Outcome of interest:  $Y_{c,t}$ , total new int'l students
- Key Covariates: China<sub>c</sub> × Post<sub>t</sub>
  - ► *China<sub>c</sub>*: China dummy (vs. ROW)
  - Post<sub>t</sub>: 2018 and after
- Fixed Effects: country, year
- Other:  $X_{c,t-1}$ , country-year covariates, including GDP (log), GDP growth (annual %), GDP per capita (PPP, log), total population (log), export (import) volume to (from) the U.S. (log)
- Clustered Standard Errors: country
- Estimator: NegBin, Quasi-Poisson



## **DID Results: Aggregate**

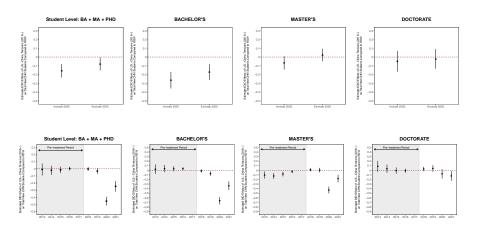


Figure: Relative Change of Total New International Students from China Compared to the ROW, 2013–2021.

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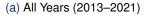
- Unit of analysis: country-institution-education level-year
- Split Sample: School type (Red public, red private, blue public, blue private) & level (BA, MA, PhD)
- Model:

$$Y_{c,i,t} = \beta(China_{c,i} \times Post_t) + \alpha_c + \gamma_t + \theta_i + \theta_i \gamma_t + \alpha_c \theta_i + X_{c,t-1} + \epsilon_{c,i,t},$$

- Outcome of interest:  $Y_{c,i,t}$ , total new int'l students
- Key Covariates: China<sub>c,i</sub>Post<sub>t</sub>
  - ► China<sub>c.i</sub>: China dummy (vs. ROW)
  - ► *Post<sub>t</sub>*: 2018 and after
- Fixed Effects: country, year, institution, institution-year, country-institution
- Other:  $X_{c,t-1}$ , same country-year covariates as earlier
- Clustered Standard Errors: country
- Estimator: NegBin, Quasi-Poisson



### **DID Results: Institution**



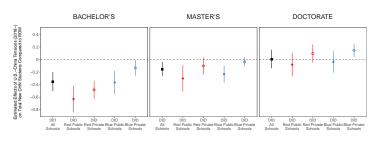


Figure: Relative Change of Total New Chinese International Students Compared to the ROW by State Partisanship and Institution Type

- Policy Context
- 2 The Effects of Geopolitics
- 3 Data & Measures
- Students from China vs. The Rest of the World
- 5 The Effect of Tensions on Sub-national Allocations
- 6 The Effect of Tensions on Inflows in Sensitive Fields

#### **DDD Model**

- Unit of analysis: country-education level-CIP field-year
- Split Sample: level (BA, MA, PhD)
- Model:

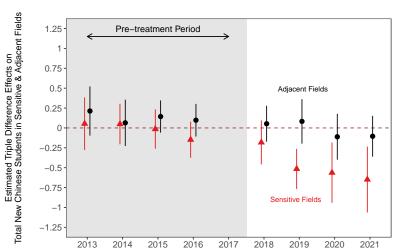
$$\begin{split} Y_{c,f,t} &= \sum_{t=2013,-2017}^{2021} \beta_t^{S*} (\textit{China}_{c,f} \times \textit{Sensitive}_f \times \gamma_t) + \sum_{t=2013,-2017}^{2021} \beta_t^{S} (\textit{Sensitive}_f \times \gamma_t) + \\ &\sum_{t=2013,-2017}^{2021} \beta_t^{A*} (\textit{China}_{c,f} \times \textit{Adjacent}_f \times \gamma_t) + \sum_{t=2013,-2017}^{2021} \beta_t^{A} (\textit{Adjacent}_f \times \gamma_t) + \\ &\alpha_c + \gamma_t + \theta_f + \alpha_c \gamma_t + \alpha_c \theta_f + \epsilon_{c,f,t}, \end{split}$$

- Outcome of interest:  $Y_{c,f,t}$ , total new int'l students
- Key Covariates: China<sub>c,f</sub>  $\times$  Sensitive<sub>f</sub>  $\times \gamma_t$ 
  - Sensitive<sub>f</sub>, sensitive 6-digit CIP field dummy
  - $\gamma_t$ , year dummy (2013–2021)
  - Year-by-year triple difference estimate, 2017 as baseline
- Fixed Effects: country, year, field, country-year, country-field
- Clustered Standard Errors: 6-digit CIP field
- Estimator: Negative binomial



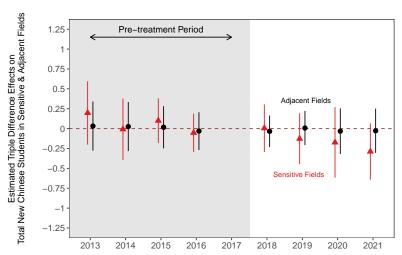
#### Tensions Reduced New CHN Sensitive-Field Ph.D.s.

#### **DOCTORATE**

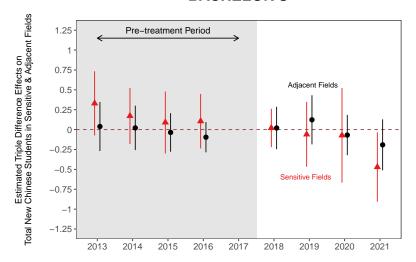


### CHN MA Students: Null Effects

#### **MASTER'S**



# CHN BA Students: Null Effects, esp. before COVID BACHELOR'S



#### Theoretical contribution

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- ► Limited understanding of how U.S.-China tensions have impacted migration compared to trade & investment

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#### Empirical contribution

- Link sensitive technologies and students at the origin-field level
- ▶ Tensions  $\rightarrow$  larger  $\downarrow$  CHN sensitive-field PhD students
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- → Reveals new patterns of uneven ↓ among int'l students in the U.S.
- → New sub-national policy implications of U.S.-China competition

#### Send comments and suggestions to:

steven.liao@ucr.edu

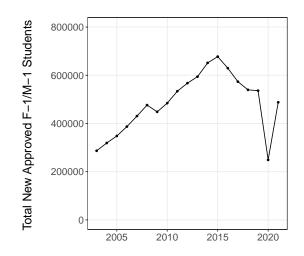
More information about this and other research:

https://www.stevenliao.org/

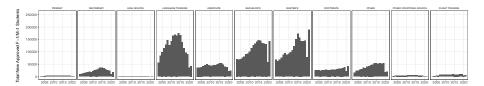
#### Extra Slides

- Aggregate Trends
- Education-level Trends
- Proportion of Students from China
- Proportion of Students from China by School Type
- Field-level Trends, Top 2 Origins
- Descriptive Stats: Int'l Ph.D. Students in Sensitive Fields
- Descriptive Stats: Int'l Master's Students in Sensitive Fields
- Validation: Similarity Scores & Field-Specific DID Estimates
- DID Analysis: Aggregate, Quasi-Poisson
- DID Analysis: States
- DID Analysis: Institutions, exclude 2020
- DID Analysis: Sensitive Fields, Dynamic

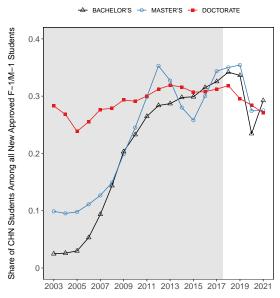
## Aggregate Trends



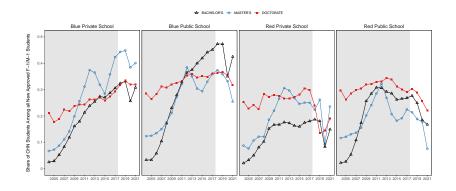
#### **Educational-level Trends**



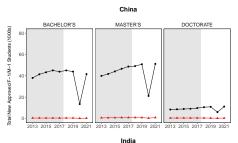
## Proportion of Int'l Students from China

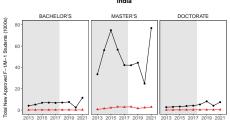


## Prop. of Int'l Students from China, by School Type



## Sensitive vs. Non-Sensitive Fields, Top 2 Origins





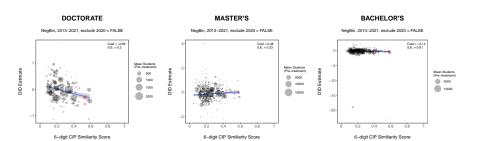
## Descriptive Statistics: Int'l PhDs in Sensitive Fields

CIP Code	CIP Title	CN Students (13'-17')	ROW Students (13'-17')	CN Students (18'-21')	ROW Students (18'-21')	CN Change (%)	ROW Change (%)
40.0806	Nuclear Physics.	5	3	0	1	-100	-66.67
40.0808	Condensed Matter and Materials Physics.	9	11	0	2	-100	-81.82
15.0801	Aeronautical/Aerospace Engineering Technology/Technician.	1	1	0	0	-100	-100.00
15.0803	Automotive Engineering Technology/Technician.	19	13	0	0	-100	-100.00
11.1003	Computer and Information Systems Security/Auditing/Information Assurance.	9	32	1	217	-88.89	578.12
14.2001	Metallurgical Engineering.	18	30	5	26	-72.22	-13.33
14.2301	Nuclear Engineering.	154	226	43	193	-72.08	-14.60
14.1101	Engineering Mechanics.	50	97	18	48	-64	-50.52
14.0999	Computer Engineering, Other.	5	6	2	1	-60	-83.33
14.1003	Laser and Optical Engineering.	41	48	19	35	-53.66	-27.08
49.0101	Aeronautics/Aviation/Aerospace Science and Technology, General.	8	15	4	10	-50	-33.33
14.0201	Aerospace, Aeronautical, and Astronautical/Space Engineering, General.	240	885	126	805	-47.5	-9.04
14.1801	Materials Engineering.	1135	1119	757	1013	-33.3	-9.47
14.2201	Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering.	17	6	12	2	-29.41	-66.67
40.1001	Materials Science.	295	248	223	250	-24.41	0.81
14.1099	Electrical, Electronics, and Communications Engineering, Other.	46	109	42	62	-8.7	-43.12
40.0802	Atomic/Molecular Physics.	1	7	1	3	0	-57.14
40.1002	Materials Chemistry.	7	22	9	20	28.57	-9.09
14.4201	Mechatronics, Robotics, and Automation Engineering.	32	74	59	109	84.38	47.30
29.0203	Signal/Geospatial Intelligence.	2	3	6	6	200	100.00
15.0805	Mechanical/Mechanical Engineering Technology/Technician.	0	0	0	1	NaN	Inf
43.0403	Cyber/Computer Forensics and Counterterrorism.	0	0	0	12	NaN	Inf
15.0303	Electrical, Electronic, and Communications Engineering Technology/Technician.	0	1	0	0	NaN	-100.00
49.0104	Aviation/Airway Management and Operations.	0	2	0	0	NaN	-100.00

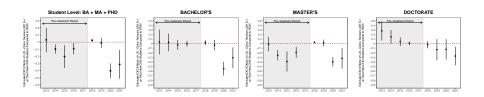
## Descriptive Stats: Int'l MAs in Sensitive Fields

CIP Code	CIP Title	CN Students (13'-17')	ROW Students (13'-17')	CN Students (18'-21')	ROW Students (18'-21')	CN Change (%)	ROW Change (%)
15.0403	Electromechanical/Electromechanical Engineering Technology/Technician.	1	2	0	5	-100	150
40.1002	Materials Chemistry.	1	14	0	10	-100	-28.57
43.0301	Homeland Security.	3	30	0	29	-100	-3.33
49.0199	Air Transportation, Other.	1	14	0	4	-100	-71.43
15.0801	Aeronautical/Aerospace Engineering Technology/Technician.	2	4	0	0	-100	-100
40.0808	Condensed Matter and Materials Physics.	2	0	0	0	-100	NaN
49.0399	Marine Transportation, Other.	7	9	0	0	-100	-100
14.2001	Metallurgical Engineering.	14	45	1	31	-92.86	-31.11
49.0104	Aviation/Airway Management and Operations.	13	110	1	26	-92.31	-76.36
14.2201	Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering.	40	15	5	12	-87.5	-20
43.0403		19	159	3	389	-84.21	144.65
	Automotive Engineering Technology/Technician.	33	397	11	128	-66.67	-67.76
14.0201	Aerospace, Aeronautical, and Astronautical/Space Engineering, General.	326	1720	142	1097	-56.44	-36.22
14.1003	Laser and Optical Engineering.	42	40	19	11	-54.76	-72.5
14.2301	Nuclear Engineering.	50	162	29	86	-42	-46.91
14.1801	Materials Engineering.	1522	1009	945	722	-37.91	-28.44
14.1101	Engineering Mechanics.	16	57	12	20	-25	-64.91
40.1001	Materials Science.	491	238	372	159	-24.24	-33.19
15.0303	Electrical, Electronic, and Communications Engineering Technology/Technician.	8	146	7	29	-12.5	-80.14
29.0203	Signal/Geospatial Intelligence.	2	1	2	9	0	800
	Nuclear Medical Technology/Technologist.	1	5	1	12	0	140
11.1003		393	8186	409	8479	4.07	3.58
49.0101	Aeronautics/Aviation/Aerospace Science and Technology, General.	52	185	63	278	21.15	50.27
29.0207		4	55	5	89	25	61.82
14.1099	Electrical, Electronics, and Communications Engineering, Other.	261	461	329	203	26.05	-55.97
14.4201	Mechatronics, Robotics, and Automation Engineering.	192	436	292	1041	52.08	138.76
29.0299	Intelligence, Command Control and Information Operations, Other.	1	1	2	4	100	300
14.0999	Computer Engineering, Other.	22	62	50	225	127.27	262.9
15.0805	Mechanical/Mechanical Engineering Technology/Technician.	6	12	15	7	150	-41.67
15.0405	Robotics Technology/Technician.	10	12	27	31	170	158.33
43.0404	Cybersecurity Defense Strategy/Policy.	0	0	1	1	Inf	Inf
14.0202	Astronautical Engineering.	0	3	0	10	NaN	233.33
15.0508	Hazardous Materials Management and Waste Technology/Technician.	0	3	0	1	NaN	-66.67
15.0899	Mechanical Engineering Related Technologies/Technicians, Other.	0	0	0	1	NaN	Inf
40.0806	Nuclear Physics.	0	0	0	1	NaN	Inf
43.0399	Homeland Security, Other.	0	3	0	3	NaN	0
51.1002	Cytotechnology/Cytotechnologist.	0	10	0	6	NaN	-40
26.0912		0	5	0	0	NaN	-100
	Military and Strategic Leadership.	0	1	0	0	NaN	-100
30.2901	Maritime Studies.	0	3	0	0	NaN	-100
40.0802	Atomic/Molecular Physics.	0	3	0	0	NaN	-100
47.0607	Airframe Mechanics and Aircraft Maintenance Technology/Technician.	0	1	0	0	NaN	-100
47.0614	Alternative Fuel Vehicle Technology/Technician.	0	1	0	0	NaN	-100

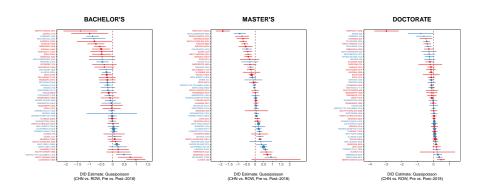
## Validation: Similarity Scores & DID estimates



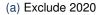
## Aggregate DID Analysis: Quasi-Poisson Results



## DID Effects of U.S.-China Tensions by State



## DID Results: Heterogeneity by State and Institution



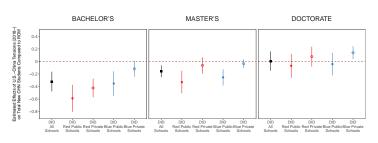


Figure: Relative Change of Total New Chinese International Students Compared to the ROW by State Partisanship and Institution Type

## Dynamic DID Results

