

Trump supporters on campuses more likely to show prejudice toward international students: study

August 29 2018, by Bert Gambini

International students at American colleges and universities do not always find a welcoming environment. Research has shown that, as a group, internationals face prejudice from segments of the domestic student population, and a new study by a University at Buffalo psychologist suggests that stereotypes alone do not lead to that prejudice.

"Prejudice against international students is multifaceted," says Wendy Quinton, Ph.D., a clinical associate professor in UB's psychology department and author of the paper published in the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*.

"But there are factors leading to prejudice that universities can influence."

Her study showed that, aside from stereotypes, other factors, including support for President Donald Trump, predicted prejudice against international students from the domestic [student](#) population.

"Some of President Trump's policies, such as promoting 'America First,' the travel ban and his talk of building a wall are in line with unwelcoming attitudes toward immigrants—but this is the first evidence I've seen linking support for Trump with attitudes toward international students," says Quinton, an expert in prejudice, stigma and social identity who surveyed 389 college students, all of whom self-identified

as being born and raised in the United States.

"This finding tells us that if you statistically account for stereotypes, those domestic students who were higher in Trump support still had significantly higher prejudice. Liking Trump goes beyond stereotypes in predicting prejudice against international students."

Stereotypes are ideas or beliefs about members of a certain group. A [stereotype](#) can be positive or negative. Prejudice is a negative attitude toward members of a particular group. Stereotypes can lead to prejudice and Quinton says there are stereotypes that predict prejudice against international students.

"I found other factors, not just stereotypes—and administrators may be able to influence those factors and make a difference," she says.

In addition to Trump support, university identity emerged as another [independent predictor](#) of prejudice.

University identity is reflected in a sense of belonging to the school. Do I feel like I'm a member of the campus community? Does the university value me? Do I belong here? Students who didn't strongly identify with the university showed higher levels of prejudice against international students.

"Among the predictors of prejudice against international students that administrators can influence, university identity came out as an important independent predictor," says Quinton. "If you increase university identity and make everyone feel like they belong to one group then the division between domestic and international students should become smaller."

Standardized test scores marginally predicted prejudice. Those domestic

students with lower SAT scores had higher levels of prejudice. Domestic students who had fewer positive stereotypes and more negative stereotypes also tended to be prejudiced against internationals.

But socialization is also critical, and it can positively impact those who would otherwise be highly prejudiced against international students, according to Quinton.

She says the process of getting acquainted predicted levels of prejudice.

"Particular kinds of socialization matter the most: Do we study together? Do we share activities together? Do we have the kinds of close contact that can build friendships? That mattered," says Quinton. "For those with lower SAT scores, for those low in positive stereotypes, for those high in Trump support, the more they socialized with international students the lower their [prejudice](#)."

"University identity and socialization are both positive factors that universities can foster and that everyone can benefit from."

The results from Quinton's research come on the heels of the first national decrease in international enrollment at American universities after years of increases. Statistics from the U.S. State Department show a 17 percent decline in 2017 in student visas.

That drop had a significant economic impact on the country.

Between 2015 and 2016, international students contributed nearly \$33 billion to the U.S. economy and supported over 400,000 jobs, according to NAFSA: Association for International Educators.

Quinton sees the globalization experience as enriching for domestic and [international students](#) alike.

"International students are part of the fiber and fabric of American universities. They bring different experiences, cultures, backgrounds, languages and ideas. Domestic students gain a great deal from the presence of internationals on campus and develop a deeper understanding of the world because of that diversity.

"Universities should make the effort to address these variables because the potential benefits are so great, for all involved," she says.

More information: Wendy J. Quinton, Unwelcome on campus? Predictors of prejudice against international students., *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* (2018). [DOI: 10.1037/dhe0000091](https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000091)

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