



Analysts: Free College Plans Could Hit Foreign Students, Institutions

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Plans to make public universities free proposed by Democratic presidential hopefuls Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Bernie Sanders of Vermont may not work out so well for international students, analysts say.

In commentary posted by **Business Insider**, Neal McCluskey, the director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, and Catherine Straus a research associate at the center and a former international student from Taiwan, warn the idea poses risks for students and universities.

“Ending tuition and fees for Americans would almost certainly lead to big revenue losses for institutions,” they wrote.

“In 2018, public colleges brought in more than \$74 billion in tuition-and-fee revenue, minus state aid to students. With about 90% of public college students undergrads, free college would require \$67 billion more annually.

“That's a ton of revenue to make up for, especially since most states are strapped by medical and pension costs,” they argued.

International students would likely protest paying even higher prices for schools that are free to others — and if they looked elsewhere, “that would be a big loss,” they argued.

“The loss of international students would not just deliver a direct financial hit,” they pointed out.

“Interactions with students from abroad will be more and more important as Americans prepare for an economy that will increasingly transcend national boundaries and cultures. We need to know and understand other people to work successfully with them.”

The authors concede the United States could avoid the problems and make public college free for international students too. “But it is difficult to imagine that ever gaining much popular support,” they wrote.

“In the end, the effect that ‘free’ college would have on international enrollment is not the most important to consider. But it is still one we ignore at our peril,” they wrote.