



Situational Analysis

Indian Students under attack: US should review, revisit & revamp governance norms to ensure their safety

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Introduction

Indian students have strong inclination to pursue higher education opportunities overseas which is not a one-sided phenomenon. Foreign colleges and universities are also diversifying their curriculum, educational opportunities, job chances, commitments and declarations to attract Indian students. In recent years, America has consistently been most preferred country for Indian students seeking education with international exposure.

In 2021, more than 107,000 students of Indian origin were enrolled in American institutions for higher education.¹ This number climbed to 269,000 in 2022–2023 academic year.² America has highest number of Indian students and is the top pick for international students from many countries. Enrolments at American institutions has increased by almost 35 percent this year.

Given the rising numbers, it is crucial to understand the students' status, safety, advancement and their impact on the American economy and infrastructure. This situational study will provide insights into benefits America accrues from Indian students and what Indian students are getting in return!

Demographic Analysis

America boasts of a multitude of colleges, universities and institutes that attract students from nearly every country worldwide. California has the highest number of students and institutions compared to other states.

Institute of International Education's (IIE) open door report for academic year 2020-2021 indicates that there were 200,000 Indian students,³ which is currently up to about 270,000.⁴

Indian students are prominent in a wide range of fields, particularly in STEM areas like computer sciences, engineering and mathematics. The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) data shows that a considerable number of Indian students choose to study engineering, business and management, computer sciences, and social sciences.⁵

¹ <https://nces.ed.gov/fastFacts/display.asp?id=98>

² <https://opendoorsdata.org/annual-release/international-students/#data-highlights>

³ <https://www.iie.org/publications/open-doors-2021/>

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/u-s-and-india-relations-the-long-view/>

⁵ <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevis-data-mapping-tool/january-2024-stem-sevis-data-mapping-tool-data>

Indian students majorly reside in states like California, New York, Texas, and Illinois which host notable universities and institutions specializing in technology, finance and healthcare. Indian students are prevalent in the region due to career opportunities across different sectors. Indian students also prefer New York City, San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston that serve as popular locations.

In the past, men constituted a majority of students studying overseas. But, the proportion of Indian women studying abroad has increased noticeably in recent times.

According to IIE Open Doors report, female Indian students in United States made up about 45 per cent of the entire Indian student population in academic year 2020 – 21. Involvement of Indian women seeking education at global level is growing significantly.

Indian students in USA make a substantial impact on the academic, cultural, and economic aspects of the country. They strengthen university campuses, promote cross-cultural exchange and bolster bilateral relations between India and United States.

Indian students are assets for the United States

Each Indian student studying in United States makes a substantial contribution to the economy and infrastructure through many means. Indians enrolling in American universities help boost the institutions' earnings. Students give financial support to service providers through their spending on lodging, food, transportation and other essential items. They contribute to government revenue through employment creation in part-time roles, internships or research support. Innovation stimulates economic growth, fosters entrepreneurship and draws investment in high-tech sectors through scientific research, technical advancements and academic partnerships in leading-edge research and innovation projects.

The students facilitate cultural interchange and foster mutual understanding between the two countries. Intercultural discussion enhances bilateral relations, fosters goodwill and encourages collaboration in areas such as trade, technology and diplomacy. Several students have an entrepreneurial mindset and aspire to establish their own firm or startup. These entrepreneurs enhance economic

dynamism and technical progress, bolstering United States' competitiveness in the global market.

Nearly one million international students selected United States as their destination in last academic year. In 2019, overseas education was the fifth largest export of US services sector generating nearly \$ 41 billion to the economy. More than 200,000 Indian students in the United States contribute over \$7.7 billion to the US economy annually.⁶

Situation of Indian Students in US



United States is widely recognized as a strong economic force and has a long-standing reputation as a dependable choice for international students looking for quality education and a secure life. It used to be a dream destination for quality education but if we look at last two months alone, the place where around 270,000 Indian students

live have proved to be a nightmare for them.

In January and February 2024, nine Indian students passed away or were killed, one of whom was killed by a policeman. Parents are concerned about sending their children for higher education to United States due to this serious situation.

Case Studies of Recent Killings and Attack

Vivek Saini

Vivek was a victim of terrifying, brutal and heinous incidents that define USA today. Julian Faulkner, a homeless person, viciously assaulted and killed Saini, an MBA student in Lithonia, Georgia, at midnight on January 15, 2024.



⁶ <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/study-abroad/story/is-us-still-a-land-of-opportunity-for-indian-students-1747089-2020-12-06>

Vivek, a 25-year-old student from Indian state of Haryana was employed part-time as a clerk at a gas station. Fellow employees informed the police that they had been harbouring Faulkner for about 48 hours. WSB-TV stated that the employees provided him with chips, soda, water, and jacket for warmth.

On January 15, Vivek Saini told Faulkner to leave or he would call police. Police reported that Faulkner assaulted Vivek with a hammer while he was departing for home. An employee reported that Vivek was hit 50 times on the head.

Upon arrival, the cops saw Faulkner with a hammer standing near Saini's body. He was declared dead on the spot.⁷

Jaahnavi Kandula



On January 23, Kevin Dave's police car reportedly struck Jaahnavi Kandula, a 23-year-old Indian student in Seattle, USA. Officer Dave was reportedly driving at a speed of around 120 km/h when the incident occurred while responding to a drug overdose call.

Further to the grief, bodycam footage from Seattle Police Department shows Officer Daniel Auderer making a flippant remark about terrible accident, saying, "Just write a cheque." The amount is USD 11,000.

Most astonishing is that The King County Prosecutor's Office decided not to file criminal charges against Seattle Police Officer Kevin Dave.⁸

The Consulate General of India in Seattle stated that "on the recently released investigation report of the King County Prosecuting Attorney on the unfortunate death of Jaahnavi Kandula, the Consulate has been in regular touch with the designated family representatives and will continue to extend all possible support in ensuring justice for Jaahnavi and her family.

⁷ <https://www.wsbtv.com/news/local/police-release-new-details-surrounding-gruesome-murder-gas-station-clerk/JXXIUTN2PRF7ZNXPN5FK3GKYA/>

⁸ <https://www.opindia.com/2024/02/india-us-police-officer-jaahnavi-kandula/>

We have raised the matter strongly with local authorities including Seattle Police for appropriate redress. The case has now been referred to Seattle City Attorney’s Office for review.

We await completion of Seattle Police's administrative investigation and will continue to monitor progress on the case”.⁹

Neel Acharya



Neel Acharya, a 19-year-old Indian American student excelling in computer sciences and data science as a junior passed away on January 29, 2024 under mysterious circumstances.

The incident, commonly referred to as "Neel Acharya Purdue University mystery," began when Neel was reported as missing. Officials confirmed that he was found dead near the Purdue University Airport bringing the search to a sad conclusion.¹⁰

Shreyas Reddy Beniger

According to his LinkedIn profile, Benigeri was pursuing a master’s degree in business statistics at Lindner School of Business, University of Cincinnati. The course familiarized business students with statistical methodologies and reasoning.



Cincinnati University is situated on Woodside Drive in Ohio. Benigeri obtained a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from Birla Institute of Technology and Sciences, Pilani before relocating to US.

⁹ <https://twitter.com/IndiainSeattle/status/1761125946869035024>

¹⁰ https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article_24f6005e-c247-11ee-baf2-93c201b13579.html

Benigeri passed away shortly after Neel Acharya, another student of Indian descent, was discovered deceased close to Purdue University in Indiana. The cause of Beniger's death remains unknown.¹¹

Sameer Kamath



Sameer Kamath, an Indian origin American citizen, was pursuing a doctoral degree in Mechanical Engineering Department at Purdue University. He earned a master's degree from the same department in August 2023.¹² Kamath of Purdue is the fifth Indian-origin student to die in US since January 2024.

Kamath was discovered dead at Crow's Grove Nature Preserve on February 5, 2024, at around 5 pm. The location was 3300 North Warren County Road 50 West in Williamsport, according to Warren County Coroner Justin Brummett.¹³

Sameer Kamath's death highlights significant problems encountered by Indian students studying in US as multiple publications emphasize the disturbingly high rate of such instances. Authorities have claimed to be investigating circumstances of Kamath's death.

Akul Dhawan

Akul Dhawan, an 18-year-old Indian-origin first-year student at University of Illinois in Urbana passed away on January 20, 2024, on West Nevada Street in US due to exposure to extreme cold after being denied entry to a club during a night out with friends, as reported by Champaign County Coroner's Office.



¹¹ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/us-news/who-was-shreyas-reddy-third-indian-student-found-dead-in-us-in-a-week-101706842518741.html>

¹² <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sameer-kamath-9b22b4151/>

¹³ https://news.yahoo.com/purdue-university-graduate-students-death-205613153.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9kdWNrZHVja2dvLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAACLHF1gcMODQoEHIRC7IBLCdQlhUuNLHHdVKY-jzNNPY9pFDu-suMarlkpEyRj2IWnzYfxOCZy1b425pnw1sdpkU8k0Q0eBAcj03pN6A1htWFNqIV10UWkdQSQgMvmjTd4Fhw4K40iMCPB_ZIJ1tf7x7Huw8IVt4tYbWAW89QHw

He was discovered lying on concrete stairs behind a building about a four-minute walk from the club. The local media reported that the temperatures in the area dropped to approximately -2 degrees Celsius at that time.

Dhawan's family believes that the police weren't searching for their son. The family of Akul expressed concern in an open letter about why Akul was found 10 hours later instead of immediately after being reported missing, when he may have been rescued. The places of his purported disappearance and discovery are within less than 200 feet distance!

They claimed that the institution failed to inform them of any concerns prior to the death. As a father, I never expected to get such news. We are utterly upset. Our family has been left with a significant void that will forever alter us," they expressed.¹⁴

Champaign County Coroner Stephen Thuney released a statement on February 20 outlining official reason for Dhawan's death. The release indicated that the death was accidental. "An autopsy was performed on Tuesday, January 23, 2024, that confirmed the death of Dhawan was due to hypothermia. Acute alcohol intoxication and prolonged exposure to extremely cold temperatures significantly contributed to his death."¹⁵

Syed Mazahir Ali



Syed Mazahir Ali, an Indian IT student studying for his master's in information technology at Indiana Wesleyan University, was viciously assaulted by unknown attackers in Chicago, USA, on February 4, with one of the attackers wielding a gun. The individuals responsible for this horrific event are unidentified, and the reason for the assault has not been established. Ali suffered severe injuries, such as cuts and fractures, and received medical care at a nearby hospital.¹⁶

¹⁴ https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/university-illinois/an-open-letter-from-the-family-of-akul-dhawan/article_85fd762d-bdb7-540d-ac93-4817e0d14c38.html

¹⁵ <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/indians-abroad/story/indian-origin-student-illinois-university-us-canopy-nightclub-urbana-hypothermia-campus-2505701-2024-02-22>

¹⁶ <https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2024/Feb/07/indian-student-from-hyderabad-brutally-attacked-in-chicago-indian-mission-assures-assistance>

Nikesh and Gattu Dinesh

Nikesh and Dinesh were found dead on February 6, 2024, only 16 days after starting their higher education in the United States, causing shock in their homeland and among their family. Dinesh obtained his B.Tech. degree in computer science from a private university in Chennai last year and was accepted into Sacred Heart University in Connecticut. He finished his education in Alampur, located in Mahabubnagar district in the former state of Andhra Pradesh, and pursued his intermediate studies in Hyderabad. Connecticut police notified the parents of Gattu Dinesh, 22, and Nikesh, around 20 years old, that the roommates passed away while sleeping. Dinesh hails from Wanaparthy, Telangana, whereas Nikesh comes from Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh.¹⁷

This study examines documented incidents; however, there are other reported instances that are concerning and critical. In view of the increasing cases of this kind, not only those parents whose children are studying in America are anxious but also those whose children want to go to America to study or who want to send their children. The American administration's behaviour in certain instances is worrying. This echo of the deaths and attacks is more than a personal tragedy; They serve as a rallying cry for the safety of those who travel abroad in search of knowledge and opportunity.

Key Takeaways

1. US government and educational institutions hosting Indian students must acknowledge and take responsibility for unexpected and suspicious deaths, investigate them effectively and take measures to prevent such incidents from re-occurring.
2. A significant number of Indian students' study at American educational institutions, thereby making substantial contributions to the American economy. Consequently, it is entrusted upon the government and institutions to ensure that they provide them with a good environment, a safe life, and quality education.
3. Implement stringent regulations and training procedures for law enforcement personnel, specifically focusing on their handling of emergency incidents with overseas students. This may involve implementing routine sensitivity training, cultural competency

¹⁷ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/two-indian-students-found-dead-in-us-101705302176589.html>

programmes and accountability mechanisms to avoid occurrences such as unfortunate passing of Jahanvi Kandula.

4. Develop an effort to promote positive interactions between international students, local law enforcement and administration by implementing community engagement initiatives. This could involve activities like cultural exchange programmes, language courses, and police-community forums aimed at enhancing mutual understanding and trust.
5. United States is a country where individuals from many cultures and various geographical locations come for education and employment opportunities. Promoting cross-cultural exchanges and integration programmes is essential at this time.
6. US that has been vocal about equitable opportunities and inclusivity world over should look back at what's happening in its own backyard.
7. Instead of mudslinging on partner countries like India, US should review, revisit and if required revamp governance structures with specific reference to foreign nationals, especially students and youngsters that go to America for studies in different colleges and universities.

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