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March 18, 2025

Timothy L. Killeen
President
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
506 South Wright Street
Urbana, IL 61801

Dear Mr. Killeen,

The United States is at a dangerous crossroads where the pursuit of short-term financial gains by academic institutions jeopardizes long-term global technological leadership and national security. Our nation's universities, long regarded as the global standard for excellence and innovation, are increasingly used as conduits for foreign adversaries to illegally gain access to critical research and advanced technology. Nonetheless, too many U.S. universities continue to prioritize financial incentives over the education of American students, domestic workforce development and national security. They do so by admitting large numbers of Chinese nationals into advanced STEM programs, potentially at the expense of qualified Americans. Accordingly, we write to request information regarding your university's policies and oversight mechanisms concerning the enrollment of Chinese national undergraduate, graduate, and PhD students, their involvement in federally funded research, and the security of sensitive technologies developed on campus.

The significant tuition revenue generated by international students—many of whom pay full tuition—has caused elite universities to become financially dependent on foreign enrollment, particularly from China.¹ This reliance on foreign students, especially those from adversarial nations, raises serious concerns about the displacement of American talent, the outsourcing of expertise, and the long-term implication for U.S. technological leadership and economic security. The intelligence community has warned that American campuses are "soft targets" for espionage and intellectual property theft.² The U.S. Department of Justice has further raised concerns that "international students' motives aren't just to learn but to share that intelligence with foreign

¹ See House Cmte. on Foreign Affairs, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Threat to American Universities (July 7, 2020).

² Ken Dilanian, *American universities are a soft target for China's spies, say U.S. intelligence officials*, NBC News (Feb. 2020).

superpowers to see a competitive advantage."³ These warnings make clear that this issue is not merely economic. It is a matter of national security. As China aggressively pursues dominance in strategic industries, the unchecked enrollment of Chinese nationals in American institutions risks facilitating the technological transfers that strengthen Beijing's military and economic competitiveness at our nation's expense.

The large influx of Chinese national students into the United States presents a growing national security challenge. Each year, hundreds of thousands of Chinese nationals study in the United States, with some gaining access to cutting-edge research in fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, semiconductors, and aerospace engineering.⁴ One third of all foreign graduate students studying STEM fields at U.S. universities are Chinese nationals.⁵ Some of these students are directly linked to Chinese state-backed funding sources, government talent recruitment programs, and research institutions tied to China's military-industrial complex.⁶ Simply put, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has established a well-documented, systematic pipeline to embed researchers in leading U.S. institutions, providing them direct exposure to sensitive technologies with dual-use military applications.

According to a study conducted by Harvard University, only 25% of Chinese graduate students intend to immigrate to the United States or another Western country after completing their graduate programs.⁷ More concerning, however, is that nearly half remain in the United States only temporarily for post-graduate employment before returning to China; and 25% of the students intend to return to China immediately after graduation.⁸ This pattern raises significant concerns about the extent to which Chinese nationals, after gaining expertise in highly advanced fields, ultimately transfer knowledge back to China.

The brain drain of critical expertise is not a coincidence but a reflection of Beijing's explicit strategy to leverage academia for technological advancement. The CCP's talent recruitment programs actively incentivize students and researchers to return to China and apply their acquired skills in ways that directly benefit the regime's economic and military ambitions. As a result, U.S. universities serve as training grounds for China's technological ascendance. Without stronger protections, American academic institutions risk facilitating the very innovation that the Chinese government seeks to use to outcompete and surpass the United States.

³ Alex Caprariello, *Have Chinese spies infiltrated US college campuses?*, NewsNation (Feb. 7, 2023).

⁴ Aline Barros, *Chinese Still Largest Group of Foreign Students in U.S.*, Voice of America (Dec. 21, 2023).

⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-23-106114, *Efforts Underway to Address Technology Transfer Risk at U.S. Universities, but ICE Could Improve Related Data*, (Nov. 15, 2022).

⁶ See Senate Perm. Select Subcmte. on Investigations, *Threats to the U.S. Research Enterprise: China's Talent Recruitment Plans* (Nov. 19, 2022); Federal Bureau of Investigation, *The China Threat: Chinese Talent Plans Encourage Trade Secret Theft, Economic Espionage* (2024); U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Comm., *Overseas Chinese Students and Scholars in China's Drive for Innovation* (Oct. 7, 2020).

⁷ Richard Yarrow & Victoria Li, *Chinese Graduate Students' Experience of U.S. Higher Education Through Covid and U.S.-China Tensions*, Harvard Kennedy School (Aug. 2024).

⁸ *Id.*

A September 2024 joint report from the House Select Committee on China and House Committee on Education and Workforce revealed several instances where American researchers, benefiting from federally funded programs, have enabled China to achieve significant technological advancements in critical and emerging technologies.⁹ The committees found that this has often led to the transfer of dual-use technologies pivotal to China's strategic objectives, including artificial intelligence and semiconductor research.¹⁰ By failing to retain these skilled individuals or admit students more likely to remain in the country, U.S. universities inadvertently act as incubators for China's technological and military advancements.

America's student visa system has become a Trojan horse for Beijing, providing unrestricted access to our top research institutions and posing a direct threat to our national security. If left unaddressed, this trend will continue to displace American talent, compromise research integrity, and fuel China's technological ambitions at our expense. Therefore, we respectfully request that you provide written responses to the following requests for information and questions as soon as possible but no later than April 1, 2025:

Request for information:

1. Provide a list of all universities that Chinese national students at your university previously attended, including their research affiliations.
2. Specify the sources of tuition funding for these individuals (e.g., personal wealth scholarships, Chinese talent recruitment programs, Chinese government grants).
3. Identify the type of research Chinese national students are conducting and the programs they are participating in at your university.
4. List all university programs that include Chinese national participants, along with the sources of funding for these programs.
5. Provide a list of laboratories and research initiatives where Chinese national students currently work.
6. Provide a country-by-country breakdown of applicants, admittances, and enrollments at your university.

⁹ House Select Cmte. on China & House Cmte. on Ed. and Workforce, *CCP on the Quad: How American Taxpayers and Universities Fund the CCP's Advanced Military and Technological Research* (Sep. 2024).

¹⁰ *Id.*

Questions:

1. What percentage of the university's total graduate student body consists of Chinese nationals?
2. What percentage of the graduate program's total tuition revenue comes from Chinese nationals?
3. What percentage of Chinese graduate students are engaged in federally funded research projects?
4. Does your university have policies in place to prevent foreign nationals from working on projects tied to U.S. government grants (e.g., Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, Department of Defense, Department of Energy, National Science Foundation funded research)?
5. Have Chinese nationals worked on federally funded research?
6. Does the university have monitoring mechanisms to track foreign students' participation in research with military or dual-use applications?
7. What collaborations exist between university faculty and China-based institutions or research laboratories?
8. Have any Chinese graduate students disclosed participation in China-backed recruitment and talent programs, government grants, or corporate-backed funding initiatives?
9. Are there restrictions on Chinese nationals enrolling in export-controlled coursework (e.g., advanced semiconductor engineering, quantum computing, AI, and aerospace engineering)?
10. What percentage of Chinese graduates from your university remain in the United States, and what percentage return to China?
11. Are Chinese nationals disproportionately concentrated in high-tech fields such as AI, quantum computing, robotics, aerospace, and semiconductors?
12. Are there any background screening processes for Chinese nationals applying to sensitive research programs?

Mr. Timothy L. Killeen

March 18, 2025

Page 5 of 5

13. Do any faculty members maintain research ties with Chinese institutions or researchers?
If so, which universities and/or researchers in China?

14. How many Chinese STEM graduates return to China, and what industries or institutions do they typically join (e.g., Huawei, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China Electronics Technology Group Corporation, Aviation Industry Corporation of China, etc.)?

The House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party has broad authority to investigate and submit policy recommendations on countering the economic, technological, security, and ideological threats of the Chinese Communist Party to the United States and allies and partners of the United States under H. Res. 5 Sec. 4(a).

Thank you for your attention to the important matter and we appreciate your prompt and full reply.

Sincerely,



John Moolenaar

Chairman

House Select Committee on the CCP