

May 13, 2025

## For Many Researchers, Help Wanted Comes From Distant Locales

**A letter from David A. Brenner, MD, President and CEO of Sanford Burnham Prebys**

For decades, the United States has been a beacon for science around the world, both for those who aspire to become scientists and for those seeking to conduct research at the highest levels, with the broadest support and deepest resources.

Now, not so much.

The Trump administration's ongoing [assault on science](#), from funding cuts and mass firings to reversing and eliminating programs and projects based on political ideologies, has fundamentally altered the equation.

The U.S. is still the world's science superpower, but it is losing ground. Other countries are investing more. [China is close behind](#) in terms of funding research and development. By some estimates, it will draw level in the next few years. By other measures, it is already ahead: producing more science and engineering PhDs and filing more international patent applications.

Instead of U.S. science attracting and keeping the best minds, as has been the case for many decades, many scientists are deciding their prospects and futures may be brighter elsewhere. Equally, if not more concerning, other countries have begun to actively recruit American researchers at risk to pick up their labs and move. Researchers who came to this country to work are finding it hard to stay.



“Nobody could imagine a few years ago that one of the great democracies of the world would eliminate research programs on the pretext that the word ‘diversity’ appeared in its program,” President [Emmanuel Macron](#) of France said during a recent speech announcing a major new effort to attract U.S.-based researchers to Europe.

At the same conference, Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, announced an investment of 500 million euros (\$566 million), to “make Europe a magnet for researchers” over the next two years.

That new funding is in addition to a \$105 billion international research program called Horizon Europe that supports many of the scientific efforts that the Trump Administration seems intent on quashing, such as [mRNA vaccines](#).

Of course, a shrinking scientific enterprise in the U.S. hurts Europe too. It hurts everyone. Modern science requires deep and continuing collaboration. But science leaders and institutions outside the U.S. also see opportunity. If the U.S. doesn't want to support the work of leading scientists, said Macron, others will, promising government support to help lure international researchers.

A recent poll of more than 1,600 U.S. scientists by the journal [Nature](#) found that three-quarters of them said they were looking for jobs in Europe and Canada. The trend was particularly pronounced among early-career researchers. Of the 690 postgraduate researchers who responded, 548 were considering leaving the U.S.; 255 of 340 PhD students said the same.

That's not surprising. The Trump administration has terminated hundreds of research grants and dramatically reduced or limited what it deems worthy of funding, often based on non-scientific reasons or no apparent reasons at all.

"This is my home — I really love my country," a graduate student at a top U.S. university wrote in responding to the Nature survey. "But a lot of my mentors have been telling me to get out, right now."

She doesn't have much choice. Her research support and stipend ended when the Trump administration shut down funding to the agency that supported her work. Her adviser found emergency funds to support her short term, but to continue her career, the graduate student is applying for research positions in Europe, Australia and Mexico.

Her story is not uncommon, but at least she's already embarked upon her science career. [Universities across the country](#) are cutting education programs, reducing graduate student admissions and decreasing support.

Not all of the adverse effects will be immediately felt. These students represent the next generation of scientists. Like their predecessors, they are motivated to find answers to the great scientific questions of our time, to improve our understanding of the world and our lives.

And they will. They just may not do it in the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David A. Brenner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**David A. Brenner, MD**  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Donald Bren Chief Executive Chair