

SCOOP: ICE Revoking Students' Immigration Statuses Without Their or the University's Knowledge

"Never seen something like this," say university officials about the secret targeting of Middle Eastern students.



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Hundreds rally in New York City against the detention of Columbia student protest leader Mahmoud Khalil on March 12, 2025. Photo by Lev Radin/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images

In a developing story, it appears the Trump administration is quietly targeting *even more* students for deportation and doing so in a way that is taking universities and students themselves completely by surprise.

According to documentation seen by **Zeteo** and interviews with university officials, administration is deploying the rarely-used risk-to-foreign-policy immigration provision they used to detain Mahmoud Khalil to now target students across the country.

University officials say that targeted students hail from the Middle East and Muslim-majority countries. They've also reported inconsistent notification patterns: some students have been informed about the revocations by the government, some have not; some only found out after officials manually checked internal visa status databases – while universities and officials themselves have mostly seemed to not be informed by the government.

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Revocation by Pushing a Button

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) appears to be *manually* revoking students' immigration status – an authority typically left to university staff. And some students and universities are not even being made aware of those revocations – setting students up to be taken by immigration agents without even knowing it was coming.

Three university officials, who were given anonymity so they could speak freely, across the country report that, in recent days, student residency statuses in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System – SEVIS, a database where residency statuses of foreign students are managed – are being changed without their knowledge.

Samah Sisay of the Center for Constitutional Rights told **Zeteo** that one's visa being revoked does *not* mean that their status would be too. Unlike student visas – which

entry documents that allow someone to enter the country – student *statuses* are what allow people to stay in the US. To maintain one's status, a student has to fulfill certain requirements, like being properly enrolled in classes, keeping documents up to date and following work restrictions.

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A student's *visa* could expire or be revoked for any number of reasons, but that wouldn't necessarily mean their *status* to stay would be taken away, too. Some of the *statuses*, which are typically overseen by university officers, are now allegedly being unilaterally revoked by ICE instead. While university officers often oversee status in the SEVIS system, Sisay said that DHS can technically revoke status without a university actively disenrolling a student.

Still, the practice is alarming students and university staff across the country. As one official put it, "Someone at ICE pushed a button, and now [students] are 'illegal' through a process that absolutely should not be happening."

"Never Seen Something Like This"

According to documentation seen by **Zeteo** and university officials across the country, the unusual termination of students' statuses has occurred just in recent days, as Secretary of State Marco Rubio has announced that the State Department has revoked at least 300 visas.

The reason? The same little-used rationale the State Department used to detain and attempt to deport Mahmoud Khalil, and an increasing string of students since then: provision of **Section 237 of the Immigration and Nationality Act** — targeting students on the basis that their presence would have "potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences" for the US.

In one case, a student was reportedly notified by the US that their visa was revoked under Section 221(i) of the act – which enables the Secretary of State to revoke visas per t

“discretion” – and then that their *status* was terminated by Section 237.

In multiple cases, the US cited both the foreign policy provision and another portion of Section 237 to assert that the student was “otherwise failing to maintain their status

This **appears to be what happened** to Tufts University graduate student **Rumeysa Ozturk**, who was detained by masked immigration authorities on Tuesday.

Some university officials are discovering these by sheer accident, encountering the changes as they look through the SEVIS database.

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A State Department spokesperson told **Zeteo** that the department “has broad authority to revoke visas under Section 221(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA),” and that they “exercise that authority when information comes to light indicating that a visa holder may be no longer be eligible for a visa.”

“Generally, the Department is not required to notify an individual of a visa revocation but does so when the Department determines it is practicable,” the spokesperson continued, adding that “the number of revocations is dynamic.”

DHS and the White House did not respond to **Zeteo's** requests for comment.

While much of the discourse surrounding college campuses has revolved around Ivy League colleges, virtually all the cases **Zeteo** reviewed occurred at state schools across the country.

As with several of the recent high-profile cases involving individuals whisked off the street, it’s unclear what *actual* grounds have justified the revocation. One university official told **Zeteo** that a student from the Middle East whose status was revoked said they had not attended protests or had social media posts that might have triggered