

Foreign-student enrolment bucks declining US trend

The total number of international undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at US universities held even this year. This marks the end of two consecutive years of decline, according to the most comprehensive survey of the 2005–06 school year.

Roughly 565,000 foreign students studied in the United States in that academic year, said the Institute for International Education, an organization based in New York that tracks enrolments in the United States of students from abroad. That number was down by a fraction of a per cent from the previous year.

Enrolments from South Korea were up by 10%, whereas those from China were flat and the number of students from India dropped by nearly 5%.

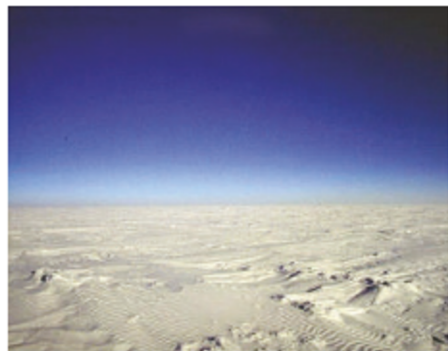
But first-time enrolments were up 8.3%. “The slide in enrolment has basically bottomed out,” says Peggy Blumenthal, an executive vice-president at the institute. “We’re turning the corner.”

China set to drill for Antarctica's oldest ice

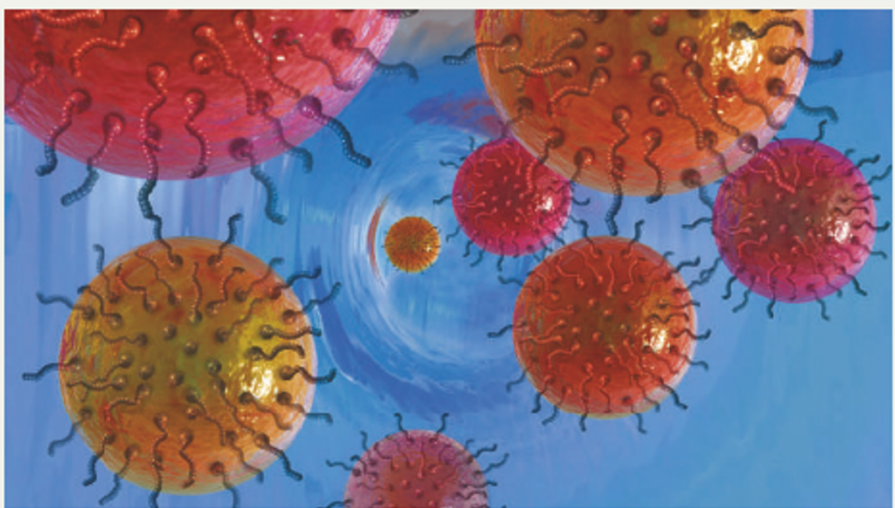
Things are looking good for China's search for the oldest ice in the Antarctic, climate researchers heard on 12 November at the Earth System Science Partnership meeting in Beijing. The group aims to drill deep into an ice cap called Dome Argus, 4,000 metres above sea level.

A partial analysis of the 110-metre-long core taken from the dome in a 2005 expedition (see *Nature* 433, 564; 2005) helps to confirm that snow has accumulated slowly in the area over the past 10,000 years at an average rate of 1.5 cm per year, says expedition member Xiao Cunde of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Lanzhou.

That shows that the ice at the cap's bottom should be more than 1 million years old, or possibly even 1.5 million years old, said Cunde.



Frozen time: climatologists hope to extract 1-million-year-old ice from Antarctica's plateau.



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'Nanorust' to provide safe drinking water for millions

A new technique to remove arsenic from drinking water could offer hope to the millions of people in India, Bangladesh and other developing nations who have no choice but to rely on wells that hold contaminated water. The method, developed by researchers in Texas, uses tiny rust particles, pictured above, that are smaller than viruses.

These 'nanorust' particles are stirred through the water and then dragged out using a simple hand-held magnet, report Vicki Colvin and her colleagues at Rice University in Houston (*V. Colvin et al. Science* 314, 964–967; 2006). The iron present in the rust (magnetite; Fe_3O_4) binds to the arsenic, reducing it to the safe levels stipulated by international drinking-water standards of the US Environmental Protection Agency. The team is now working on a cheap and simple manufacturing method using rust mixed with olive or coconut oil as a dispersal agent.

Indian space agency wants person on Moon by 2020

India's space agency, the ISRO, has announced plans to put a person in space by 2014 and to land an Indian on the Moon by 2020, four years ahead of China.

The decision reverses the ISRO's policy of using space technology for national development instead of for manned flights, which come at a huge extra expense. The agency will seek US\$2.2 billion in state funding — treble its current annual budget — for its manned flight programme, and many times more for the Moon landing.

The plans, unveiled to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last month, were endorsed by a cross-section of the scientific community at a consultative meeting on 7 November in Bangalore. Formal government approval will be sought before the end of the year, says ISRO chairman Gopalan Madhavan Nair.

England's universities get more cash for chemistry

England's ailing chemistry departments, several of which have been closed in recent years, have been thrown a financial lifeline.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which distributes grants to universities for teaching and other costs, said on 8 November that it will inject £75 million (US\$143 million) over

the next three years into science subjects such as chemistry and physics, which are expensive to run. The University of Exeter and a handful of other institutions have closed chemistry departments recently, but the money is expected to prevent any more closures in the short term.

Science-policy experts are now calling on the HEFCE to recognize that teaching subjects such as chemistry is unusually expensive, and to change the criteria it uses to distribute money accordingly.

Mars orbiter performs anniversary stunt

A pre-celebration headache has struck NASA, which lost contact with the Mars Global Surveyor just days before the tenth anniversary of its 7 November launch.

The craft was having trouble moving its solar panels early in November, and a two-day silence followed. On 5 November, a signal was received showing that the orbiter had gone into a pre-programmed safe mode while awaiting instructions from Earth. As *Nature* went to press, scientists had still heard nothing since. They think the orbiter has adjusted its solar panels into a position that makes communication difficult.

If it does not receive any signals from Earth for seven days, the orbiter is programmed to transmit from its high-gain antenna. Should this signal not arrive, the spacecraft might have to stay missing in action.