Best Practices in International Student Recruitment and Retention in Anglophone Countries

In this report, Hanover Research explores best practices in the recruitment and retention of international students. Our focus is on Anglophone countries, and while the major focus is often the United States, we also provide data relevant to universities in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In addition to recruitment and retention strategies, the report addresses the economic impacts of international enrollment, the enrollment trends seen in various English-speaking countries, and the needs, perceptions, and interests of international students.
Introduction

In this report, Hanover Research explores best practices in the recruitment and retention of international students. Our focus is on Anglophone countries, and while the major focus is often the United States, we also provide data relevant to universities in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The report is organized as follows:

- **Section One: The Benefits and Economic Impact of International Student Enrollment**: The opening section briefly examines the benefits associated with increased international student enrollments, particularly the economic benefits afforded to host nations.

- **Section Two: International Enrollment Growth in Anglophone Countries**: The second section examines the enrollment trends seen in several Anglophone countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

- **Section Three: Focusing International Student Recruitment Efforts**: The third section provides insight into international student origins and characteristics, which help determine the best geographic and academic areas on which to focus international recruitment efforts.

- **Section Four: Student Perceptions and Information Needs**: The fourth section explores the perceptions and information needs of prospective international students, including information on motivators to study abroad in Anglophone countries and highly valued institutional characteristics.

- **Section Five: International Student Recruitment Strategies**: The fifth section focuses on common strategies used by Anglophone countries to recruit international students. In addition to general recruiting principles, this section focuses on the use of unofficial channels, institutional partnerships and agreements, recruiting agents, financial incentives, and print and online publications.

- **Section Six: International Student Retention Strategies**: The final section focuses on specific strategies used to increase retention of international students, such as the use of international student offices, mentorship programs, and bridge programs, among other practices.

The report concludes with a brief summary of the main themes uncovered in our research.
Section One: The Benefits and Economic Impact of International Student Enrollment

The number of international students attending U.S. higher education institutions recently reached record highs. In the 2008-09 academic year, the number of international students increased by eight percent, while new enrollments were up by 16 percent, the largest percentage increase in international enrollments since 1980.\(^1\) While the 2009-10 academic year saw even higher enrollment figures, growth slowed substantially, with an increase of just 2.9 percent for all international students and 1.3 percent for first-time enrollees.\(^2\)

As their numbers increase, international students are steadily becoming a significant and highly sought-after component of student bodies. International students not only diversify campus communities and further institutional goals, they also contribute significantly to the economy of the host country. In the U.S., foreign students and their families contributed an estimated $17.6 billion in net income to their schools and host communities during the 2008-09 academic year.\(^3\) The economic impact of international students continues to rise, with an estimated $18.78 billion contributed to the U.S. economy in the 2009-10 academic year.\(^4\)

In Canada, the Minister of International Trade estimates that international students infused $6.5 billion into the Canadian economy in 2008.\(^5\) Meanwhile, in Australia, the economic contributions of international students and their families resulted in a value-add of $12.6 billion in 2007-08.\(^6\) And in New Zealand, recent estimates suggest

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that international education contributes $2 billion a year to the economy.\textsuperscript{7} Only older estimates are available for the UK, which suggest that the personal (off-campus) expenditures of international students generated approximately £1.5 billion in 2003-04. That year, total international student expenditures resulted in £2.4 billion in output across the economy and more than 21,900 jobs.\textsuperscript{8}

The estimated 671,616 international students studying at U.S. institutions during the 2008-09 academic year led the U.S. Department of Commerce to place higher education “among the United States’ top service sector exports.”\textsuperscript{9} American higher education institutions and other domestic organizations covered, on average, 30 percent of the total cost of education for their international students at all levels for AY 2008-09. Other sources, including “personal and family” assets and “assistance from their home country governments or universities,” helped to provide roughly 70 percent of the cost of international students’ educations.\textsuperscript{10}

Moreover, many foreign students pay full tuition and live in campus residence halls, placing them among the most profitable enrollees at colleges and universities. A 2006 presentation by Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) notes that even with the added cost of an Office of International Affairs to support its foreign students, “the average international student annually yields $7,000 more in tuition than an in-state student.”\textsuperscript{11} Similarly, foreign students comprised only 8 percent of the student body at Hawaii’s Kapiolani Community College but contributed 36 percent of its tuition revenues for AY 2006-07.\textsuperscript{12}

Because of their increasing desirability, which also stems from diversity initiatives and other non-financial objectives such as the internationalization of U.S. campuses, competition for international students is intensifying among U.S. institutions as well as the greater Anglophone education industry. As Indiana University President Michael A. McRobbie stated, “In an increasingly competitive global economy, the international dimension of education is becoming more and more important. Indeed, it is a matter of practical necessity – we have to provide it as part of a good education, and students increasingly demand it.”\textsuperscript{13}

The U.S. government is supportive of efforts to recruit international students to U.S institutions. The Department of State utilizes over 400 EducationUSA centers around

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\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.


the world to connect international students with U.S. higher education institutions.\textsuperscript{14} The centers aim to promote the high quality, variety, flexibility and creativity of the U.S. educational system. In response to the Institute of International Education’s AY 2008-09 survey results, Judith A. McHale, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, stated: “I am delighted to see the large increase in the number of international students who are choosing to study in the United States...The all-time high number of international students who studied here in the 2008/09 academic year testifies to the quality and diversity for which American higher education is known around the world.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} “Record Numbers.” Op. cit.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
Section Two: International Enrollment Growth in Anglophone Countries

Given the benefits to individual higher education institutions and the economic impacts on nations at large, international student enrollments have been closely watched in recent years. This section examines the trends seen in several Anglophone countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

United States

For the decades leading up to the September 11 attacks, United States colleges and universities enjoyed unparalleled dominance in international education. The years following the September 11 attacks saw the second and largest downturn in foreign applications and enrollments since the Institute of International Education (IIE) began tracking the number of foreign students in 1949. After five years of steady growth, the 2002-03 academic year witnessed a minimal rate of increase in foreign enrollments, before declining 2.4 percent in AY 2003-04 and again by 1 percent in AY 2004-05. Foreign enrollment declines leveled in 2005-06 and enrollments grew 3 percent in AY 2006-07. Enrollments then grew 7 percent in AY 2007-08, and nearly 8 percent in AY 2008-09—faster than in AY 2000-01 and 2001-02—suggesting that foreign enrollment trends have completely recovered from their lull in the few years after September 11.

Recent Enrollment Growth by Carnegie Classification

During October 2009, the Institute of International Education (IIE) surveyed 701 institutions ranging from major research universities to community colleges to ascertain current trends in international enrollment patterns. The study included 434 (62 percent) public institutions and 265 (38 percent) private institutions. Among these schools were 195 doctoral/research universities, 142 master’s universities, 145 baccalaureate institutions, and 186 associate’s colleges. The sample also included 20 specialized professional schools and 13 institutions in an “other” category.

Figure 1 summarizes the IIE’s findings regarding the growth rates of international enrollments at American higher education institutions.

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21 Ibid., 2-3.
From AY 2007-08 to AY 2008-09, nearly 71 percent of all institutions reported that their international student enrollments either remained stable or increased. This percentage was even higher (80 percent) for larger institutions with significant populations of international students. However, these figures were lower than those from AY 2005-06 to AY 2006-07 (with 81 percent of all institutions and 91 percent of larger institutions reporting stable or increased enrollment).23

Figure 2 on the following page provides the percentages of baccalaureate and master’s institutions reporting improvement or decline in their foreign student populations.

Source: Institute of International Education22

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22 Ibid., 5.
Among Baccalaureate level institutions, 68.8 percent of institutions reported stable or increasing international enrollments from AY 2007-08 to AY 2008-09, while 65.1 percent of Master’s universities reported growth or stability. This also represents a slight decrease overall from the AY 2005-06 to AY 2006-07 period, in which 75.2 percent of Baccalaureate and 77.9 percent of Master’s institutions reported international enrollment growth or stability.

United Kingdom

According to the United Kingdom’s Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the total number of international students enrolled in UK institutions in 2008-09 totaled 368,970. This figure represented an 8 percent increase from the previous year, in which 325,985 foreign students were enrolled in UK institutions. Full-time, postgraduate programs saw the strongest growth in international student enrollment, with a 17 percent increase. Growth in undergraduate study was less impressive at 8

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percent, but still significantly higher than the growth seen among research postgraduate registrations (just 1 percent).25

**Canada**

Data published by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) on the number of students who have obtained study permits to pursue education or training in Canada for six months or more suggest a total enrollment of 95,404 foreign university students in 2008. This figure includes all students in undergraduate and postgraduate (master’s and doctoral) programs in Canadian universities, but excludes students enrolled in vocational trade programs at non-university institutions, private institutions, and language institutes. The 2008 enrollment figure represents a 0.8 percent increase from the 2007 level and a 141 percent increase from the 1998 level. The number of foreign students with study permits has increased every year from 1998 to 2008, with double-digit increases between 1998 and 2003.26

**Australia**

In Australia, enrollment growth at the postsecondary level has tapered off over the period 2006 to 2008. Enrollment of international students in higher education programs grew by only 7.7 percent from 2006 (169,710 students) to 2008 (182,770 students).27 A somewhat different picture emerges when student visas are used as a measure of international student activity. In total, 269,828 student visas were issued in 2009-10, a 15.8 percent decrease from 2008-09, when 320,368 visas were granted. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship of the Australian Government explains: “Measures relating to Student visa integrity, together with the introduction of legislative changes to Student visa requirements and a number of global factors such as the global financial crisis and the strengthening of the Australian dollar have contributed to a decline in Student visa activity for offshore grants.”28

**New Zealand**

In New Zealand, the total number of tuition-paying international students at all levels increased by 7 percent in the first four months of 2010 compared to the same time period in 2009. Among public tertiary enrollments, a 15 percent increase occurred in polytechnic schools and a 4 percent increase occurred in universities. At 13 percent, foreign students continue to comprise a much smaller proportion of total university students in New Zealand than in Australia, which enrolls approximately 20 percent international students.29

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Section Three: Focusing International Student Recruitment Efforts

Where to Focus Efforts Geographically

United States

Efforts to recruit international students may greatly benefit from a geographic focus based on current trends. The United States draws students from many countries, but the primary sources in recent years have been Asian and South Asian nations. **Asia currently generates 62 percent of America’s international students, and 74 percent of those students come from India, China, Japan, and South Korea.** In addition to Asian student populations, the U.S. higher education market benefits from substantial interest among Canadian and Mexican students. Africa and South America are typically viewed as emerging markets, and Saudi Arabia has recently begun sending greater numbers of students following a several-year lull in the wake of the September 11 attacks. The top twenty-five countries, based on the number of students sent to the United States each year, are listed below in Figure 3.

![Figure 3: Leading Countries of Origin for International Students](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Institute of International Education.  

One example of targeted recruitment comes from Post University in Connecticut, a private “student-focused, career-driven” institution, which has both online and campus-based studies in technical subjects. Post University focuses on the recruitment of Chinese students and has an on-campus bilingual Chinese counselor. The University offers Chinese translations of its admissions webpages and the

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specific requirements for English translations of all official documents. However, this extreme type of single-country targeting is unusual in international student recruitment and retention.

Though current international student recruitment efforts are focused primarily on the regions detailed above, another area of interest which has a far less saturated recruitment market is **Latin America and the Caribbean**. The interest in U.S. higher education in these markets is high, but there is also significant concern about the cost of U.S. institutions and potentially negative American attitudes towards these students. The EducationUSA centers are active in this region and organize education tour groups or individual tours to establish local contacts, some at a minimal fee of $100 to $300. The Fulbright Commissions are aggressively expanding their reach throughout the region, making scholarships more widely available to students. There is also a focus through the State Department on reaching “non-traditional audiences” through programs such as the Opportunity Initiative, which “provides promising students…with limited resources [the opportunity] to apply to U.S. colleges and universities.”

U.S. institutions and state governments have responded to these efforts. For example, the University of Florida, in compliance with Florida statute 1009.21, announced that full-time students from Latin America or the Caribbean “who receive scholarships from the federal or state government qualify for in-state tuition.” In addition, a recent evaluation from Michigan State University’s Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) discussed the potential for specific endowments from Latin American alumni to support Latin American students studying at the center. The region provides a differentiated opportunity for international student recruitment efforts.

**United Kingdom**

In the United Kingdom, China and India represented the largest source countries for international student enrollment in 2008-09, respectively comprising 12.1 and 8.7 percent of the 415,585 foreign students enrolled in public universities. China and India were followed by the United States (5.2 percent), Germany (4.3 percent), and France (4.2 percent).

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34 Ibid.  
Canada

In Canada, China and South Korea were the largest providers of foreign students in 2009-10, respectively comprising 25.4 and 13.2 percent of the nation’s 198,136 international students. These two leaders were followed by the United States (5.7 percent), India (4.8 percent), and France (4.7 percent).38

Australia

In Australia, the following Asian countries made up the top five source countries in 2008: China (25.3 percent), India (11.7 percent), Malaysia (8.2 percent), Hong Kong (5.6 percent), and Indonesia (4.4 percent). The United States followed these countries, sending 4.2 percent of international students. Estimates provided by the Atlas of Student Mobility place total international enrollment in Australia at 223,508 in 2008.39

New Zealand

In New Zealand, 2007 estimates place total international student enrollment at 33,047 students. A substantial portion of these students (41.0 percent) come from China. Other major senders include Australia (8.3 percent), India (7.4 percent), the United States (7.4 percent), and Malaysia (5.2 percent).40

Where to Focus Efforts Academically

Disciplines of Interest

Foreign students in the United States gravitate heavily toward certain fields, most notably business and engineering. Institutions seeking students from abroad would do well to make such high demand fields available to their potential foreign students. With only 3.1 percent of international students identified as undeclared majors, foreign students tend to come to the United States with more defined educational goals than domestic students. They also have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates at the undergraduate level, at least in IUPUI’s experience.41 Figure 4 on the following page analyzes international students according to major field for AY 2008-09. These figures represent the overall breakdown of the more than 670,000 foreign students enrolled in the United States.

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Favored Degree Types

Roughly 47 percent of foreign students in the United States seek graduate or professional degrees. Those studying for bachelor’s degrees are the next largest contingent (around 32 percent), while students pursuing associate’s degrees comprise just over 12 percent of the foreign student population. Students engaged in intensive English language training and non-degree programs account for the remaining 9 percent.

Figure 5 on the following page provides a detailed breakdown of foreign students by degree types. The graduate and undergraduate categories are divided into subcategories based upon year of study (undergraduate) and degree pursued (graduate). Among baccalaureate students, the largest segment for AY 2008-09 was the freshman class—which is not surprising, given that the decade’s highest enrollment growth rate occurred that same year. This cohort is followed by the AY 2008-09 senior class, which matriculated in 2005-06 when the period of enrollment decline was coming to an end.

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Figure 4: Breakdown of International Students by Degree Field, AY 2008-09

Source: Institute of International Education

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It is not apparent from looking at the graph, but it should be noted that *associate's-level programs are a significant source for funneling foreign students into four-year programs*. A substantial portion of the 12.2 percent of foreign students enrolled in U.S. community colleges are likely to transfer to four-year institutions after two years of study. There is an emerging nationwide trend in which “international students spend their first two years at a community college rather than going straight to a four-year university” in order to minimize their expenses and improve their English language skills.\(^44\)


Section Four: Student Perceptions and Information Needs

In order to take full advantage of renewed growth in international student enrollment, colleges and universities must understand what international students seek in an education abroad, offer programs that fit these concerns and priorities, and apply effective recruitment strategies worldwide. This section explores the perceptions and information needs of prospective international students, as indicated by recent studies.

Understanding the Priorities of Foreign Students

Why Foreign Students Decline Admission Offers

In addition to studying the rates of new foreign student enrollments at different types of higher education institutions, the October 2009 IIE survey asked its 701 respondents to identify the most common reasons that their prospective international students gave for declining admission offers. Figure 6 indicates the most common impediments to admission offer acceptances. Values in the “Other” category include: “concerns about the swine flu, lack of financial aid or scholarships for international students, less on-campus employment opportunities and a poor U.S. job market.”

Figure 6: Institutions Citing Each Factor as the Primary Impediment to Foreign Student Matriculation

Source: Institute of International Education

46 Ibid., 18.
A major 2007 study conducted by the British higher education consulting firm Hobsons and presented at the 2007 NAFSA conference surveyed thousands of prospective students from five countries to ascertain their chief reasons for studying abroad, their educational priorities, and their primary concerns about international study. The survey sample included: 2,421 students from China, 4,780 from India, 1,778 from Germany, 2,201 from Nigeria, and 249 from Japan. Since India, China, and Japan, respectively, are the first, second, and fifth largest contributors of foreign students to American universities, responses from these student populations are of paramount importance to U.S. institutions.

**Student Perceptions of Major Anglophone Education Systems**

Hobsons asked participants to discuss their perceptions of higher education in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia and explain why they would choose to study in each country. **Students from all five surveyed nations cite the United Kingdom’s “excellent academic reputation” as the foremost reason to enroll there.** The majority of Chinese, Nigerian, and Japanese students also appraise the United States on the basis of its academic reputation, while Indian and German students believe that studying in the United States would improve career prospects in their native countries. Nigerian and Indian students cite Australia’s academic reputation as its primary advantage, but students from China, Japan, and Germany tend to judge Australian institutions mainly by the country’s perceived quality of life.

Overall, the study indicates that students from each surveyed country who choose the United States do so primarily for the academic reputation of American institutions and their belief that an American education will be a boon to career advancement. The United Kingdom shares this academic and job-centered response pattern with the United States, while Australia is universally seen as a more attractive option due to quality of life issues and comparatively relaxed visa and immigration laws.48

**Analysis of the Most Highly Valued Institutional Characteristics**

Hobsons assessed the extent to which a university’s academic reputation, facilities, financial aid package, relationship between students and faculty, and location affect prospective students’ overall perceptions of the institution. The study’s findings, reproduced in Figure 7, indicate that international students describe certain aspects of their education as universally important, while other characteristics matter to some groups more than others. For example, academic reputation was found to be of considerable importance to all students, regardless of their home countries.

While respondents across the board rated academic reputation and institutional facilities highly, there are discrepancies in other categories. German, Japanese, and

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48 Ibid., 6.
Nigerian students rank the availability of funding and scholarships as the least important institutional characteristic. Financial aid ties for second place among Chinese and Indian students, however. This correlates with the Hobsons findings on how students intend to fund their educations. These results indicate that Chinese and Indian students depend heavily upon government and institutional aid to fund their educations. In contrast, German, Japanese, and Nigerian students are more likely to pay for school by drawing upon family resources. All responses in Figure 7 derive from a 2-point scale.

**Figure 7: Most Valued Aspects of the Educational Experience by Nation**

![Figure 7: Most Valued Aspects of the Educational Experience by Nation](image)

Source: Hobsons, 2007

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49 Ibid., 18.
50 Ibid., 11.
Understanding the Information Needs of Foreign Students

In addition to studying student valuations of various institutional characteristics, the Hobsons results also shed light on the types of information foreign students are most likely to seek when choosing among prospective schools. The results are reproduced below in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Most Common Information Sought From Institutions**

![Diagram showing the percentage of students seeking different types of information from institutions for various countries.](image)

Source: Hobsons, 2007

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51 Ibid., 13.
Information about admissions requirements and the application process is highly sought among prospective students from all respondent countries, although for Indian and Nigerian students, financial information is most frequently requested. Indian and Chinese students seek scholarship information at a significantly higher rate than students of other nationalities. Once again, students from both countries tend to rely more on institutional and government sources of financial assistance to fund their educations.
Section Five: International Student Recruitment Strategies

While the previous pages have provided a basic introduction to international student enrollment trends, characteristics, perceptions, and interests, the final two sections will be devoted to recruitment and retention strategies. These final sections draw on a review of the literature, as well as the specific practices in place at a sample of higher education institutions. This section focuses on effective recruitment strategies, while the following section will turn to retention efforts.

Favored Recruiting Strategies

Of the IIE’s 701 respondents, 395 (57 percent) indicated that they had taken new steps during the 2008-09 academic year to mitigate international enrollment decreases, while the remaining 299 (43 percent) had not. The IIE surveyed institutions that endeavored to stave off declines in international enrollments and determined the most common strategies, shown below in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Percent of Institutions Engaging in Common Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New staff or additional staff time</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New international programs/ collaborations</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New funding for int'l recruitment trips</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New funding for marketing/ promotion</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Institute of International Education

The IIE is not the only entity to study international recruiting practices. A 2006 study by the University of Massachusetts’ Richard Yam et al. asked participating institutions to rank international recruiting strategies according to their perceived

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53 Ibid., 15.
effectiveness. Yam and his colleagues presented the study’s findings in Montreal in 2006 and again at the NAFSA Conference on May 31, 2007 in Minneapolis. We reproduce their results below in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Top 8 Strategies for International Student Recruitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Merit Scholarships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>International Brochures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Articulation Agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Express Mail of Acceptance Letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Independent Travel (Fall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Small Group/Tour Travel (Fall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Information Sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Yam et al.\(^{54}\)

While it is difficult to draw exact parallels between Yam’s top eight strategies and the five presented in the IIE report (Figure 9), there are some important similarities between them. “Merit Scholarships” and “Articulation Agreements” would likely fall under the IIE category of “New International Programs/Collaborations.” This type of initiative can include anything from articulation agreements with foreign universities to new academic programs to attract foreign students. “International Brochures” and “Express Mail of Acceptance Letters” match the IIE’s “New Funding for Marketing/Promotion” category. These advertising and marketing activities are more highly ranked in Yam’s study than in the IIE findings. Yam’s “Independent Travel” and “Small Group/Tour Travel” categories relate to the IIE’s “New Funding for International Recruiting Trips” category. These travel options receive roughly equivalent ratings in both studies.

In his Minneapolis presentation, Yam noted that “the recruiting tool” or “activity by itself does not tell us why and how it is effective.”\(^{55}\) He went on to discuss the difficulties inherent in comparing the efficacy of different methods and noted that “it is difficult to compare or qualify” strategies.\(^{56}\) Yam also acknowledged that many of his survey’s terms for initiative types are very broad and could overlap in certain cases. As an example, he observed that “travel can include a lot of different things such as interviews, information sessions, school/embassy/agents visits and many other activities.”\(^{57}\) Similarly, some methods are difficult, if not impossible to assess in terms of efficacy since “it is impossible to track the effectiveness of [individual] international brochures.”\(^{58}\) Yam’s disclaimer serves as a reminder that in many cases,


\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.
comparing the different international recruiting methods to each other can be tricky and, potentially, misleading. Furthermore, what works the best in one circumstance and for one institution may not be effective in another case.

**General Recruiting Principles**

Yam and his co-presenters offered general comments on international recruiting during their presentation that warrant inclusion here. Co-presenter Ted McKown, Director of International Admission at Kent State University, commented that international recruiting methods are changing as universities face decreased funding and begin to utilize technology more effectively.

Admissions strategies historically have used a “funnel” approach, through which institutions try to attract the highest number of applicants—even if the yield from that applicant pool is very small. McKown suggested that “the funnel used to imply that you are putting as much into the top of the funnel as possible,” but he conceded that in many cases, “[We] can’t afford to do that anymore.”

In the face of limited recruiting resources, McKown proposed a new model more akin to a cylinder, “in which you are much more targeted and focused [on] what you put in the top” to ensure greater enrollment yields at the end of the process. As a general recruiting principle, he claimed that it is “getting more difficult to distinguish between ‘recruitment activities’ (which generate initial inquiries) and ‘yield activities’ (which convert those inquiries to enrollees).”

The “cylinder” requires significant self-assessment on the part of the recruiting institution, which has to determine what type of international student it is likely to attract based upon its academic reputation, program offerings, and overall culture and environment.

Roehampton University, on the outskirts of London, is a small, predominantly undergraduate university with enrollments of just over 8,200 students. The University’s recent strategic plan includes discussion of an admissions “cylinder.”

With regard to international recruiting, Roehampton advocates a focused recruiting strategy, which we describe below:

> The selection of markets should be based on research that identifies a critical mass of qualified students seeking higher education outside their home country and where there is sufficient interest in subject areas that are offered at Roehampton. Markets in which Roehampton has been active historically should be carefully considered as well as new markets that offer significant potential.

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59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
To successfully execute a focused recruiting effort, higher education institutions must know their own strengths and also understand the factors that motivate their prospective students. While the international recruitment strategy rankings in Figures 9 and 10 are a useful guide, each method must be appraised in light of an individual institution’s goals and resources.

Analysis of Specific Strategies

Using Unofficial Channels

Word of mouth remains the most effective means of attracting applicants and converting acceptances into enrollments. The Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign noted in a 2006 MSNBC article that the University’s international students are also its “best marketers,” since they “go back and talk about our programs and promote it to their countrymen.”

For schools without a substantial international student and alumni base to draw upon, there are ways to simulate this “unofficial” approach for a comparatively low cost by engaging students, staff, and alumni (whether they are international citizens or not) who are living or traveling abroad. IIE President and CEO Allen Goodman recommends an active style of recruiting in which “deans and provosts collaborate with foreign universities and harness the power of alumni goodwill.”

Virginia Tech’s “Hokies Abroad” initiative is one such volunteer-centered recruiting program, “where alumni living outside the United States offer their assistance and knowledge of the university to guidance counselors, students, and parents” to assist the University’s recruiting efforts in foreign countries. Shortly after the program’s founding in 1996, it had gained the participation of “more than 130 alumni living in 57 countries.” Shortly thereafter, alumni volunteers organized two receptions for prospective students in China and Singapore, thereby giving the University “a physical presence in more countries than would normally be possible” using Tech personnel alone. Hokies Abroad II, which began in 1997, expanded on the first program’s success, and encourages “Tech faculty members [who are] traveling internationally” for conferences or other engagements to meet groups of alumni for “informational and recruiting purposes.” In its first year, Hokies Abroad II enjoyed support from more than 80 faculty members. Professors, staffers, alumni, or students of a university who travel or live abroad have the opportunity to market their institutions through preexisting personal or professional ties. These bonds are already grounded in a certain level of trust that is difficult to earn through a conventional recruiting relationship.

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64 Hussain, S. “Schools Struggle to Combat Foreign Student Drop.” MSNBC.com, August, 8, 2006, p. 3.  
http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14034413
65 Ibid., 2.  
http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/vtpubs/spectrum/sp971120/1b.html
67 Ibid.  
68 Ibid.
Data from the Hobsons study support the argument that prospective students’ personal networks are their main sources of advice when selecting higher education institutions. This information, shown in Figure 11 below, indicates that friends and teachers are almost universally the most persuasive influences in students’ application and enrollment decisions.

**Figure 11: Prospective Students’ Main Sources of Advice**

The British Council’s role in recruiting international students offers insight about how more traditional and focused “official” marketing efforts compare with the advice of friends, family, teachers, and relatives. International prospective students clearly favor personal contact over any kind of “official” initiatives conducted at the institutional or national levels. The “unofficial,” grassroots recruiting strategy can be particularly useful to smaller colleges and universities, since they often lack the funding for larger and more formal marketing pushes.

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Articulation Agreements and Academic Partnerships

Partnerships and articulation agreements come in many varieties, and some of these configurations will be more suitable than others depending upon institutional size and name recognition. These efforts require official connections between two or more institutions over a sustained period of time. Their initial investment can be very high, but the rewards of a long-term overseas relationship resemble those reaped by the “unofficial” methods discussed above.

International Foundation Programs

Roehampton University’s strategic plan contains an overview of several types of articulation agreements and “International Foundation Programmes” (IFP's). In an IFP agreement, the university “admits into its degree courses students who have successfully completed an agreed IFP run by a private college overseas.”70 The IFP differs from a traditional articulation agreement; IFP students begin as freshmen upon completion of the program rather than entering with credit. IFPs are “the most basic type of offshore operation,” but they still require a strong commitment from involved institutions:

The nature of the investment required in this kind of arrangement will vary according to the experience of the partner college, but may include time spent in course development of the IFP; secondment of academic staff for teaching; involvement in exam procedures; and monitoring of quality assurance procedures.71

Roehampton’s planners warn that “unless an individual university enjoys a very high reputation and has a strong subject base in one of the popular subject areas, such as business,” an IFP might not be financially viable. They note that “most successful [IFP] schemes” historically have “been in mass markets, such as China, where large numbers of students are seeking placement in popular programs,” and caution that “it would be difficult for Roehampton to justify [an] investment in an IFP providing pathways to less popular programmes in the arts and humanities.”72

The University of Warwick’s business school runs one of Britain’s most successful IFPs, and markets it primarily to Kenyan students. Roughly 25 percent of students who graduate from the foundation program gain admission to the University of Warwick’s business program, but the foundation program is so well-regarded that its “students easily obtain placement in other UK universities” upon completion. Similarly, an eleven university alliance called the Northern Consortium guarantees the graduates of its foundation programs a place in one of the member institutions.73

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71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
Articulation Agreements

Articulation agreements have many of the same advantages and disadvantages as IFPs but allow students to enter institutions with advanced standing. Roehampton notes that “articulation agreements have proved successful in Malaysia, Singapore, China, India, and Thailand in providing a consistent flow of overseas students” to British colleges and universities. As with IFP’s, however, “there are always significant quality issues that require close attention and investment.” This is particularly true of “the standard of English required by the students for acceptance into the [foreign institution’s transfer] programme initially … and for admission to Roehampton on completion of the period of study overseas.”

Community College Recruiting Agreements

Another international student recruitment strategy available to American colleges and universities is already common practice: articulation agreements with two-year institutions. Many of the foreign students enrolling in American community colleges do so to strengthen their English skills and fill the gaps in their secondary educations before entering baccalaureate programs. Others enroll in two-year colleges to reduce the overall costs of baccalaureate-level education. The IIE 2009 Open Doors report states that, of the 671,616 international students in American institutions during AY 2008-09, 95,785 of them (14 percent) attended community colleges.

Pursuing international students who have already completed significant coursework in the United States has several major advantages. Chief among these is the reliable quality of students, who would have already completed two years of accredited coursework before transferring. Secondly, international student retention might be an easier feat when they have had experience living and studying in the United States.

Partnerships with Private For-Profit Education Firms

Colleges and universities have recently begun exploring partnerships with private for-profit higher education companies. Kaplan Inc., which “claims to provide training to nearly a million students across 3,000 classroom locations worldwide,” recently entered the United Kingdom marketplace. Among Kaplan’s proposed programs is an ESL course intended for foreign students, which Kaplan administers on traditional college campuses:

Kaplan Inc. has agreements with two British universities … to provide integrated academic and English language pathway programmes at both

74 Ibid., 12.
75 Ibid.
undergraduate and postgraduate levels, taught on their University campuses in “Kaplan International Colleges.”

Partnerships with private, for-profit firms “enable … universities to access an established flow of overseas students” and can also be “an inexpensive means of recruiting international students.”

*International Recruiting Agents*

No mainstream international recruiting method has sparked more controversy in recent years than the use of recruiting agents to boost foreign enrollments. Cheryl Darrup-Boychuck of the *US Journal of Academics* co-presented the “Return on Investment in International Student Recruitment” study with Richard Yam at the 2007 NAFSA conference. Darrup-Boychuck noted that among most institutions, “there was very little middle-ground when the topic of Agents was discussed… colleagues either loved them or did not love them.” Yam and his co-presenters cautioned that while agents can be very effective, they should not be viewed as a temporary fix for declining international enrollments. Institutions that use agents successfully typically cultivate long-term relationships with carefully chosen agents, even if it means losing money on the partnership initially.

The Hobsons study profiled the types of assistance students most commonly receive from international recruiting agents. The results are reproduced in Figure 12 on the following page.

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78 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
Figure 12: Services Most Often Provided By Education Agents

Source: Hobsons, 2007\textsuperscript{81}

The Hobsons data show that agents are universally used as sources of financial information, particularly with regard to tuition and fees and cost of living. Among the less developed countries, students rely more heavily upon agents for help with the immigration and visa processes and explanations of scholarship options. German and Japanese students are more likely than their counterparts in developing nations to seek personalized advice from an agent. Students from all countries surveyed appear to rely upon agents for application help and detailed course information at roughly the same rates.

Roehampton University’s strategic plan comments that agents tend to be most effective in emerging markets and areas in which there is little general knowledge of Western higher education systems. Roehampton’s recruiting planners note that “agents are essential in large markets (e.g., China, India) and also flourish in more immature markets (e.g., Pakistan, Nigeria) where they provide a necessary flow of information for students.” The University’s strategic plan states that in “more mature and sophisticated (e.g., Malaysia, Singapore)” markets, “the role of the agent diminishes.” In Western and English speaking countries, agents are almost entirely unnecessary. In some nations, between 60 and 80 percent of all students who study abroad do so through an agent.

A January 2008 article in The Chronicle of Higher Education discusses the need for recruiters among students in developing nations and smaller colleges and universities that lack the budget for extensive international recruiting. The feature contends that despite the proliferation of the Internet, with e-mail and applications that can be submitted online, students in the developing world still heavily depend on commissioned agents to help them navigate what is to many a mysterious and daunting application process.

The use of recruiters by prospective international students appears to be growing. In the past year, “more than 60 percent of the international students who headed to Australia—primarily from China, India, and Malaysia—used recruiters based in their home countries” during the application process. This number is “up from 48 percent in the previous two years.”

The Chronicle article focuses mainly on the emerging market in Vietnam, which has sent a historically high number of students to the United States in recent years. The Director of the IIE’s Vietnam office comments that “a lot of [prospective international students] want someone to hold their hand and to help with the paperwork” during the application process, which has led to a rising demand for

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85 Ibid.
recruiting agents.\textsuperscript{86} Students using agents often get additional help preparing for visa interviews, and also rely on them for additional information since, for many students, “information on the Internet about studying in the United States is not sufficient.”\textsuperscript{87}

Agents work on a commission basis and usually make at least 10 to 15 percent of a recruited student’s tuition – and sometimes upwards of 25 percent.\textsuperscript{88} Given the current system, higher education institutions and prospective students must be wary of dishonest agents, some of whom collect students’ deposits only to disappear, while others may simply lack the skill to render their promised services.\textsuperscript{89} Since “poor agents harm … the reputation of the university with which [they] are associated,”\textsuperscript{90} universities seeking to use recruiting agents would do well to select them with care and appraise performance on a regular basis.

In some cases, consolidating agencies become a second middleman in the application process. When consolidating agencies are employed, an agent typically sends a student’s completed application to a consolidator, which forwards the application to a participating college or university that best matches the student’s interests and qualifications.\textsuperscript{91} Consolidators can potentially submit the applications they receive to dozens of university clients. Like recruiting agents, consolidating agencies may render services on a commission basis.\textsuperscript{92}

The \textit{Chronicle} discusses the advantages international recruiters provide to smaller institutions, which often lack extensive recruiting resources or name recognition:

> Those who use in-country recruiters say that more is at issue than the bottom line. Local agents make it possible for small, little-known colleges to attract people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, which makes their campuses more attractive to American students. It is also more practical for small colleges to hire someone locally than to send a staff member on expensive overseas recruiting trips.\textsuperscript{93}

Staffers from the University of North Alabama discussed their use of recruiting agents at the 2007 NAFSA conference. The University enrolls approximately 6,200 undergraduates and 1,100 graduate students, and has engaged in an extensive campaign to bolster undergraduate enrollments over the past six years. In 2001, the University enrolled 142 international students.\textsuperscript{94} By 2004 this number had climbed to 187, after which it began growing rapidly, reaching 327 in 2005, 530 in 2006, and 803 in 2007. During the same six-year interval, the percentage of foreign students relative

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Overland. Op. cit.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator. “University of North Alabama.” http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=university+of+north+alabama&s=all&id=101879
to the University’s total enrollment jumped from 3 percent to 12 percent, and the number of countries represented ballooned from 25 to 60.\textsuperscript{95} By 2007, 80 percent of the school’s foreign students were recruited by North Alabama’s network of agents.\textsuperscript{96} In 2009, the number of foreign students at North Alabama had climbed to 981.

The University of North Alabama pays its agents according to several different schemes, which can include a one-time commission payment when the student enrolls for his or her first semester, continuous commission payments as long as the student remains enrolled, a “scaled compensation rate,” or a flat fee per student.\textsuperscript{97} The University uses a goal- and incentive-based program for its agents and consolidators, and offers several types of rewards including: increased commission rates if goals are met, a subsidized advertising budget, discounts on tuition for students referred by the agent/company, and visits to the school, among others.\textsuperscript{98}

North Alabama’s agent program has been extremely successful and provides guidance for maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks of using agents. As our other sources have suggested, the University’s example shows that “working with agents is crucial if you have a limited budget and/or name recognition.” While agents can be a “great asset” to recruiting efforts, their potential to damage the school’s reputation is a constant concern and requires “follow-up, training, and patience” on the institution’s part. North Alabama maintains an “agent manual,” which outlines all the terms and conditions of its agent relationships. As a final recommendation, the North Alabama example cautions against working with agents who lack references and have not been “introduced through the proper channels.”\textsuperscript{99}

\textbf{Travel/Attending International Student Fairs}

\textit{International student fairs “offer an excellent opportunity to meet a large number of prospective applicants over a focused period of time and take advantage of advertising done in support of the fair.”}\textsuperscript{100} The actual efficacy of international fairs, however, is somewhat debatable, especially when one considers the cost of attendance and the potential for direct competition from big-name fair attendees. Roehampton University recommends fairs only for “promoting programmes that have a mass market appeal,” (e.g., business) and not for “engaging in niche marketing of programmes with a more limited market.”\textsuperscript{101} The Roehampton planners generally favor other methods of international recruiting and suggest that “the decision to participate in a fair must … be made based on a clear understanding of the market and a comparison of [the fair’s] effectiveness against other potential marketing activities.”\textsuperscript{102}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Yam et al. suggest that smaller schools participate in international student fairs more as a way to study the marketplace and assess student concerns and priorities than as a sure-fire recruitment tool. Some of these institutions favor the small group tour approach over fairs. Tours may last for several weeks and visit major cities across a large region. As is the case with fairs, tours are also quite expensive, but they allow for more direct, individualized contact with prospective students through information sessions.

Some institutions offer interviews and information sessions for accepted international students. While fairs and group tours are purely recruiting initiatives, information sessions and interviews can help boost the overall yield of a school’s recruiting efforts. Yam claims that since “interviewees are already selected,” interviews are more of a “yielding activity and thus have a better ROI” because they engage students who are already interested in the school.

Financial Incentives

Scholarships and other financial incentives are instrumental for both recruiting and yield initiatives. This is particularly true among students from developing nations, who are more likely to require financial assistance. Studies by Hobsons and the IIE have consistently shown that students from India, China, and Nigeria (among others) focus heavily on finances when applying to higher education institutions.

The IIE reports that for the 2008-09 academic year, 64.9 percent of all foreign students relied upon personal and family funds for support, while another 22.7 percent received funding from their colleges or universities. Much smaller percentages of students received funding from their own employment (5.0 percent), their home governments or universities (3.7 percent), or U.S. or foreign private sponsors (1.1 and 0.9 percent, respectively). The U.S. government, international organizations, and all other sources each funded less than 1 percent of international students.

Hobsons asked its respondents about how they intended to pay for college and the results, as shown in Figure 13, reiterate international students’ heavy reliance upon scholarships and employment. This trend is especially pronounced among major sending countries like China and India.

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104 Ibid., 8.
Figure 13: Most Common Sources of Funding

Source: Hobsons, 2007

Given the high percentage of foreign students who are self-funded, it should not be surprising that financial arrangements play a considerable role in school selection. Not all colleges and universities have the resources to offer significant financial aid and scholarship packages to their international students, but there are still effective methods for reducing the tuition “sticker shock,” even if the money for scholarships is unavailable on a large scale. Yam contends that institutions can utilize several strategies for offering small discounts. These can include: offering tuition breaks to international students for successfully referring other students from their home countries, giving special pricing for those students who pay their bills in advance, offering competitive merit scholarships, and even a simple repackaging of price tags, since “$19,985 looks better than $20,015.”

*Direct Mail and Online Marketing*

Yam et al.’s study ranked international brochures very highly in terms of their perceived effectiveness, but during their presentation, they noted that there is no good way to track the effectiveness of print publications against print costs. It is much easier to track the effectiveness of online media, but online marketing is limited by the number of prospective students with access to a fast and reliable internet connection. Darrup-Boychuck suggests that “with online promotions, you’re targeting the top one-sixth most affluent segment of the population.” Recently, print and online publications have become much more targeted, and higher education institutions “are moving away from mass marketing” approaches.

Still, traditional mail marketing efforts can be utilized effectively. Institutions develop international mailing lists of institutions and advisory centers to receive information on a regular basis. This mailing list should come from the names and addresses of schools from which the current applicants are coming, the College Board CEEB code lists which contain the names and addresses of many international schools, the Directory of Overseas Educational Advising Centers, and the mailing lists of overseas schools and other useful contacts which can be purchased from Linden Educational Services.

As we saw with travel initiatives, print and online communications can support both recruiting and student yield activities. Roehampton University’s planners refer to certain communications initiatives as “conversion activities” and stress the fact that “international students have somewhat different needs from those of home students and conversion activities should reflect those differences.” These internationally focused conversion activities “involve direct and indirect contact with admitted

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108 Ibid., 8.
109 Ibid., 33.
110 Ibid.
applicants and take many forms including mail-outs of print publications, text messages and emails, phone calls from current students or staff, publicity campaigns, and so on.”

Yam noted in his presentation that “some students prefer to receive a hard copy [of their] acceptance letter instead of just learning it on-line.” He cautioned schools against simply relying “on web or online communication,” since “some developing countries are still not up to speed with the Internet and download capacity.”

Online recruiting efforts for international students can be simplified through targeted Google or Yahoo! ads with term contracts. Online marketing efforts can also be outsourced to for-profit companies specializing in international students. For example, ICEF provides marketing and sponsorship opportunities promising to reach “hundreds of thousands of students and young travelers” and also includes services such as global expos, workshops and networking events connecting institutions with students.

Compilation websites such as StudyOverseas provide international students with a portal showing U.S. universities currently recruiting international students as well as those in the UK, Australia and Canada. Institutions are divided by degree programs, states and regions.

A significant aspect of effective online recruiting is providing part of an institution’s website devoted exclusively to international students. EducationUSA provides suggestions for links and resources to include:

- A description of the institution including a cost breakdown and housing information
- Proportion of international students at the university and class profiles
- Quotes and profiles of current international students
- Accreditation details for the institution
- Course catalog with course descriptions and the number of credit hours necessary to be enrolled full-time
- Contact information for international student offices and administrators
- International undergraduate and graduate admissions information including reporting methods, score requirements, deadlines, mailing addresses, letter of recommendation guidelines and application fee payment methods
- Up-to-date information on student visas and how to receive an I-20. Any new SEVIS regulations are located at http://travel.state.gov
- An FAQ and checklist section to facilitate the application process
- Local information such as the campus size in hectares, average local temperatures in Celsius, distances in kilometers, local points of interest or nearby major metropolises
- A downloadable application in a variety of formats.

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113 Ibid.
International student applications should not ask for social security numbers, GPAs, zip codes, use the terms fall and spring, include 800 phone numbers which are not toll free outside the U.S. or have automated responses, use college to refer to university-level programs, or require original copies of academic certificates and define certified.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{117} “Internationalize Your Website.” EducationUSA, U.S. Department of State. http://www.educationusa.info/highered.php
Section Six: International Student Retention Strategies

The Challenges

The ability to retain international students is financially important for U.S. institutions given the profit from an international student who stays the full length of a course. There are also cultural benefits of prolonged international student integration. That being said, international student retention rates are actually often higher than those of domestic students.

A recent report by the University of North Alabama (UNA) noted that the decrease in its overall retention rate could in part be attributed to the decrease in international students. UNA released a report on their graduation, progress and retention in spring 2009 showing some interesting trends in international student retention: “Most Nonresident Alien students demonstrated higher retention rates than domestic students at UNA,” however, “part of the overall decline in freshmen to sophomore retention can be attributed to the effect of Nepalese student migration into UNA.”\textsuperscript{118} Over the three years prior to 2009, numerous Nepalese students entered UNA as first-time, full-time freshmen and most of these students (97 to 100 percent) did not return for their sophomore year. These data demonstrate that though international student retention can be high, certain groups often require specific attention and support.

A significant part of the challenge in retaining international students at U.S. universities is that there is not comprehensive data collection of the issues they face and their perceptions of the services offered to them. Though some scholars promote an analysis of international students’ needs as compared to the services offered by a U.S. institution, given the individuality of institutions, a defined feedback mechanism may be more effective in analyzing the effectiveness of an institution’s programs and resources.\textsuperscript{119} Feedback outlets through administration and faculty contacts as well as anonymous feedback options should be provided.

However, one comprehensive study by researchers at Indiana University Bloomington examined “levels of engagement in effective educational practices of nearly 3,000 undergraduate international students and more than 67,000 of their American counterparts at 317 four-year colleges and universities.”\textsuperscript{120} One interesting result of this study was that “as the proportion of international students increases both groups [international and domestic students] perceive their campus to be less,

not more, supportive.”¹²¹ This result is counterintuitive, but researchers attribute it partially to “negative amplification” whereby focusing on a disappointment about an institution increases when students can share their frustrations with a group of peers. Hence, simply increasing the number of international students on a campus “will not necessarily enhance the quality of many aspects of the undergraduate experience.”¹²² Retention efforts must be given the same attention as recruitment efforts.

The International Student Experience

Recognizing the unique issues facing international students will benefit U.S. institutions that want to increase retention. For international students, experiencing their studies in the United States requires significant adjustments. The literature has generally found that English language proficiency and social support are the two best predictors of successful international student adjustment, while demographic variables are not as important. One study concluded that “the acculturative stress levels experienced by student sojourners can approach that of refugees.” The lack of personal resources when arriving in the host country creates difficulty in adjusting to a new culture, which is compounded by academic stresses.¹²³ This cultural, social and academic adjustment will be discussed below.

*Culture Shock and Social Adjustment*

“Culture shock describes the loss of emotional balance when a person moves to [an] unfamiliar environment,” according to Cabrini College’s international handbook.¹²⁴ The effects of culture shock should not be underestimated. Dr. Sara Maggitti, a counselor at Cabrini College, stated, “In my personal and professional experience, culture shock can have significant impact on the individual and can be debilitating...An individual can subsequently develop emotional illness from extreme culture shock.”¹²⁵ Culture shock is amplified by “less access to support systems, family and friends, for coping with the transition.”¹²⁶ There is also “an adjustment to new social norms and customs, their role as foreigners, the ignorance of host nationals about their home country and culture, the difficulty in making new social contacts, the differences in language and nonverbal communication, and sometimes racial discrimination and relationship problems.”¹²⁷ Numerous studies found that Asian students encounter the biggest difficulties in adapting to campuses and

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¹²¹ Ibid., 2.
¹²² Ibid., 19.
¹²⁵ Ibid.
¹²⁷ Ibid.
establishing friendships, though they compose the primary international student group currently attending U.S. institutions. On the other hand, European students, whose culture is more similar to the U.S., often adjust more quickly.

Figure 14 below illustrates the cultural adjustment process. Initially international students may be excited with the new aspects of U.S. culture, then they may experience initial culture shock when they cannot eat the same foods as they can at home or fully express themselves. This may be followed by “surface adjustment” to daily life, though a more severe culture shock may follow during which students feel alienated and lonely and notice deeper differences in relationships and attitudes. As students begin to understand the causes of this culture shock, they will begin to adapt and adjust with help from numerous resources. If students’ adaptation goes well, they will likely experience a reverse culture shock upon re-entry to their own countries given the experiences and changes they have undergone in the U.S.

**Figure 14: The Cultural Adjustment Curve: Adapting to the U.S.**

International students, at least initially, may find the transition eased by contact with students from the same culture to provide a social network. For example, Oytun Emre Yücel, a Turkish student at Northwestern, explained that his core group of

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130 Ibid.
friends at university is Turkish and that the group speaks Turkish amongst each other. “There are certain conversations that we can have in our language that we just can’t have in English,” he stated. Furthermore, Yücel found certain American college traditions hard to adjust to. He explains:

At home, it’s not always about going out to drink and get wasted and not remember the last night…It’s very much like social drinking. You go out with friends, drink, have fun, dance a little, sit down, talk, have a great night, come back to your house, sleep and actually remember that night the next morning. Some of the Turkish people I know get used to the ‘American way,’ but not a lot of people in my class have.131

However, most international students ultimately want to be integrated into their campus and form friendships outside their nationalities as well. In fact, studies have found that, “Talking and interacting with host students was highly correlated with international students’ perceptions of their adjustment to American life” and that “spending more leisure time with Americans was significantly correlated with the adaptation of international students.”132 Many friendships on U.S. campuses are formed between students who are living together or participating in the same activities.133 As such, encouraging the full integration and participation of international students on campus is crucial.

Academic Adjustment

Academic adjustment is another obstacle faced by international students and can include, “language challenges, academic difficulties, and adjustment to the U.S. educational system.”134 The academic adjustment to different classroom behaviors, study skills, the relationships between professors and students and among students can be challenging. Academic adjustment is made profoundly more challenging because of the language barrier. Chon Klomjit, a Thai student at Northwestern stated that, “It’s hard to read at the same level as the native, also to speak, and listen…I spend more time, twice the time as other people spend, doing homework, because if I can’t understand one sentence then I can’t go on.”135

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133 Ibid.
Many international students also lament the fact that Americans speak very quickly and with different twangs.\textsuperscript{136}

\textbf{It is often the case that the rules, behaviors, expectations, the use of technology, and the relationships between the faculty and students are culturally-based.} For example, whether students must revere their teachers or are able to question their assumptions can be a major cultural difference between U.S. higher education institutions and those in other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{137} Younghai Li, an Emporia State University student from China stated that, “It’s totally different from China, the education system, but I prefer here…In China, I just took my head to the classroom and listened to the teacher. Here we have to take our brain. I have to do homework every day and I love it.” Another student, Kari Huouilila stated that, “In Finland, we have academic freedom so you don’t have to go to class if you don’t want to.”\textsuperscript{138}

In the same vein as cultural adjustment, international students want to be integrated into the classroom and not feel misrepresented, especially if they are a racial minority on campus. A black Caribbean student at Thompson College noted that:

I’m sick of being in different courses and I am one of few Black students and I’m there in a class discussion on race, ethnicity, or culture. Why is it that all the White students and the professor looks at me for to represent the Black race…Like we (people of African heritage) all think the same. One time I was in a humanities course and the topic of slavery came up. I’m Caribbean born and raised there. Of course there was slavery in the Caribbean but did anyone ever consider that my perspective on slavery would be different from an African American? No!\textsuperscript{139}

Despite these challenges, international students are generally highly academically engaged. The IU study found that “\textbf{Overall, international students were more engaged in educationally purposeful activities than American students, especially during the first year of college},” though trends converged as students reached their final year in college.\textsuperscript{140} One explanation for this trend is that academic

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achievement can be used as a coping mechanism for international students who initially feel isolated and lonely at their institutions. It is worth noting that trends varied depending on the racial and ethnic mix of both the international students and the domestic counterparts on a campus. In this vein, another trend demonstrated by the study was that though many international students are very familiar with technology in the classroom, they initially tend to use this as a substitute for face-to-face interactions until they become more comfortable.  

*Educating Domestic Students*

The cultural, social and academic adjustments are all areas where U.S. higher educational institutions can provide support to international students. However, programs, resources or offices designed to provide this support should also aim to educate and include domestic students. International students who interact and form friendships with U.S. students will better adjust to their new environment; however, they often encounter ignorance and “negative American attitudes toward international students” and “a relative lack of sensitivity by Americans to cultural differences and the international students’ own isolation as foreigners.”

A 2004 National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) report states that it will take effort for U.S. institutions to increase domestic student awareness because:

> Education-abroad programs, while increasing in number, still involve only 3 percent of undergraduates annually. Only one in 10 American students studies a foreign language. The sad truth is that American campuses have failed to internationalize at the very time it is essential to serving our students, our communities and the world.

As a result, cross-cultural initiatives are a crucial part of any retention programs to integrate both international and domestic students.

*International Student Retention Strategies and Practices*

*Internationalization of U.S. Institutions and a Conceptual Framework*

Internationalization has become an oft-used term among academic leadership: “the process of integrating international and multicultural perspectives and experiences into the learning, discovery and engagement mission of higher education.” The internationalization of a campus can take many forms which are largely designed to affect domestic students and faculty and prepare them for a globally connected world. As Indiana University Vice President of International Affairs Patrick O’Meara stated:

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141 Ibid., p. 17.
144 Ibid., 52.
In our ever-more interconnected world, the experience of an education abroad and the global diversity of the university community represented by international students, are no longer an extra bonus of being part of an institution with a global perspective. They are now essential to our students’ future careers and future lives as educated citizens.\textsuperscript{145}

**Many of the same efforts to internationalize an institution will directly impact international student retention.** The NAFSA: Association of International Educators set **nine criteria** for the internationalization of U.S. campuses including:

- Administrative Support and Infrastructure
- Community Service and Outreach
- Curricular Initiatives
- Faculty Commitment
- Institutional Commitment
- Research and Faculty Exchange
- Student Learning and Participation
- Support for Education Abroad
- Support for International Students and Scholars\textsuperscript{146}

It is the final category in which this report is interested. **Though it is not an entirely commercial enterprise, support for international students and scholars needs to be considered through the lens of service quality.** Five main quality dimensions are: **tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy**. Any U.S. institution looking to initiate enrollment, admission, integration and retention efforts for international students should consider its programs and processes in this light. For example, one study found that an institution was communicating with its prospective international students through three separate departments leading to contradictory messages and miscommunications. Inconsistency among departments and different ways of organizing and storing student data also led to a prolonged application process frustrating visa concerns. These types of concerns can be addressed with customer relationship management (CRM) software, protocols and departmental deadlines.\textsuperscript{147} Creating “blueprints” of all international student processes and practices will aid in this type of analysis to ensure quality.

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Creating International Student Friendly Campuses

As U.S. institutions recognize the positive impact of international students in their larger internationalization objectives, they must create international student friendly campuses. Various organizations have suggested simple methods and practices to achieve this. IDP Education, a major student placement and research firm, suggests:

- Guaranteeing **student housing**, on or off-campus
- Guaranteeing **places of worship** at all times, even holidays
- Being candid about the **diversity details** of a campus by classifying students as more than simply “international”
- Insisting on **student activities** and ensuring some activities are accommodating to different cultures
- Providing a **cost of living breakdown and on-campus job opportunities** so that international families are prepared. Under J-1 and F-1 visas, students can work up to 20 hours a week, usually only on campus. Consider allotting certain student jobs only to international students.¹⁴⁸

EducationUSA, the Department of State’s international recruitment body also recommends ways to create an “international student friendly campus,” including:

- Creating a **special section on the website for international students** that offers guidance and resources on specifically international student issues and activities. The section should also explain the admissions process and U.S. educational system in an easily understandable format.
- **Educating the leadership, faculty and staff** at an institution on the legal, cultural and educational issues facing international students
- Ensuring that there are staff particularly dedicated to the application process of potential international students and the needs of international students during their stay. There should also be staff “whose primary goal is the successful academic, linguistic, psychological, and cultural adjustment of each international student who enrolls on the campus.”
- Offering a **separate orientation** for new international students
- Ensuring that dining places on campus offer kosher and halal options
- Providing additional **English language support** and instruction
- Providing housing options for international students over vacation periods
- Initiating a **local host family program** to integrate international students into the local community and culture¹⁴⁹

International Student Offices

Though any U.S. university admitting international students is required to have a staff member trained on immigration matters, the existence of an office solely devoted to the needs of international students demonstrates a commitment of an institution to its international student body and allows for specific time and resources to be directed towards its needs, thus encouraging retention. NAFSA’s Knowledge Community for International Student and Scholar Services (KCISSS) is a primary resource in this field. NAFSA has an International Student Advising Network which includes assistance with understanding immigration regulations, building successful orientation programs, intercultural communications advice, best practices for developing appropriate office policies, and supporting internationalization on campus. The network provides resources, forums, interviews with experts and toolkits and networking tools for professionals in the field.\(^{150}\)

The network advises that international student offices can and should engage in numerous ways on campus in order to act as the primary resource for international students and to encourage retention. **From an administrative perspective, these offices should safeguard the ability to bring international students and scholars to the university by ensuring compliance with federal agency requirements (Department of Homeland Security and Department of State), tracking laws and regulations, applying for certifications and re-certifications, ensuring training for staff compliance, and acting as a resource to university departments for immigration questions.** The Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVIS) under U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement also has reporting requirements which include registering each enrolled student each term in the SEVIS system, monitoring enrollment and reporting drops below full time, maintaining information on the completion or termination of programs, terminating records for students who fail to maintain status, and responding to ICE and FBI inquiries.\(^{151}\) SEVIS maintains significant resources on its website for institutions to provide to their students.\(^{152}\)

As noted above in terms of recruitment, maintaining a firm grasp on immigration advice for students, scholars and dependents and communicating this competency is crucial to international student recruitment as well as retention. International student offices should be aware of all enrollment and visa requirements, changes in

\(^{150}\) Knowledge Community for International Student and Scholarship Services. NAFSA Association for International Educators. [http://www.nafsa.org/knowledge_community_network/sec/international_student_3/](http://www.nafsa.org/knowledge_community_network/sec/international_student_3/)

\(^{151}\) “The World Comes to Our Campus PowerPoint Tool.” NAFSA Association for International Educators. [http://www.nafsa.org/resourcelibrary/default.aspx?id=8673](http://www.nafsa.org/resourcelibrary/default.aspx?id=8673)

immigration status, travel requirements, and work authorization and maintain the documents on campus. International student offices should also be a resource for information on driving and transportation, Social Security Administration application, banking advice, housing advice, cultural advice, tax information and work authorization.

These information resources should be coupled with cultural adjustment practices and programs. The international student office should organize arrival information, orientation, adjustment workshops, and social events on campus. Workshops and events should also go beyond the orientation and induction period for international students and should continue to be available throughout their time as students. They might include counseling, cross-cultural workshops, international student associations, employment workshops, faculty assistance, departmental assistance, an English conversation program, cultural celebrations, an International Education Week, a peer mentor program, an international film festival, field trips and a weekly or monthly forum or study group.153

Another resource compiled by some international student offices is an international student handbook. This handbook may outline resources and programs at the university, tips for adjusting to culture shock, as well as explanations of cultural practices and values. For example, the University of Minnesota publishes a handbook which explains *inter alia* some American values and practices:

- Being on time
- Individualism
- Direct communication
- Problem-solving
- Pragmatism
- Informality

As well as:

- Friendship and dating practices and attitudes toward sex
- Legal issues, e.g., acceptable alcohol or tobacco use and sexual harassment
- Personal safety procedures

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Kennesaw State University maintains an International Student Retention Services office which provides significant resources to international students, including a Global Village which contains study and discussion space and computers for student use, as well as internationally-focused exhibitions and resources. The International Student Association is a student-run organization providing support and organizing numerous events.\textsuperscript{155}

Arkansas Tech University’s Office of International and Multicultural Student Services has many international student associations which are largely nationally based to encourage communities among the international student body. The office organizes numerous events including field trips, welcome parties, basketball tournaments, an international homecoming float, an International Education Weekend, Hispanic Heritage Month luncheon, and, recently, a 50-minute ‘tour’ of India presentation. The office also employs Graduate Assistants (graduate students) and Student Workers (undergraduate students).\textsuperscript{156}

The University of Michigan’s International Center focuses on international student well-being and offers counseling for students struggling with culture shock. One Korean student who used the university’s services explained that after initially appreciating the diversity of American culture in Ann Arbor, she then required further help to acculturate: “Everyone expected me to speak English well, to understand the American culture, and to always behave like Americans do. I began to feel pretty bad because I realized that no one really cared about me when I needed them to care about me the most.”\textsuperscript{157}

These examples demonstrate the potential need for infrastructure and professional development if these types of facilities or staff do not already exist at an institution. Whether the office aims to be purely administrative or also serve as a gathering and teaching facility for international students will determine the requirements. Though international student offices will provide the primary resource for international students, it is important to recognize that “international students have far reaching impact on college campuses.” They are involved in residence life, dining services, the library, computer services and athletics, and, as such, efforts to retain international students should be extended into the wider campus and its programs.\textsuperscript{158}

\textit{International Bridge Programs}

\textbf{Bridge programs are becoming an increasingly utilized practice at U.S. institutions in order to effectively integrate international students into the culture, language and academic environment prior to and during full enrollment at the institutions.} Bridge programs should aim to enhance cultural sensitivity among their participants and to ultimately get them to the stage of cultural

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{155} “International Student Retention Services.” Kennesaw State University. http://www.kennesaw.edu/stu_dev/isrs/
\item \textsuperscript{156} Office of International and Multicultural Student Services. Arkansas Tech University. http://www.atu.edu/imsso/
\item \textsuperscript{157} “An International Students’ Personal Story.” University of Michigan. http://mitalk.umich.edu/pop_is_story.php
\item \textsuperscript{158} Gillette. Op. cit.
\end{itemize}
appreciation, a willingness to engage and learn, and the ability to be flexible, take risks and problem-solve.\(^{159}\) Bridge programs vary greatly in their content from being primarily focused on ESL training to cultural training to cross-cultural activities with domestic students. Depending on language requirements and the countries of origin of international students, different types of bridge programs may be appropriate for different institutions.

Foothill College, a community college in California, has a six-week intensive summer ESL program that allows international students with lower TOEFL/IELTS scores to start their studies at Foothill College the summer before they transition into a full-time course load. Admittance in the fall quarter is guaranteed for students who complete the program without retaking the TOEFL or IELTS. The program includes the following features:

- The program earns students 10 units of credit for $2,000 with a $500 deposit. This includes tuition, fees, health insurance and a field trip.
- The program is open to international students with TOEFL 475-499 PBT, 151-172 CBT, 52-60 IBT, or IELTS 5.5 – 5.9. The Summer Bridge Program is also open to students with TOEFL scores above 500 PBT/61IBT or above IELTS 6.0.
- Classes in the program are held Monday-Thursday from 9am to 1:20pm providing 125 hours of intensive English training with a focus on listening comprehension, oral communication, reading and vocabulary, grammar and writing.
- Teachers in the program have a master’s degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).
- Students in the program are also encouraged to stay with host families arranged by International Student Placements.\(^{160}\)

Fontbonne University in St. Louis, Missouri offers a similar program, combining ESL classes with academic courses until international students are prepared to enter the university full-time. This is usually accomplished in 12 to 18 credit hours. The International Bridge program is designed for international students with low to intermediate English proficiency. No TOEFL or IELTS score is required, though students with below 500PBT/61IBT may apply for the program. The program is

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divided into levels so that students must take “Compass tests” to progress to each new level.  

Park University’s English as an International Language (EIL) program offers a more customized experience wherein there are no required courses and each student receives individual advising through the Program Coordinator on the courses necessary to achieve English language proficiency. English courses receive college credit, but as soon as students feel able to do so, they are encouraged to take normal Park University courses, which can begin as early as the first semester. In coordination with the university’s Academic Support Center, English language support and mentoring continues throughout an international student’s time at the university, even following graduation from the EIL program.

Another type of bridge program takes place at international campuses prior to international students’ arrival at U.S. institutions. This type of bridge program requires an effective and trusting relationship between the U.S. institution and a foreign institution. For example, the University of Massachusetts, Boston (UMass) offers an Academic Bridge Program with Tsinghua University in China wherein Chinese students prepare for their study at UMass while at Tsinghua University:

The program begins at Tsinghua University with one year of post-high school study in English and an introduction to US style education. During the second half of the year, students declare an academic interest and are exposed to that discipline in mini-courses delivered as in a US classroom. The approach includes development of reading, writing and critical thinking skills, along with English proficiency.

Following completion of this program, staff at the Academic Bridge Program help students prepare their applications and work through the visa process. An IELTS score of at least 6.0, as well as recommendations from the Bridge Program faculty, are required. UMass also offers a University Preparation Program wherein academically eligible students requiring additional English training can enroll in Continuing Education courses at UMass. If a recommendation by the University Preparation Program Director is received upon completion, students can become full-time UMass students.

Another important aspect of bridge programs is the orientation process. The University of Pittsburgh guides international students through a comprehensive orientation process, including pre-arrival information. Information about international student health insurance is also available. The arrival procedure is comprehensive, with opportunities to register for airport pick-up around the official arrival date. The university hosts Check-In and Essentials sessions for both

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161 “Bridge Program Overview.” Fontbonne University. http://www.fontbonne.edu/admissions/international/bridgeprogram
undergraduates and graduates during which they will also take the English Language Proficiency Test. There is also an International Parent’s Welcome Session. In addition, the university encourages new international students to attend the traditional new student orientation sessions which ensures that they receive the same information and guidance as domestic students. These separate orientation processes cater to specific international student needs and promote immediate integration of international students into campus life.\textsuperscript{164}

Ball State University provides a unique bridge experience for international students. Local families, couples or individuals volunteer to partner with an international student for a year. There is diversity among the volunteers, but they “all have a common interest in learning about other cultures and sharing the American way of life.”\textsuperscript{165} International students do not live with their hosts, though the hosts are selected to provide emotional and practical support as international students transition into university and American life. The university encourages international students to join in activities with their hosts such as holiday celebrations, outings, errands and meals, as well as on-campus events. This type of program is a unique initiation into the community and American culture.

\textit{Mentor Programs}

Another primary method of international student integration and cross-cultural initiatives is the use of mentor programs, which come in different forms as demonstrated by the following examples.

According to Park University, the goal of a mentoring program is to provide direct benefits to the students:

- Better acclimation
- Better informed
- Improved cross-cultural communication
- Friendship
- Sense of belonging
- Increased involvement in community activities and events
- Increased knowledge about the institution\textsuperscript{166}

The Global Bridge Program at Washington State University focuses on language and cultural peer mentorship. The program is a collaboration between the International Center and the International Business Club “designed to bridge the gap between the languages, cultures and students represented at WSU.” The program pairs

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international and domestic students to discuss their languages and cultures through a “Campus Friends” and a “Language Partners” program depending on whether students are more interested in improving their cultural or language adjustments.\textsuperscript{167}

Loyola Marymount University utilizes a mentorship program before the international students even arrive on campus. Recent numbers have shown that LMU had a 34 percent increase in international student applications in 2010, as well as a 250 percent increase in international transfer applications. Furthermore, the University states, “Our freshman [international] retention rate is slightly higher than the average of the University, and our freshman [international] GPA is slightly higher than the LMU average.” Administrators attribute some of the retention success at LMU to the weeklong international student orientation before the fall semester and the new “iMentor” program through which international students are paired with a domestic student mentor who communicates with them via email prior to starting their courses at LMU.\textsuperscript{168}

Hampshire College’s Peer Mentor Program takes the approach of pairing incoming students of color and international students with returning students of color and international students. The mentorship program “was developed in response to students’ concerns about the retention of students of color and international students at Hampshire College.” By pairing minority students with similar backgrounds, it helps incoming students become associated with the resources available to them, the systems at Hampshire College, residential life and student groups. Students who volunteer to be mentors are met with expectations of a year’s commitment of 10 to 24 hours per semester. Mentors are expected to be in contact with their mentees on a regular basis, at the least phoning them every two weeks. The expectations are that mentors demonstrate a personal interest in the mentee’s individual adjustment process, thus providing individualized social and academic adjustment assistance and resources.

Yet another approach is shown through Park University’s internationalization and multicultural International Student Mentoring Program developed in 2008. The program differs from others in that the mentors are faculty members. The program pairs a faculty or staff member with an incoming international student to meet two


times a month for 30 minutes. The program suggests meetings include activities such as lunch, attending a university event, or attending international events together on campus. Park’s mentorship program aims to encourage interaction between international students and staff, encourage staff to attend intercultural events, and “to provide a less formal environment for the student to ask questions and seek help outside the classroom/office.” Park notes that this style of mentorship program is not only meant to enhance international student integration, but also to improve the cross-cultural communication for staff and their awareness of the international student body on campus, which should improve the classroom experience for both parties. To formalize the program, both an orientation and end of year dinner are held. In addition, both parties sign mentoring contracts and are provided with guidelines for the program. Most importantly, Park’s program fits into its larger objective of “Internationalizing the Curriculum,” which aims to augment current curriculum with international topics.”\textsuperscript{169}

Finally, Shoreline Community College outside Seattle has been commended by NAFSA for its internationalization efforts. A key aspect of its success has been the International Peer Mentor program, through which five international students are selected annually to paid positions where they help new international students adjust to life at Shoreline and in the community. These mentors take diversity training courses alongside the college’s staff and attend professional development conferences. The program has greatly increased the integration of international students into the campus.\textsuperscript{170}

\textit{Forums and Discussion Groups}

\textbf{The organization of forums and discussion groups can also be effective.} One method utilized by the University of Sunderland in the UK included an International Student Forum featuring guest speakers from campus and support services. The course and its delivery assisted the international students’ transition from their previous educational experience. Two factors were noted as crucial to the success of this program. The forum was included in the students’ schedules so that they did not feel it was an additional burden, thus increasing attendance. The International Student Forum was also included in the schedules of the faculty members involved, including both preparation and delivery time, thus ensuring staff commitment to the program and quality programming. Students were receptive to the forum and its structure.\textsuperscript{171}

Community Involvement

International students are interested in becoming involved not only in the campus community, but also in the local community. As a result, some institutions have implemented community involvement programs to engage international students. Arkansas Tech University aims to allow international students to become involved with the local Russellville community. Through the International Student Speakers Bureau (ISSB), international speakers from Arkansas Tech go into local schools and community organizations with prepared presentations about their cultures, often including clothing, photos, and music. This mutually beneficial experience allows international students at the university opportunities to:

- Practice and improve English speaking skills
- Learn to build effective presentations and keep an audience captivated
- Become acquainted with new friends and potential employers
- Learn team building and leadership skills
- Interact with community groups

In order to formalize the program, each ISSB member receives an official certificate at the end of each semester which also helps them build their resumes while attending a U.S. institution.172

Faculty Involvement and Practices in the Classroom

As discussed above, a major area of adjustment for international students is likely to be in the classroom. As part of a U.S. culture series released by NAFSA: Association of International Educators, a booklet on U.S. Classroom Culture compiled some of the changes in classroom culture faced by international students.173 The flexibility, diversity, choice and often decentralized nature that describe the U.S. education system are perhaps the most significant differences from foreign cultures.

This culture is reflected directly in U.S. classrooms, where there is great flexibility in teaching methods and more independence in learning and completing assignments. The U.S. tends to use a more “learner-centered” classroom environment, where professors present content, but generally act more as facilitators of discussion and analysis. Thus, students are much more active participants, even guiding the learning process:

International students often report that the amount and type of interaction expected of them in the United States is different from their classroom

experiences at home. However, exactly how classroom participation differs from home depends on the country and on the specific institution that the student comes from.\(^{174}\)

Speaking out is considered valuable in U.S. classrooms and is often used as a barometer of students’ understanding of the material. In relation to individual participation, students are expected to have opinions on the subject matter:

Students are expected (and often required) not only to know the content of their courses, but also to think independently about it and to express their own perspectives and opinions in class and in their written work. If they disagree with the instructor or their classmates, they are able to express this in class. Openly disagreeing or simply expressing one’s opinion can be challenging for students who are accustomed to listening and taking notes rather than speaking up. It is an added challenge when the student has an attitude of awe toward the instructor.\(^{175}\)

Another major difference is that evaluation in U.S. classrooms can be mixed among group projects, individual work, quizzes, class participation, and presentations, rather than simply exams. Multiple choice tests are often a foreign concept to international students.\(^{176}\) Overall, there is a much less top-down, more casual classroom approach with far less emphasis on memorization than in many other cultures.\(^{177}\) It can be difficult for international students to adapt to these major differences in classroom style.

It is primarily the faculty at an institution who should be briefed on how to approach these differences. Faculty should make their expectations and classroom procedures clear to international students. This is especially true in regards to academic standards on issues such as plagiarism where standards differ greatly among cultures.\(^{178}\) They should also consider that “avoiding slang or acronyms or providing handouts with definitions are useful additions for the international students functioning in the class and help them in adjusting to the language.”\(^{179}\) It is also suggested that the faculty should learn the names of international students in their courses and open channels of communication. It has been noted that, “although the international students expressed gratitude that faculty had office hours, they did not seek faculty out until asked by faculty to do so. They also expressed concern in asking questions during the class due to their perceived language skills and previous educational experiences.”\(^{180}\)

Faculty should encourage international students to participate in the classroom and to consult with them on an individual basis even if this concept is foreign to them and

\(^{174}\) Eland et al. Op cit., 16. \\
^{175}\) Ibid., 17. \\
^{176}\) Ibid., 24. \\
^{177}\) Ibid., 14. \\
^{179}\) Gillette. Op cit. \\
even if the students believe they do not have the language skills necessary to do so. Over time, these obstacles will become easier to overcome, and students will become used to this type of professional relationship.

As an aspect of the internationalization of campuses discussed above, institutions should aim to foster “globally competent faculty and staff members.” Faculty should be encouraged to integrate international aspects into their courses and to use international students as a resource.\(^\text{181}\) International student relations should be part of diversity training and professional development courses and incorporated into annual professional development goals.

Moreover, open communication with staff to discuss concerns and provide feedback about the international student experience allows students to feel heard. At Emporia State University, a two-hour discussion group between international students and the university’s president, Michael Lane, provided this kind of forum. Students brought up issues from food to roommates to experiences in the classroom. “Our purpose is to learn what the international students are interested in, what’s going well and what can we improve,” Lane stated. “I think we learned lots of things tonight and we can work on what we need to improve.”\(^\text{182}\) This type of feedback mechanism is a potential area for direct staff involvement in the international student experience on campus.

\textit{English Language}

\textbf{English language proficiency can be a major obstacle for retaining international students.} As outlined previously, bridge programs are one option for overcoming this obstacle prior to international students even beginning their full-time studies. However, \textbf{English language support should also be an ongoing effort on campuses.} In addition to learning English to engage in social and commercial interaction, international students must have English proficiency to deal with academic situations. Major difficulties for international students come from “differences in accent, enunciation, slang and use of special English words.”\(^\text{183}\) These difficulties should be addressed, and there are various options for U.S. higher education institutions looking to incorporate English language training into their programs in order to attract and retain international students.

\textbf{English Language Institutes (ELIs) exist at many U.S. higher education institutions.} The University of Delaware (UD) has a comprehensive ELI accredited by the Commission on English Language Accreditation. The program provides approximately 28 hours of instruction each week through class meetings, private

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tutoring sessions and time in the Listening Laboratory and Self-Access Learning Center. The institute offers specialized courses such as Business English, Academic English and American Culture. Students are divided into six levels of proficiency and are placed into a level through an initial placement test. At the end of the program, successful participants receive an official certificate at a graduation ceremony. Though the program is a separate institute, it pairs with various colleges and universities through a Conditional Acceptance Program that allows qualified students to be accepted into full study without a TOEFL score. There are also possibilities for simultaneous enrollment in undergraduate courses at UD and earning UD credit through the ELI courses.\textsuperscript{184}

U.S. institutions also elect to hold continuing English language courses for international students throughout their time as full-time students. \textbf{These English language courses should also be supplemented with programs such as conversation partnerships, workshops on using slang and colloquialisms, and workshops providing writing assistance}.\textsuperscript{185}

In addition, colleges and universities have recently begun exploring partnerships with private for-profit higher education companies. Kaplan Inc., which “claims to provide training to nearly a million students across 3,000 classroom locations worldwide,” recently entered the United Kingdom marketplace. Among Kaplan’s proposed programs is an ESL course intended for foreign students, which Kaplan administers on traditional college campuses.\textsuperscript{186} Partnerships with private, for-profit firms enable “universities to access an established flow of overseas students” and can also be “an inexpensive means of recruiting international students.”\textsuperscript{187}

\textit{Financial Concerns}

As in institutions’ recruitment efforts, financial concerns play a major part in international student retention. \textbf{U.S. higher education institutions need to be sensitive to the financial constraints posed by high tuition costs and changing situations in students’ home countries, as well as the employment restrictions students face while on visas}. Educating international students about their ongoing financial options while attending U.S. higher education institutions, as well as considering other options to support international students, should be a priority in retention efforts.

For example, Portland State University set aside a specific fund for international student retention. Its International Student Retention Scholarship is open to international students who have attended Portland State University for a full academic year. The program requires that international students satisfy English language proficiency requirements, maintain a 3.0 cumulative Grade Point Average,

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\item[187] Ibid.
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maintain an F-1 student visa, and clearly define degree goals. Application requirements also include an essay, letters of recommendation, and proven financial need. This type of scholarship encourages the retention of the best international students and is coordinated by the International Student Services department at Portland State University.188

Similarly, Fontbonne University offers two types of international student scholarships. The International Bridge Scholarship of up to $1,000 per year is for those students conditionally accepted as undergraduates to the university and who are enrolled in a combination of ESL and academic courses. Upon meeting minimum English proficiency requirements and enrolling in the university as full-time undergraduates, international students may be eligible for International Retention Scholarships of up to $5,000 per year. These scholarships recognize the progression of international students at the university.189

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188 “International Student Retention Scholarship.” Portland State University, p.1
http://oia.pdx.edu/images/isss/Intl_Student_Retention_Scholarship.pdf
189 “Bridge Program Overview.” 2010, Fontbonne University.
http://www.fontbonne.edu/admissions/international/bridgeprogram
Conclusion

As illustrated in this report, the enrollment of international students not only helps further institutional goals for internationalization and diversification, but also provides substantial economic benefits for host countries. In most Anglophone countries, international student enrollments have continued to trend upwards, though at varying paces. In the United States, the September 11 attacks prompted a sharp decline in international student growth, though the country has since recovered its status as a major host country.

As universities place increasing emphasis on campus diversity and internationalization, it will be paramount to focus attention and resources on effective recruitment and retention efforts targeted toward foreign students. While some practices, such as the use of recruiting agencies, have been controversial in the higher education community, commonplace practices exist. Many institutions use institutional partnerships and agreements, participation in recruitment fairs and events, and print and online publications to reach international audiences.

Once students enroll in the host country, they face numerous challenges and require special support and assistance to make cultural adjustments and succeed in their studies. Higher education institutions can use diverse programs to support foreign students, including formal programs, such as orientations, bridge programs, mentorships, and English language institutes, as well as more informal initiatives to create a welcoming culture on campus.
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