Statistics, Trends, and Opportunities

International student recruitment is big business—and growing. According to the American International Education Foundation (AIEF), in 2000, international students contributed in the realm of $12 billion to the U.S. economy.¹ By the 2012-2013 school year NAFSA reported that number at $24 billion.² And those numbers aren’t predicted to go anywhere but up.

Now more than ever, international students have the motivation and the resources to leave their home soil to earn a degree. In doing so, they not only feed the economy of their host nation and contribute to the financial health of the institution, they enrich the diversity of the student bodies they represent, provide added dimension to the classroom, and ideally, increase the multi-cultural competency of those around them.

It is no wonder then, that colleges and universities worldwide are making a push to recruit more international students. But recruitment is not as easy as “if you build it they will come.”

Competition for recruitment can be intense. Not just from other U.S. schools but from schools around the globe. This is demonstrated in the diminishing market share of the U.S., the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada.³ In fact, according to a NAFSA Trends & Insights publication, “the number of countries actively engaged in recruiting inbound students has grown considerably as a means to improve the quality of their own systems (e.g., China, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Taiwan, Thailand, and Brazil).”⁴

In the United States, the numbers are currently skewed in favor of large research institutions with strong business and STEM programs. Open Doors® reports that in the U.S., 5% of institutions host 69% of all international students.* Degree options play a significant role in enrollment. The higher the available degree, the higher the level of research opportunities available, the more international students are enrolled. The fields of study of choice are Business (21%) and STEM (28.3%).*
2013 Open Doors figures show the breakdown as follows:

- 534,688 international students studying at doctorate granting institutions
- 138,346 international students studying at Masters college
- 31,227 international students studying at baccalaureate colleges

That is not to say, however, that smaller, lesser-known colleges and universities do not have opportunities to expand their international student enrollment. They just have to look at things more comprehensively than their larger counterparts.

What follows are some trends, and statistics to keep in mind when considering how to expand international student enrollment on your campus.

Look to OPT and ESL as Avenues for Increased International Presence

According to a 2012 research report by World Education Services, “English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs are emerging as an important pathway for international students,” while “the availability and length of Optional Practical Training (OPT) will also continue to be an important factor for students heading for the U.S.” This may be a good avenue for schools without strong business, STEM, or graduate programs to increase diversity on their campus.

Expand Your Geographic Reach

Look at the world as your oyster and think beyond the traditional in terms of recruiting. Right now the vast majority of international students studying in the United States originate from China, India, and South Korea. This leaves plenty of opportunity in other areas of the world.

Although it would not be a good idea to ignore Asian recruitment, looking elsewhere further diversifies your home campus and adds a layer of financial protection should diplomatic relations in those regions falter.

NAFSA’s Trends and Institutional Implications for International Student Enrollments in U.S. Institutions, drives that point home well: “Remember that with 55,000 students, Iran was the top sending country to the United States in 1979 when diplomatic relations were cut. We can only imagine the challenges universities would face if something happened to dramatically cut enrollments from China and India.”

Case Studies in International Enrollment & Diversity

In Cleveland, OH - Fall 2013 brought a watershed moment at Case Western University in Cleveland. For the first time in history, the top hometown for incoming freshman was not in Ohio, not in Pennsylvania—but in China.

Source: Cleveland’s economy may get a boost as international students flock to CWRU/The Cleveland Plain Dealer

In Columbia, MO - The University of Missouri reports a 130% increase in international students over the past four years—with sponsored students representing close to 50 countries including Saudi Arabia, Ecuador, Russia, Indonesia, Brazil and Cameroon.

Source: Sponsored Student Program brings Outstanding International Students to MU/international.missouri.edu

In Tucson, AZ - Thanks to a grant from President Obama’s 100,000 Strong in the Americas campaign, The University of Arizona has launched an initiative in partnership with institutions in Peru and Chili to promote student exchanges in the STEM field.

Source: UA Named Partner in Obama’s 100,000 Strong in the Americas | UA News
Look Closer to Home
A push by President Obama and the State Department to increase regional prosperity through education and cross-cultural student exchange has provided added incentive to recruit closer to home. The 100,000 Strong in the Americas campaign, administered by the State Department, NAFSA, and Partners of the Americas, provides grant money to make international study more broadly accessible throughout the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean. The Partners of the Americas website reports that since January 2014, investors have pledged $3.65 million, and $670,000 grants have been dispersed.

Information on the most current grant competition can be found at http://www.partners.net/partners/100.000_Strong_in_the_Americas1.asp. Institutions from the U.S., Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela are eligible to apply.

Consider Community Colleges
A recruiting ground even closer to home may be your local community college. According to Best Practices in International Student Recruitment and Retention in Anglophone Countries—Hanover Research, another trend worth noting is that associate’s level programs can be a significant source for recruiting foreign students into four-year programs. This is because an increasing number of international students are using a two-year stint at a community college to minimize expenses and improve English language skills before moving on to a four-year institution.

Build a Referral Base
It might sound simplistic, but the international students that pass through your campus can be your biggest supporters or your biggest detractors in their home country. Ensuring that your international student body has a positive experience while living and learning on your campus will not only aid in student retention, it will enhance your recruiting leverage. Because word of mouth is free, it may also reduce your recruiting costs. It is important, therefore, to pay close attention to the factors—social, academic, and administrative—that impact the overall happiness and well-being of your international student body.

Suggestions for improving the student experience include:

- **Streamline the application process** and make it easy for students to access all the information they need online in one central location.

- **Expand orientation programs** to better prepare foreign students for life on an American campus.

- **Provide assistance with obtaining work visas** and understanding job and internship opportunities.

- **Establish peer-mentoring programs** to match returning students with incoming freshmen.

- **Promote living-learning residence life initiatives** that foster diversity and increase integration.

- **Sponsor diverse organized social activities.**

---

**Insights on International Student Satisfaction**

The following chart, taken from an i-graduate.com report: Explaining International Student Satisfaction: Insights from the International Student Barometer provides a good visual on factors that impact student satisfaction and the extent to which institutions can affect them.

The areas with the lowest satisfaction scores and the highest red bars (correlation with recommendation) represent opportunities for schools to innovate and improve.

*Source: http://graduate.dev.ingelby.com*
Conclusion
There is no one-size-fits-all answer that will work for every institution. Each school needs to take stock of where they are and where they want to go, and define a plan for how to get there. While the above trends and statistics are by no means all-inclusive, they should provide a solid base of information to work with when plotting your course for increasing international student enrollment. Look for additional articles in the coming months highlighting specific actions some of our partner schools are taking to recruit and retain a more diverse international student body.

Resources:
10. Hudzik, J. K., & Briggs, P. F.