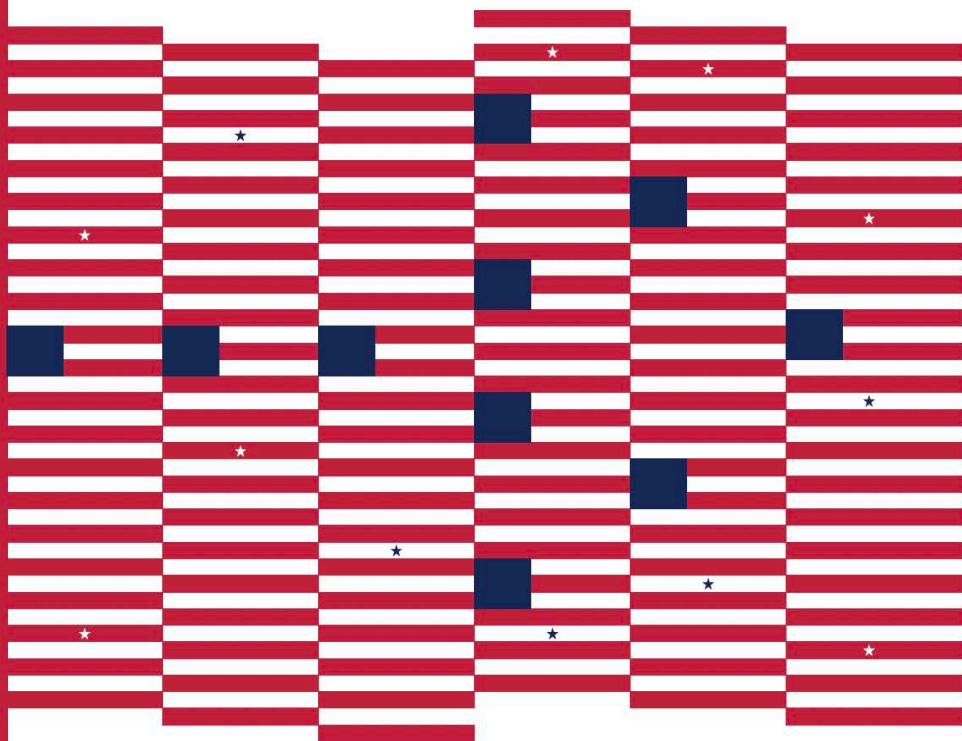


ENTRY POINTS TO US EDUCATION

LUAN, HABTE, DI MARIA, & BISTA



# ENTRY POINTS TO US EDUCATION

JING LUAN, LEILT HABTE, DAVID L. DI MARIA, KRISHNA BISTA



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# **Entry Points to US Education**

*Accessing the Next Wave of Growth*

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# Entry Points to US Education

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Accessing the Next Wave of Growth

Jing Luan, Leilt Habte, David L. Di Maria,  
Krishna Bista

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# Praise for this book

*"Entry Points to US Education* highlights examining modern international education's complexities. Editors and authors offer a nuanced and thorough examination of the diverse pathways available to Generation Z students. This work is indispensable for those looking to elevate their strategic approach to international student engagement and education. All contributors expertly combine theoretical insights with practical examples, making this book an incredibly valuable resource for implementing effective recruitment and engagement strategies."

**Dr. Allan E. Goodman**, Chief Executive Officer, Institute of International Education, New York, USA

\*\*\*

"This is a compelling book for anyone seeking to add depth and detail to their understanding of the admissions systems into US higher education. Delivered in an accessible engaging format, this is an essential lens which all aspiring international recruiters and those working in enrollment management will be keen to look through. My congratulations to Dr. Jing Luan et al for demystifying and democratising this knowledge."

**Amy Baker**, Chief Executive Officer, Professionals in International Education (PIE), London, UK

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"A book truly for the ages! Both theory and science-based, this momentous volume will guide students to choose new and better ways for college."

**Lily Guo**, CEO of Global Advanced Technical Education (GATE) China, and College University Partnership Board Member

"Luan, Habte, Di Maria, and Bista provide a crucial roadmap for navigating the complexities of international student recruitment in *Entry Points to US Education: Accessing the Next Wave of Growth*. Their comprehensive analysis and innovative strategies are indispensable for institutions aiming to enhance their global reach and effectively engage with Gen Z students."

**Dr. Ron K. Patterson**, President, Chadron State College, Chadron, Nebraska, U A

\*\*\*

"This work lays out a much-needed plan for facilitating increased international student study at the U.S. undergraduate level. Its consideration of the preferences of Gen Z and Millennial students as well as the larger global context and expertise of current practitioners results in content that is meaningful, authentic, and immediately applicable."

**Dr. Sora H. Friedman**, Professor of International & Global Education, SIT Graduate Institute, Vermont, USA

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"Unlock the gateway to America's educational landscape with *Entry Points to US Education*. A strategic guide illuminating pathways for personal and national advancement."

**Dr. Naziema Jappie**, Deputy Dean, Centre for Higher Education Development, University of Cape Town, South Africa

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"*Entry Points to U.S. Education* clarifies the intricacies of international student mobility in the U.S., cementing its status as an invaluable reference for both new entrants and seasoned professionals alike in the field of international education."

**Dr. Emily Kirsch**, Director of International Relations and Partnerships, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Extension, USA

“As the global demand for US education continues to surge, *Ten Entry Points to US Education: Accessing the Next Wave of Growth* is a collective effort of authors who provide an illuminating roadmap for international students seeking to unlock the boundless opportunities within the United States educational landscape. Through meticulous research and insightful case-studies analysis, the authors provide a comprehensive approach on traditional educational frameworks and emerging technology enhanced learning methods. Each chapter of the book expertly navigates the complexities related to international student access, offering invaluable guidance on how to thrive in this dynamic environment. The book is a must read for students, educators, and policymakers alike.”

**Dr. Jeet Joshee**, Associate Vice President, International Education and Global Engagement, California State University Long Beach, Immediate Past President, AIEA

\*\*\*

“This book by Jing Luan and his co-editors strikes at the central need for data-driven decision-making in International Education programming for Generation Z students and all future learners. It presents a cogent rationale for using data in strategic planning and resource allocation but also surfaces an urgent need for innovative and sustainable training for leaders serving international students. It should be on the reading list of international education planners, researchers, administrators, and academic and student services program leaders. The global diversity of our strength and pathway to survival lies in an international educated citizenry, and this book points to a continuing path to success and offers the needed tools and strategies to do so.”

**Dr. Edward J. Valeau**, Superintendent/ President Emeritus, Hartnell Community College, Salinas, California, USA

\*\*\*

“Currently, some 1.1 million international students are studying at over 5,300 universities in the USA - creating an amazing “economic industry” for the USA, estimated at some \$38.7 billion and employing in excess of 400,000. This has become the 6th largest services industry in the nation. To enable millions of students to access the U.S. experience and foster strong bonds, it is crucial to open up all available entry points. International student education is a major

"international industry" that American higher education provides for the current and future generations of the world."

**Dr. Patrick van Rooyen**, CEO & Managing Partner, GoGlobal Education;  
Executive Director, World Education Group, USA

\*\*\*

*"Entry Points to US Education: Accessing the Next Wave of Growth* provides an updated and dynamic cartography to facilitate international students' access to US universities, offering the different routes—the most direct and the less trodden ones—to reach their objective. Of utmost interest to students, academia, and institutions, this accurate and detailed chart provides clear and meaningful signposts and instructions for inclusive global navigation.

**Dr. Elena de Prada Creo**, Vice Dean for International Affairs, University of Vigo, Spain

\*\*\*

"Just as American higher education leaders have examined and developed different entry points into colleges and universities for US-based students, a similar exploration is taking place for international students seeking to study in the US. This book offers much-needed practical strategies and evidence-based guidance for meeting the interests and needs of today's international students pursuing undergraduate degrees at US institutions."

**Dr. Dawn Michele Whitehead**, Vice President, Office of Global Citizenship for Campus, Community, and Careers, American Association of Colleges and Universities, Washington, DC

\*\*\*

*"Entry Points to US Education: Accessing the Next Wave of Growth* captures the essence of well-developed educational strategies in modern times. With its insightful analysis of cases and strategies, it serves as a source for educators, researchers, and policymakers aiming to navigate the complexities of a liberal yet meritorious educational ecosystem."

**Dr. Bal Chandra Luitel**, Professor & Dean, Kathmandu University School of Education, Lalitpur, Nepal

\*\*\*

"Bravo to the authors of this book. With the changing preferences and global mobility patterns of Generation Z students, there is an urgent need for colleges and universities to understand the multiple entry paths into U.S. undergraduate education. The delineation of opportunities and challenges with each of the 10 points of entry provides practitioners with insight into modernizing international education for their campuses. Case studies included in the book give depth into the successful strategies for implementing the different entry points. Data and research provide a foundation for case-making for reform. Tools are offered for strategic enrollment management and partnerships. This book causes you to think differently about the approach to international students entering into U S baccalaureate degree programs. A must-read for anyone interested in embracing the model and growing international enrollment."

**Dr. Martha Ellis**, President of Mellis LLC and Professor in Residence University of Texas at Austin, USA

\*\*\*

*"Entry Points to U.S. Education* is a timely review of how to optimize the enrollment of international students in U.S. higher education. As the leading destination for international students worldwide, with an increasingly competitive landscape amongst nations for these talented students, it is important for the United States, and its educators, to familiarize themselves with the variety of options they have for enrolling international students and, more importantly, why and how they should approach this task. Opportunity can only be had if it is first understood."

**Dr. Karen McBride**, Executive Director, Community Colleges for International Development (CCID), Houston, USA

\*\*\*

"An insightful comprehensive analysis of entry points to US higher education, bringing together research, policy, and practice within an ever-evolving complex international student mobility landscape. A timely and valuable addition to the current global discussion around equality, diversity, and inclusion."

**Dr. Joanna Al-Youssef**, Assistant Professor, University of Nottingham School of Education, UK

\*\*\*

"This insightful book provides a vital, data-driven framework for modernizing international education to align with the evolving needs of today's globally mobile students. Centered around ten key entry points to U.S. undergraduate degrees, it offers actionable and innovative strategies to improve student engagement and expand access. This book is an invaluable resource for navigating the next wave of growth in U.S. higher education and makes an important contribution to the national dialogue on international student recruitment. I would recommend any higher education professional involved in attracting international students read this important book."

**Charles Cormack**, Chairman, Cormack Consultancy Group, UK

\*\*\*

After many years of engagement with students, parents, institutional leaders, and governmental officials, with a direct focus on global student enrollment and retention, this book demonstrates to me the power of that engagement work. Furthermore, it outlines the future of global attractiveness for U.S. institutions of higher education in today's ever changing perceptual and pragmatic enrollment ecosystem. Understanding the attraction and retention process is clearly and powerfully detailed throughout this work.

**Dr. James M. Smith**, President, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, USA

\*\*\*

"I am thrilled to have the opportunity to read this book before its publication and grateful to the authors for their generous sharing! A few authors of this book are good friends of mine, with years of rich experience and practical knowledge in education in the United States. The content of this book is a culmination of their years of practical experience, featuring both theory and hands-on advice. It truly guides readers on how to navigate higher education in the United States, especially for international students and those looking to transfer from community colleges. They provide highly effective and actionable methods and entry points, making it an essential textbook for parents, teachers, and education professionals!"

**Dr. Chunli Zhao**, Professor, Stem Cell Biology, Stanford University, Palo Alto, USA

\*\*\*

“This work is truly pioneering, as it clarifies all potential entry points to U.S. education, particularly emphasizing the significance for community colleges. As a community college trustee, I deeply resonate with the authors’ vision and strategic approach. I urge everyone to read the book, embrace its concepts, and advocate for these entry points.”

**Gilbert Wong**, Foothill-De Anza Community College Trustee, Association of Community College Trustee At Large and ACCT Student Trustee Liaison, Former Mayor and Councilmember, City of Cupertino, California, USA

\*\*\*

“This insightful publication by Jing Luan and colleagues is a game changer. The focus on actionable strategies and model practices provides a blueprint for enhancing student engagement and success in a globally mobile world.”

**Dwiraj Sharma**, CEO, Alfa Beta Group, Kathmandu, Nepal

\*\*\*

“I highly recommend this book to those seeking to study in the U.S. and to those advising foreign students. Numerous students have triumphantly completed their undergraduate education through UTA (university transfer admission). With insights from this book, I am now even more confident in my efforts to steer students towards transfer programs at community colleges.”

**Christine Ma**, International Outreach Director, American Academy of English, San Francisco, USA

\*\*\*

“This is a comprehensive and systematic introduction to the entry points for undergraduate studies in the U.S., offering incredible insights for education professionals, students, and parents worldwide. The compelling case studies make a persuasive and intuitive argument, steering us away from exclusively relying on applying for U.S. universities while in high school, which seems rather limited in light of the information from this illuminating compendium”.

**Harry Gong**, CEO, HYP Global Education, Singapore and Shanghai

"Studying in the U.S. is a dream of every child. Written with clarity and expertise, this book provides a roadmap to "Unlocking America" and demystifies the key requirements, procedures, and strategies for obtaining entry into the United States. A must-read for anyone seeking to understand the intricate pathways to the United States and embark on a journey leading to a brighter future in the land of endless opportunities."

**Dr. Pankaj Mittal**, Secretary General of the Association of Indian Universities and Former Vice Chancellor of Bhagat Phool Singh Women's University, India

\*\*\*

"An essential read for anyone invested in the future of international education in U.S. higher education institutions. As traditional models of access become overwhelmed, the authors highlight the importance of establishing alternative entry points, particularly through community colleges, for the next generation of international students. Valuable insights innovators at the forefront of the global student mobility conversation."

**Dr. Aaron McVean**, Vice Chancellor of Educational Services and Planning, San Mateo County Community College District (SMCCCD), San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley (SMCSV), USA

\*\*\*

"For students worldwide, studying in the US is both a dream and a path to future success. This book shows how that dream can be realized, and the many doors students can open to achieve their goals."

**Anna Esaki-Smith**, author of *Make College Your Superpower: It's Not Where You Go, It's What You Know*, and *Forbes* contributor

\*\*\*

This book emphasizes the importance of international student mobility and advocates for increased access to U.S. bachelor's programs through multiple entry points. The publication is committed to advancing ethical recruitment practices and promotes a more inclusive and interconnected approach to the mobility of international students. I find the book's recommendations to enhance diverse educational entry points and improve connectivity among them particularly compelling. These guidelines challenge the existing norms and offer a structured framework to capitalize on the unique strengths of U.S. higher

education, including its breadth, access, quality, and flexibility. The proactive and intentional strategies discussed in this book will catalyze significant advancements in how institutions and communities across the U.S. approach international student enrollment. I recommend this book to all professionals and policymakers involved in higher education and international student recruitment. It is a vital resource that promises to transform perspectives and encourage significant strides toward a more inclusive and dynamic educational framework.

**Dr. Jamillah Moore**, Vice President for Student Services and Enrollment Management, San Francisco State University, USA

\*\*\*

As a leader of one of largest professional associations for college admissions, I find this book invaluable for underscoring the critical work we do. It elucidates key entry points and data driven case studies, enabling us to enhance our engagement and strategic outreach efforts on an international scale. As a practitioner in college admissions at a community college, I particularly appreciate how the book highlights the essential role of two-year, vocational, and short-term programs in the global higher education landscape. It emphasizes the importance of including these options in discussions about helping students find the right higher education and post-secondary fit.”

**Kristoffer Toribio**, President for International Association for College Admission Counseling and Manager, International Admissions and Recruitment for Orange Coast College, USA

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# About the Book

## Entry Points to US Education

*Entry Points to US Education: Accessing the Next Wave of Growth* focuses on the imperative need to modernize international education as a result of the changes in international student mobility. Centered around the ten entry points, the book looks into the distinct preferences and approaches of Generation Z (Gen Z) students, offering data-driven strategies to navigate the ten entry points to U.S. undergraduate degrees. This book also provides actionable strategies and model practices and encourages a national dialogue around student engagement to enhance (in the context of) global mobility.

### Editors

**Jing Luan** is Provost Emeritus of San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley (San Mateo County Community College District) and former President of the Association of International Enrollment Management.

**Leilt Habte** is the Associate Director of the Transfer Center at the University of California Berkeley Center for Educational Partnership.

**David L. Di Maria** is a Senior International Officer and Associate Vice Provost for international education at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

**Krishna Bista** is a Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Advanced Studies, Leadership and Policy at Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland.

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Home and Abroad: International Student Experiences and Graduate Employability

Global Higher Education During COVID-19: Policy, Society, and Technology

International Student Identities and Mental Well-Being

Faculty Engagement and Internationalization at Home in Iceland

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# Dedication

I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the chapter authors for their diligent efforts and valuable contributions. Special appreciation is owed to Brian Whalen, Cheryl Delk-Le Good, Maria Dietrich, Daniel Harper, Michael Shaver, Clay Harmon, and Jennifer Wright for their exemplary leadership and unwavering support, which played a pivotal role in bringing this book to fruition. I am immensely grateful to the entire AIRC board for their unanimous decision to endorse the national recommendations on entry points.

A special note of gratitude is owed to Leilt Habte for her tireless dedication to educating the world on university transfer admission. I also want to acknowledge David Di Maria for his intellectual brilliance and Krishna Bista for his invaluable contributions to the chapters and the eventual publication of this book.

This book is the culmination of more than a decade of field experience, during which I've spent many months each year away from my cherished family, whose unwavering support and love buoyed me. I am forever grateful to my mother, whose spirit watches over me from heaven, to Brian, who is my steadfast pillar and the rock of Gibraltar in my life, and to my dad, who departed this world too soon. I owe a debt of gratitude to my relatives and friends for their loving tender care. Special recognition is extended to Dr. Elaine Jarchow, Dr. John Thomas, Dr. Bob Fenske, Dr. Portfolio Diaz, Ann Malveaux, John Hurd, Ron Galatolo, and Wei Shao for their guidance and mentorship, which have been integral to my personal and professional achievements.

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To all the parents, students, counselors, and colleagues who have stood behind me, championing the cause, I present these entry points as a guide for all future students in the world to chart a smooth and enriching path to study in the U.S.A.

**Jing Luan, Ph.D.**

***Provost Emeritus, San Mateo & Past President, AIRC***



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We extend our deepest gratitude to the STAR Scholars Network for their unwavering support, expertise, and guidance, which were instrumental in the creation and success of this publication. Special thanks to Dr. Krishna Bista, Dr. Uttam Gaulee, and the entire production team for their invaluable contributions and commitment to this project. We also recognize the crucial efforts of many individuals working behind the scenes, whose dedication played a key role in completing this project.

We are grateful to the Global Beca Foundation and College University Partnership (CUP) for their invaluable support in making this project successful. Without their contributions, bringing this project to fruition would have been impossible.

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Their dedication and expertise have been pivotal in realizing this project, and their efforts are gratefully acknowledged.

Editors

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# Foreword

Clay Harmon, EdD

*Executive Director, AIRC: The Association of International Enrollment Management*

This book's central organizing concept - the multiple entry points to a United States bachelor degree for international students - originated as a presentation session at AIRC: The Association of International Enrollment Management's inaugural spring symposium in 2022. Further discussion and development at the 2022 AIRC annual conference generated the impetus for two separate but related endeavors: the book itself, as well as AIRC's Recommendations for Advancing International Student Recruitment and Enrollment in the United States. Thus, while AIRC is not directly involved in the book's authorship or content, we are closely connected to and strongly supportive of its general theme and thesis.

AIRC is a standards development organization, recognized by the US Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission as experts in international student recruitment and enrollment. We develop and promote standards of ethical best practice for institutions and for international student recruitment agencies; offer professional development through events like the spring symposium and conference, webinars, etc.; act as a professional membership association, bringing together diverse practitioners and thought leaders; and advocate for international students and international enrollment with US federal agencies and other industry players. In recent years AIRC has taken part in a conversation about crafting a comprehensive US strategy for international education. The entry points - as elucidated in AIRC's recommendations and expounded in much greater detail in this book - are central to AIRC's position in advocating for a strong, centralized US international education strategy.

The AIRC recommendations are fairly simple and straightforward, yet they challenge the status quo by encouraging policymakers and practitioners to act with intention to advance all sectors of US postsecondary education in their international student mobility efforts. The recommendations are:

1. Promote the many and diverse US educational entry points to expand access to international student mobility;
2. Facilitate connections between entry points to support international student mobility.

By embracing the entry points model, the international education ecosystem composed of government, academia, and supporting organizations can tap into what is arguably US higher education's greatest strength: the sheer number and vast diversity of postsecondary institutions. No other country approaches the US in terms of breadth, access, quality, and flexibility in vocational and higher education. Despite these unique assets, however, international enrollments tend to concentrate in a relatively small number of institutions and in a narrow band of institutional types, meaning that opportunities for international student mobility in US higher education are significantly underdeveloped and underutilized. Media biases, unequal distribution of institutional resources, and traditional modes of thinking have passively contributed to this (in AIRC's view) suboptimal state of affairs. We champion the proactive, intentional and sustained advancement of all the diverse entry points to enable broad and equitable international enrollment growth in institutions and communities across the US. This book represents a vital, concrete step toward such advancement by crafting a common terminology, identifying and highlighting the various entry points, and enumerating potential next steps in their development. AIRC is thrilled to support the project and eager to observe and participate in what happens next.

## **Bio**

**Clay Harmon** is the executive director of AIRC: The Association of International Enrollment Management, a professional association and standards development organization dedicated to quality assurance and standards of best practice in international student recruitment and enrollment. Prior to joining AIRC, he had an extensive career in international higher education, including both study abroad and international enrollment management. Clay holds a BA in Asian Studies from the University of Puget Sound (Tacoma, Washington), an EdM in Higher Education from Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts), and an EdD in Leadership for Educational

Equity in Higher Education from the University of Colorado Denver. His academic interests include the history of US-China educational exchange and English language proficiency requirements for international applicants. E-mail: [clay.harmon@airc-education.org](mailto:clay.harmon@airc-education.org)



## Chapter 1

---

# The Ten Entry Points to U.S. Education

Jing Luan

*Provost Emeritus, San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley, United States*

Larry Lifson

*President & CEO, Global School Access, United States*

Andrew H. Chen

*CEO, WholeRen Group and F1 Hire, LLC, United States*

George Kacenga

*VP Enrollment Management, William Paterson University, United States*

### **Abstract**

This chapter explores the evolving landscape of international student mobility, highlighting the urgent need to modernize conceptions of international education. It emphasizes a data-driven, open-minded approach to aligning policies and opportunities with the dynamic preferences and paths of Gen Z students navigating an increasingly complex and digitalized educational sphere. Drawing upon recent global surveys, the text unveils the distinct preferences of these students, advocating for a deeper appreciation of the nuanced ten entry points to U.S. undergraduate degrees. It encapsulates strategic insights from the 2022 AIRC symposium, fostering dialog around actionable strategies and student engagement in the context of global mobility.

**Keywords:** International student mobility, Gen Z preferences, global learning, data-driven approach, student engagement, educational pathways, UTA, UFA, entry points

## Introduction

International student mobility has significantly accelerated over the past few years, yet our understanding and definition of international education have remained static. A modernized perspective of international education is necessary to mirror the current realities of student mobility, ensuring that policies, programs, and opportunities align with this updated definition. This modernized perspective should be grounded in facts and evidence, promoting transparency and open-mindedness. It should inspire readers to think beyond conventional practices and encourage them to set aside biases, facilitating a courageous dialogue on how prospective students can and should engage with global student mobility.

Today, international students have a wider array of choices regarding programs, funding, and destinations, all playing out on a global stage. They can select from a broad spectrum of noncredit and credit-bearing experiences, combining these experiences in various ways to suit their needs. Many international students are keen on integrating multiple academic experiences to enhance their education and skill development, serving their personal and career aspirations. They seek accessibility, value, relevance, and flexibility in their educational choices, encompassing application processes, admissions, enrollment, course selection, learning modalities, credit articulation, transfer, and study abroad.

As the primary audience for this book and our collective future, Gen Zs and Millennials are no longer the traditional students that institutions are accustomed to. A Deloitte survey of 22,000 Gen Zs and Millennials across 44 countries revealed that this group is highly connected, to the point of being unable to disconnect. They are deeply engaged in societal issues, often finding themselves overwhelmed by them, and are profoundly concerned about balancing life while worrying about wealth disparity, inequality, and climate change. Comparatively, they face more stress, grapple with more issues, and struggle to cope with the impact of COVID-19 in their young lives (Deloitte, 2023).

StudyPortals (2017) found that 77% of surveyed Gen Zs preferred studying in English-speaking countries. However, their interest in the 4 sectors of U.S. higher education yielded mixed results. According to a Gallup report, most Gen Zs view college education as important (Nicola, T. P. 2023). Yet, several studies suggest that Gen Zs may not consider college the sole option. They also exhibited trust issues with colleges in general (Edelman, J., 2023) and expressed concerns about affordability (Schwartz, N. ed., 2023).

These surveys provide insight into students' preferred study destinations but not the means to achieve them. It is, therefore, essential to examine and understand the paths they take and the resources they leverage to pursue an undergraduate degree in the U.S.—the focus of this chapter. The starting point is the initial venue where a prospective student engages with global student mobility—the driving force behind this book.

We begin by viewing the student journey to obtain a U.S. undergraduate degree as a path with multiple entry points. An entry point is where a student first interacts with services and offerings related to global student mobility:

1. University Freshman Admissions (UFA)
2. University Transfer Admissions (UTA)
3. Lateral Transfer
4. Gateway English
5. Institution Specific Pathways
6. University Credit Programs (UCP)
7. Cross-Borders X+Y Programs
8. Study Abroad
9. Stackable Credits via Career and Technical Education (CTE)
10. Short-term Certification/Non-Degree Learner

It is worth noting that an entry point serves as a significant opportunity for engagement between prospective students and service providers, akin to how Disney views each visitor interaction as a 'magic moment'. Some entry points, such as University Freshman Admissions (UFA), are well-known and widely utilized, transitioning students from high school to college. However, other entry points are less recognized and underutilized. All entry points offer avenues for pursuing an undergraduate degree in the U.S. Some, like University Transfer Admissions (UTA) related to community college transfer, hold substantial intrinsic value. While not all entry points are created equal, collectively or individually, they contribute to educational equity in the U.S.

In its inaugural symposium in 2022, the Association of International Enrollment Management (AIRC) gathered a diverse group of K-12 and higher education experts and practitioners to highlight the importance of entry points to both students and service providers. A keynote session dedicated substantial time to identifying the primary entry points, while breakout sessions focused on formulating action-oriented recommendations.

Fueled by the enthusiasm and outcomes of the symposium's entry-point session, this chapter provides a comprehensive presentation of the entry points. Each entry point is detailed, supported by relevant data, and its impact on global student mobility is discussed.

### **Entry Point #1: University Freshman Admissions (High School, Then College)**

In 2018, the College University Partnership, an initiative recommended by colleagues at Stanford University and led by UC Berkeley and San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley, along with 130 predominantly U.S. universities, rebranded this entry point as University Freshman Admissions (UFA). This effort aimed to systematically recognize and standardize the two primary approaches students use to enter undergraduate institutions: UFA and University Transfer Admission (UTA).

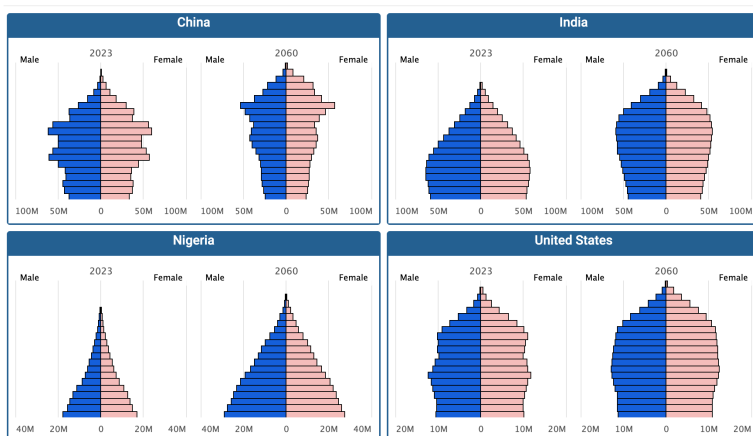
UFA is the most recognized entry point among all high school seniors, whether domestic or international. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), out of a total of 858,395 undergraduate international students in the U.S. in 2022-2023, only 42,547 were studying in community colleges, resulting in a 95% to 5% split (IIE Open Doors, 2023). UFA has been practiced since the inception of studying abroad in the U.S. and is almost considered a rite of passage. A significant industry has evolved around this annual ritual. Currently, there are 13,180 English-medium international schools worldwide, in which English is the primary language of instruction, enrolling 5.8 million students and generating \$53.8 billion annually (ISC Research, 2022). The Big 4 countries (the USA, the UK, Canada, and Australia) attract 50% of the students and 80% of the tuition revenue. HolonIQ (2022) found that studying abroad is a \$196 billion industry (defined by expenditures in tuition, accommodations, food, retail, insurance, tech, and transport), and it is projected to reach \$433 billion in 2030, with an annual increase of 7.4%. In relation to these fiscal numbers, HolonIQ projects that the current enrollment of 5 million international students will reach 8 million by 2030.

Parents, government offices, universities, and ancillary businesses such as testing, counseling, visa processing, travel, campus tours, dorms, and housing, among others, have collectively built an ecosystem that focuses on the pride, prestige, and privilege of high school students transitioning directly to elite colleges. This is the largest investment in some countries next to purchasing a family home.

On the provider side, Ivy League schools are purported to create an artificial scarcity and desirability (Schisgall and Shan, 2023) by keeping their admission numbers low. In fact, each “new low” in annual admissions seems to be celebrated (Grose, 2023). In a publication by the Harvard Crimson, Schisgall and Shan questioned how Harvard could contribute to social justice if it does not scale up. The strong allure of these exclusive schools tends to divert attention away from other high-quality institutions that could be equally beneficial to the ever-growing number of prospective students.

Research indicates that the number of global high school graduates will continue to increase. The Wittgenstein Centre, in its modest projection scenario, showed that the world population with tertiary education will double from 1 billion to 2.5 billion in 2060 (Lutz, Goujon, & KC et al., 2018).

Moreover, the U.S. Census Bureau projection shows that the general population growth in the U.S. has stagnated, while Nigeria is producing large younger populations (United States Census, 2023). It is reasonable to assume that a domestic decrease in the student base would require an influx of international students to balance the books and to keep the institutions running.



*Figure 1: Distribution of populations by age by country. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.*

According to the HolonIQ, approximately 75% of global mobilizers are from Asia and Africa, with most seeking an English-based degree. These trends have great implications for all concerned. If the postsecondary population worldwide is to double in two decades while the U.S. student population remains unchanged at best, the institutions in the U.S. must develop sweeping strategies now to welcome and accommodate the incoming global mobilizers that, among other things, will help keep the U.S. institutions operating.

It is easy to conclude that the overall trend is favorable for English-speaking countries. Generally, there will be a sufficient number of international students for every institution. Therefore, maintaining the status quo might seem comforting because ‘if it ain’t broke’, why fix it? However, this attitude overlooks many students who, despite their talent, have given up due to the seemingly insurmountable challenges of University Freshman Admissions (UFA). Even for the small population eligible for UFA, the situation for U.S. institutions is not a straightforward linear projection. Increased competition for international students from other countries is expected. The world may redraw geopolitical maps and form new alliances. The influence of Western philosophy may be diminishing, and English-speaking countries may struggle to maintain their supremacy over scientific discoveries that have led to the U.S.’s current position in international education.

The characteristics of future generations are likely to differ significantly from those of typical international students on our campuses today. We can reasonably assume the following:

- They will demand flexibility in modality, course offerings, and length of studies.
- They may not all have the same financial capabilities.
- They will desire a wider range of school choices.

In summary, the traditional UFA approach, where high school seniors fill out applications in Grade 11, take a series of standard tests, and secure enough funding for all four years of study, may not remain the dominant entry point to ‘go to college.’ Instead, other entry points may become increasingly appealing.

## University Freshman Admission (UFA) at a Glance:

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Route: High School, Then College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Most Popular, well-known, well-resourced, and highly profitable</li> <li>● Well-established product and supply chain</li> <li>● World population projection looks favorable</li> </ul>
Features: Apply while in Grade 11 Higher Eligibility 10+ Requirements \$\$\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Issue: Gen Z           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ They will demand flexibility in modality, course offerings, and length of studies.</li> <li>○ They may not all have the same ability to pay.</li> <li>○ They will desire more choices of schools.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Issue: student must live with rejection from their one-shot deal in university application</li> <li>● Issue: Information bias, one-shot deal, student unrealistic attempt and student self-selecting out</li> </ul>

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## Entry Point #2: University Transfer Admissions (Community College Transfer)

University Transfer Admission (UTA) is a widely practiced entry point within the U.S., though it is less recognized internationally. This promising entry point has gradually gained attention from international educators worldwide, thanks to the persistent efforts of community college representatives and others involved. In essence, UTA becomes possible after a student has earned credit for a lower-division program of study (typically the first two years of university) at a community college. The community college then assists the student in searching for and applying to universities that best fit their academic and personal goals. The rest of the process is routine. This approach, which is distinctly different from University Freshman Admission (UFA), simplifies the selection process for students while expanding the range of universities they can choose from (See Chapter 5, University Transfer Admission for a detailed comparison of the eligibility and process of UFA and UTA).

The foundation for UTA was laid in the 1900s when the University of Chicago established the first community college in Illinois. California later implemented a systematic co-recognition of courses taught at California community colleges and the California State Universities (CSU) and the Universities of California (UC), ensuring consistency and legal protection. The California legislature mandated that lower-division courses, typically known as general education courses in the first two years of a program of study at each community college, be articulated with each university in the state. Moreover, a sufficient number of courses in each lower-division degree program must be available and articulated with each university, thereby facilitating semi-automatic student transfers.

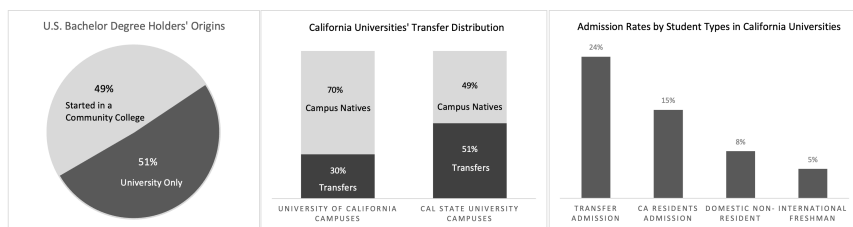
To implement the Legislature's intent, faculty from universities and community colleges convene annually to review, approve, and update each course in the articulation network. In recent years, the state has developed ASSIST.org to make this information publicly accessible. Interested individuals can use the website to identify which university course corresponds to a course (articulated course) at a community college, and vice versa. Consequently, they can determine which courses are necessary to fulfill a university's transfer requirements for upper-division studies. Upon admission, a student who transfers to a university through UTA is considered a junior.

These efforts have unlocked a plethora of opportunities. As credit forms the basis for course articulation and transfer, high school students can attend community colleges to fulfill the credit requirements of both high schools and community colleges. This process is known as Concurrent Enrollment/Dual Enrollment. Institutions have assigned various names to this initiative, including College Connection, Running Start, Bridge Program, and High School Completion.

Some students may apply for transfer with less than two years' worth of program study by further leveraging credit for admission to institutions offering bachelor's degrees. For instance, Arizona State University (ASU) accepts community college students with only one year of lower-division study, allowing these students to enter ASU as sophomores. Another variation occurs when an international student enrolls in a community college and soon begins applying to universities as a freshman. Compared to applying overseas as a high school senior, this approach offers students significant advantages, including familiarity with college learning, the U.S. education system, and American culture. They can utilize nearly free campus resources for application assistance and have the opportunity to physically tour their dream university campuses, or more conveniently, meet with university representatives visiting their campuses where they study.

Transfer variations include lower-division university students moving to a community college to improve their academic standing or for an opportunity to transfer back to a different university. These students recognize the potential of University Transfer Admission (UTA) through reverse transfer, leaving the university for a community college to leverage its transfer benefits, with the ultimate goal of ascending to a highly selective university via UTA. There can be numerous reasons for this transfer: students may find the current university environment physically challenging, struggle with the independent learning environment of a university, face potential expulsion due to poor grades, and/or grapple with academic English or cultural adjustment. In such cases, a fresh start at a community college may be the only alternative to returning home. Regardless

of these students' backgrounds and circumstances, community colleges welcome them and work diligently to prepare them for upward transfer.



*Figure 2 a, b, c. Transfer Admissions and Distributions in California and the U.S.*

In California, 30% of juniors (3rd-year students) at the University of California (UC) campuses are community college transfers (University of California Office of the President, 2015). According to the Key Facts from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2023), 51% of students at California State Universities (CSUs) are community college transfers. At UC Berkeley, the transfer admission rate is 4 times greater than the freshman admission rate (24% vs 6%) (University of California InfoCenter, 2019). The National Center for Science and Engineering Students (NCSES, 2019) reports that 48% of bachelor's degree earners in 2007 began at a community college. Sandra Craft from ThinkImpact validated this ratio using 2015–2016 data, where 49% of all individuals who completed their undergraduate studies initially enrolled in a community college (Craft S., 2021).

Alvin Parker reported a total of 800,000 baccalaureate international students studying in the U.S. in 2022 (Parker, 2023), and for the same year, the ICEF Monitor reported 60,000 international students attending community colleges (ICEF, 2022). Factoring in the data from IIE, the percentage of international students who attend community colleges is approximately 5-7%. Compared to the 45-50% rate at which American students initially choose community colleges, there is a significant difference between international and American freshmen students who choose community colleges almost 10 times more often than their peer international students. Assuming all conditions are constant, international students are not very different from American youths in terms of their goals and finances; many of them can barely afford all four years of education at a university.

An increasing number of people are recognizing the unfavorable imbalance against community colleges when 95% of international undergraduate applications are directed to 4-year institutions, leaving a mere 5% for University

Transfer Admission (UTA). In an article published in PIE, Luan (2021) projected a conservative increase of 40% in international students at community colleges, accounting for the decrease caused by COVID-19. Ideally, considering that 45% of American undergraduate students begin their journey towards obtaining a bachelor's degree through UTA at community colleges, there should be a nearly tenfold increase (~360,000) in international students at community colleges in order to achieve international enrollment equity.

From another perspective, the 360,000 students who do not attend community colleges are overpaying their tuition annually by close to \$7 billion, based on the difference between tuition of \$8000/year at a community college and \$25,000/year at a state university. This overpayment would be even greater if we consider private universities. Leaving these 360,000 students where they are, community colleges indeed have enough slots for 360,000 international students who aspire to earn a degree from a top university but lack the financial resources or access to testing, academic preparation, and other privileges associated with UFA. The reason they are not in community colleges is primarily due to a system where the focus is on prestige rather than practicality. These students are victims of misinformation and a lack of information (Luan, 2021).

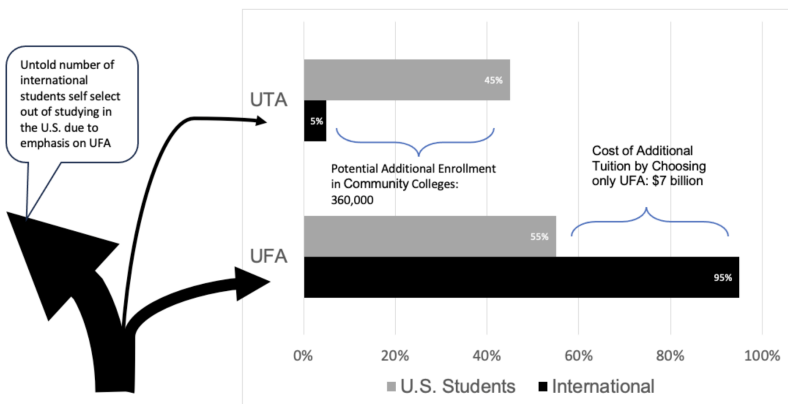


Figure 3. Costs of emphasis on UFA in student numbers, tuition and more.

As this chapter highlights the business aspect, it is apt to use the financial term 'Efficient Market', which implies that the stock market price reflects all available trends, decisions, and trades. The stock price adjusts according to all pertinent information, thereby reflecting all possibilities and achieving optimality. However, the information market for international education is, in fact, an inefficient market. The statistics in this section serve as a prime example. Even those operating the market, such as high school counselors, are not utilizing

all available and relevant information. Surveys conducted by one of the authors revealed that 80% of foreign high school counselors felt inadequately informed about U.S. community college transfer. Those more informed reported resistance from principals and parents when introducing UTA to students.

This significant lack of public awareness, whether intentional or unintentional, results in an inefficient higher education market and consequently, inequity. In 1863, Frederick Douglass spoke about ‘popular error and unpopular truth,’ a phrase fittingly descriptive of this issue. Despite the immense benefits, high success rates, and equalizing opportunities of UTA, businesses profiting from UFA and parents’ pride in their children’s attempts to gain admission to top schools have collectively rendered UTA an unpopular truth. Indeed, pride and prejudice get in the way of finding the ideal path for global youth seeking education in the U.S.

In the true spirit of global mobility, with a focus on students’ interests, it can be postulated that universities should significantly concentrate on recruitment from their local community colleges. The student base will be larger, the diversity richer, and the students themselves better prepared after two years of U.S. college life. Granted, structural changes such as course articulation and transfer guarantees are necessary, and behavioral changes are needed to shift from a model of universities recruiting solely and exclusively for their own institution admissions to a model of collaboration with community colleges to place students where they best fit.

University Transfer Education (UTA) at a Glance:

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Route:	● Less popular, less known, low budget, only profitable if volume
Community College Transfer	● More profitable for transfer institutions
Features:	● No discernable market/supply chain
Year-Round Application	● World population projection looks favorable
Lower Eligibility (by law)	● Issue: must combat pride and prejudice and misinformation
Few Requirements (by law)	● Issue: course articulation not universal and consistent
\$\$\$\$\$	● Issue: housing, transportation

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### Entry Point #3: Lateral Transfer

Lateral transfer primarily refers to transfers between 4-year institutions. There are two subgroups of lateral transfers. An intra-transfer occurs when a student

moves from one program to another within the institution, and an inter-transfer occurs when a student transfers between institutions of the same or similar levels, typically from one 4-year institution to another or from a liberal arts college to a university. Case in point: Harvard accepts transfer students, yet they are almost exclusively students who laterally transfer from another highly selective 4-year school.

Lateral transfers between universities are far smaller in number. It is for students who have already utilized a prior entry point to gain entrance to a university.

Lateral transfers from one community college to another are actually moves between 2-year institutions before students are enrolled in a bachelor's program. Community college lateral transfers are fairly common.

Lateral Transfer At a Glance:

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Route:	● Small number
Between Similar Universities	● Entry point in the sense of continuing the path to undergraduate degrees
Between Community Colleges	● Practiced in both highly selective and community college institutions
Features:	● Issue: Must have specific rationale, and handled on a case-by-case basis
Intra transfer	
Inter transfer	

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#### **Entry Point #4: Gateway English (Language School, Then College)**

English, spoken by over 20% of the world's population and widely used by another 50%, has become the global *lingua franca*. Specifically, anyone aiming to pursue an undergraduate degree in the U.S. must have an above-average command of English reading, writing, and speaking skills. Without this proficiency, all other eligibility requirements become irrelevant. EnglishUSA views English learning as the initial touchpoint for a global learner, while Duolingo elevates English to the status of a 'language of freedom'. Naturally, studying English forms a student's first impression of American culture and is a part of their formative education. It is a significant gateway for attracting international students to English-speaking countries, specifically the U.S.

While English is part of the curriculum in secondary and even elementary schools in many countries, studying in an English-speaking country requires a distinct set of language skills. Students may have 'studied' English in their home country's high schools but may not have 'used' English. If they decide

to study in anglophone countries, most would need full-time courses requiring 18 or more classroom hours per week for 1 to 3 months, depending on their initial English-level assessment. A course of study designed to enable students to reach the level of English required for studying in the U.S. is typically called an Intensive English Program (IEP). These programs model the U.S. Foreign Service Officers' language acquisition requirements (The General Accounting Office, GAO, 2017), where a trainee must complete a 40-hour week for up to six months. Providers for this type of intensive English training first emerged in the 1960s (Alberola, 2021). The largest IEP providers include ELS, Kaplan, independent language schools, or programs affiliated with or directly offered by U.S. higher institutions, totaling around 600 (Recine, 2014). Currently, 71% of a total of 75,379 intensive English learners hail from five countries (Baer, 2021).

#### Gateway English at a Glance:

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<b>Route:</b> Language School, Then College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A good source for undergraduate matriculation (particularly if IEP is connected with the institution)</li> </ul>
<b>Features:</b> Multiple outlets (some well-established) First Impression of the USA \$\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● English as lingua franca is a plus</li> <li>● USA as a destination that dominates the Five Eyes nations is also a plus</li> <li>● Issue: visa approval for IEP in the USA</li> <li>● Issue: may still use standard tools such as TOEFL, IELTS, and Duolingo as a measure of eligibility</li> </ul>

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These language programs are sensitive to geopolitical and economic changes, such as the fall of the Shah in Iran in 1979, the termination of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program by the Saudi government in 2016, the September 11 Terrorist Attack in 2001, the SARS respiratory outbreak in 2003, the COVID-19 outbreak that started in 2019, and the post-COVID slowdown of Chinese students. The group of IEP providers that require students to arrive in the U.S. to begin their language studies has experienced a decline (Civinini of PIE News, 2018) prior to the emergence of COVID-19, during which the decline accelerated to 49%. Several researchers, such as Jean-Marc Alberola (Alberole, 2021), have proposed the benefit of taking a long view of the \$50 billion English Language Training (ELT) industry. As the industry matures through crises, providers and U.S. institutions should closely monitor the growth and, conversely, the decline by country. For instance, South America, led by Brazil and Columbia, is on the rise, while Asian countries will see a sharp drop, despite Japan and China still accounting for close to a quarter of all IEP students.

### **Entry Point #5: Institution-Specific Pathways (or Institution-Designated Pathways)**

For Ivy League schools, their high selectivity results in more applicants than admitted students. The situation is markedly different for community colleges, which must vie for attention abroad to establish themselves as a viable degree path. Institutions with ‘university’ in their names have a distinct advantage when positioned alongside a community college. In many instances, universities collaborate with community colleges or contract with for-profit entities to recruit students into the university’s pathway or bridge programs rather than using community colleges as feeders. These programs target students who may not have met all the academic requirements but are admitted to the university to complete their academic preparation before matriculating into the official degree program (Student Solutions, 2023). The first year is primarily focused on preparing students for matriculation into the actual freshman class. Once they meet the hosting institution’s requirements, they become regular lower-division students. As these students typically start on the campus where they will eventually matriculate into the university’s undergraduate programs, parents are provided with a sense of connection and a clear path for their child’s future as a university student (Redden, 2018b).

Initially, as a way to better prepare incoming students for their foundational knowledge, pathway programs have evolved to become a recruitment arm of the university and a revenue source for both the university and the companies, they contracted to perform the dual duties of recruitment and education. At one point, there were 50 such entities working for U.S. universities. The term now associated with pathway providers is ‘service providers’. Several well-known service providers offering pathway programs include INTO, Shorelight Education, Navitas, Cambridge Education Group, Study Group, ELS, Kings Education, ApplyBoard, and Kaplan (Redden, 2018a).

Service providers have seen significant expansion since their inception, transforming their business model within the institutions they contract with or diversifying their businesses. This expansion has led to issues between the universities and institutions that should be resolved soon for the benefit of students (Redden, 2018b). While the need for service providers will persist, Luan, in his 2017 keynote address titled “Mega Trend 2020 - Agents of Change”, noted that community colleges, with their lower tuition, extensive coverage of the continental U.S. geography, and large number of university transfer packs, can supplement and, to a certain extent, collaborate with service providers in sending students to 4-year institutions (Luan, 2017).

## Institution-Specific Pathways (Institution-Designated Pathways) Service Providers at a Glance:

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Route:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Excellent source for undergraduate matriculation</li> </ul>
Institutional Foundation Studies, Then Intra Matriculation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Directly connecting with the undergraduate study institution</li> <li>● Clearly, designated institution - eliminating noise and distraction</li> </ul>
Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Issue: Choice of institutions tends to be within those partnering with the service provider</li> </ul>
Apply for a designated university with fewer eligibility	
\$\$\$\$\$	

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### Entry Point #6: University Credit Programs

Credits, the building blocks of Western education, are measurable units of learning that remain consistent across institutions, irrespective of time, place, and other learning contexts, as per the Omporn Regal of the World Bank (Regal,1992). The Carnegie Unit, developed in 1906, standardized student assessments due to the highly varied and low-validity approaches of oral or written processes used at the time. For college, a Carnegie Unit equates to one hour of classroom learning and two hours of extracurricular activity per week per semester, according to the United States Department of Education (US DOE, 2006). Units and credits are interchangeable, but units become credits after students complete their learning, as per the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2021). Institutions use units for operational purposes such as resource allocation and curriculum offerings, while students use credits to build portfolios towards a degree.

Credits serve as an indication of actual learning outcomes and proof of competency. In this context, universities traditionally evaluate the credits obtained by international students prior to their admission as a measure of their academic preparedness. The most common approaches involve surrogate coursework in Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB). This coursework primarily serves as an indicator of students' academic aptitude and a badge of honor. Additionally, at the university's discretion, this coursework may be considered a credit substitute for the university's coursework. While the advantages are clear, the drawbacks of AP and IB include the fact that they are often not taught by college professors and not in a college classroom setting governed by college schedules.

Not all students interested in studying in the U.S. have access to these credentialing and credit-bearing programs. In fact, only a minority of schools in foreign countries can afford these programs, exacerbating educational access inequity between the rich and the poor. A search on the AP site owned by the College Board revealed that, from 2020 to 2023, there were 18,270 AP programs worldwide, with 90% or 16,586 located in the U.S. (AP, 2023). Large sourcing countries for international education have surprisingly fewer AP programs: 8 in India and 391 in China. Furthermore, with 58,023 regular high schools in India (Kaishyap, 2023) and 14,585 in China (Statistica, 2023), the presence of AP is concentrated in a very small number of schools: .01% in India and 2.6% in China.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) program, headquartered in Geneva, lists 5,700 schools with IB programs across 159 countries (IB, 2023). For countries that are major sources of international students, there are 210 in India (IB World Schools, 2023) and 166 in China (IB Organization, 2023). The prevalence of IB in these countries' high schools is 0.4% in India and 1.1% in China. This raises ethical questions in education: Do these small numbers in China and India indicate that only a small number of students are interested in studying abroad or only those who can afford it? Or, are only a small number of students given the opportunity, while the rest, equally talented and interested, are excluded from equal opportunities? The fact is clear: talent is ubiquitous, but opportunities are not.

French philosopher Auguste Comte theorized a three-stage process for social change. In his 2016 farewell speech, Barack Obama alluded to the zigzagging effect of the political path. The debate is over regarding the pros and cons of online learning. The time has come for institutions to consider bringing learning to where the students are. In this way, students take college courses taught by a college professor following a college schedule. Research by Michigan Virtual (Michigan Virtual, 2022) shows that Gen Zs and Gen Alphas are born into a digital life; their interaction with the world is through digital media. They are not only more familiar and comfortable with online learning, but they also demand that education be brought to where they are.

With the rapid changes in learning modalities brought about by COVID-19, the field has taken solid steps to dismantle the long-held bias against online learning. More students and their parents have generally welcomed online learning from the U.S. According to the World Economic Forum, 73% of students were online learners in 2020, compared to 33% in 2017 (World Economic Forum, 2022). Surveys by Educause showed students preferring mostly or completely online courses increased more than 3-fold from 9% in 2020 to 29% in 2021

(Robert, 2022). In summary, universities can and have embraced online learning to transform higher education in line with the equally rapid evolution of online learning technology. An intriguing opportunity arises when students remain in their home countries, opting for online courses from various U.S. higher learning institutions to accrue credits and assemble them into an academic degree. Should U.S. institutions ignore this cafeteria education and insist on credits earned within their own institution, or should they permit students to apply for graduation diplomas utilizing credits obtained from a wide range of accredited institutions? Perhaps Chapter 15 on the Bologna Regional Reforms and Cultural Currency holds some answers to this provocative question.

Another method to obtain credit is through credit by exam. Originally termed by the College Board and later understood to mean ‘earning college credit toward your degree without ever setting foot in a classroom’ and ‘the best-kept secrets of the higher-education world,’ institutions use the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and a lesser-known program called DANTES Subject Standardized Tests to allow students to test into ownership of credits (MyDegreeGuide.com, 2023).

University Credit Program (UCP) at a Glance:

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Route: Accumulate earned college credits toward a degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Good source for engaging future students</li> <li>● AP/IB are de facto UCP providers</li> <li>● All college learning should be regarded as accumulation of credits</li> </ul>
Features: Earn credits from any accredited institutions over time \$\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gen Z will demand ability to earn credits, not necessarily directly and immediately for a specific degree</li> <li>● Can be done in multiple ways, anytime</li> <li>● Issue: value confusion over credits from online or community colleges</li> <li>● Issue: credits not working like credit cards</li> <li>● Issue: lack of meaningful paths and instructions for its use</li> </ul>

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Since a credit is a credit regardless of the time, place, or modality, it is reasonable to deduce that summer programs, short courses, and credits from seemingly unrelated majors should be convertible and acceptable as academic credit for degree purposes.

Now, the revolutionary idea is to dismantle the credit turf so that the credit earned by a student is one that they can take to any institution, domestic or abroad, to

meet admission requirements and to fulfill degree requirements. Credits should belong to the student, not the institution. Furthermore, credit can be earned through diverse means, including credit by exam.

### **Entry Point #7: Cross Borders X+Y Programs**

These mainly refer to programs between institutions. Specifically, for the purposes of this book, they are programs involving student exchange mobility. Roy Chan succinctly summarized this entry point as

*“international joint and dual degree programs serve three primary purposes: academic, economic, and political. In the academic realm in particular, international joint and dual degrees enhance the quality of teaching and learning, promote academic excellence, and develop intercultural competencies and awareness. In economic terms, international joint and dual degrees meet the demand of the knowledge-based economy, while in terms of politics, they promote national identity and foster collaboration and cooperation with developed and transitional economies. (Chan, 2021)*

The most notable cross-border academic partnerships include the following:

#### **U.S. and China:**

100,000 Strong Initiative

U.S. - China Fulbright Program

China Scholarship Council (CSC) U.S. Joint Research Ph.D. Fellowship Program

#### **U.S. and India**

Fulbright-Nehru Program

Obama-Singh 21st Century Knowledge Initiative

Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN)

#### **U.S. and European nations:**

Erasmus+ Program

Transatlantic Dual Degree Program

Jean Monnet Actions

Academic partnerships across borders have existed for hundreds of years. For a significant but lesser-known example, William Kirby recounts the origins of

some of China's top universities as a result of partnerships with the U.S. in the 1870s. In recent years, there have been more diverse collaborations between the U.S. and other nations. To make sorting easier, practitioners have used math equations such as 1+1, 4+0, and 1+3. The first number is usually the academic year(s) a student must satisfy in a foreign country before arriving in the U.S. to study. Recently, community colleges have also formally or informally participated in these exchange programs. It is often known as 2+2, meaning 2 years in a community college abroad and 2 years in a U.S. university. A more recent example is 1+1+2, which indicates that students complete one academic year of study in a foreign country and then complete another year of study at a community college in the U.S. before transferring to a U.S. university.

The common features of these methods are as follows:

1. They are relationships between two institutions, not system-wide.
2. They are based on where the students earn their credit by academic year.
3. The credits taken by students were predetermined carefully between the two institutions.
4. Institutions may agree to co-recognize each other's credit or one-way recognition.
5. Institutions may agree to a dual-degree model or just an entry point for students to reach U.S. universities.
6. Students must be enrolled in a foreign institution and may be considered pre-matriculated students by the U.S. university.
7. Other prerequisites include accreditation of the two institutions, sharing of faculty, division of revenue, handling of student records, and personnel management.

Cross-Borders X+Y Programs at a Glance:

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Route: Enroll in programs in a foreign institution for a degree in the USA or both	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Easily double program enrollments for a U.S. institution</li> <li>● Good revenue source for both sides</li> <li>● Supported by foreign governments - a plus</li> </ul>
Features: Good for location bound Economical \$\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● More popular for mid-tier selectivity institutions</li> <li>● Issue: program management and quality of teaching</li> <li>● Issue: foreign government specific requirements over academic freedom and mode of delivery</li> </ul>

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According to Chan, who cited studies by SUNY, in recent times, there were 306 international campuses in 37 countries enrolling 180,000 students (p89). While there are no precise data, joint and dual degrees should be many times the number of 306 campuses.

### Entry Point #8: Study Abroad

Widely practiced between the U.S. and European institutions, as many as 44% of U.S. students who study abroad are concentrated in five European countries, according to NAFSA, with seven out of ten students choosing Europe as their destination (NAFSA, 2023). For practical purposes, cross-pollination between anglophone countries and the rest of the world, particularly developing and underdeveloped countries, is urgently needed.

In 2016, the ratio of incoming U.S. students studying in China to Chinese students studying in the U.S. was 1:30. Post-COVID-19, the number of American students in China dropped to a few hundred, precisely 382 in 2020-2021, as reported by Statistica (Statistica, 2023), down from 2,481 a year earlier, as reported by the United States Department of State (2023). Compared to the 290,086 Chinese students studying in the U.S. between 2021 and 2021, as reported in the Open Doors by IIE (IIE, 2022), the ratio is a staggering 1:760.

Study Abroad at a Glance:

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Route: American college students conduct short or long-term study abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “Bring the USA to Your Campus” helps with partnerships</li> <li>● American students as ambassadors to attract future foreign students to US</li> <li>● Issue: typically much shorter than inflow to the U.S.</li> </ul>
Features: Prepackaged study tours \$\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Issue: most go to Europe</li> <li>● Issue: often treated as a fancy trip, a youth experience, not part of core curriculum</li> </ul>

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Only recently have more U.S. students started to explore other continents. This trend is emerging, but the numbers are relatively low, falling short of Michelle Obama’s call for Americans to step out of their comfort zone and immerse themselves in foreign cultures.

While studying abroad is often discussed in the context of enriching the experiences of U.S. students and fulfilling their academic needs, the benefits of

American students' presence on foreign campuses are less frequently mentioned. Their interactions with students in their host country create meaningful and valuable contact points that can potentially reinforce the welcoming culture of the U.S., dispel myths, and make the prospect of studying in the U.S. more tangible for international students.

### **Entry Point #9: Stackable Credits via Career and Technical Education**

While not necessarily an undergraduate degree program, Career and Technical Education (CTE) offered by community colleges and some state universities can indeed influence students' decisions to pursue an undergraduate degree. Embracing the concept of 'no credit wasted,' community colleges have established stackable credential courses. The U.S. Department of Education defines stackable credentials as 'part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual's qualifications and help them move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs.' In simpler terms, 'stackable credentials can be viewed as building blocks where each short-term credential that a person earns builds into a higher-level credential.' There are two main types of stackable credentials: linear (for students with a purposeful goal) and situational (for all other students who may have accumulated credentials over the years or obtained learning through work-related requirements).

Short-term Certification / Non-Degree Training at a Glance:

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Route: Any type of training programs in the USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Catering toward working adults who may have influence over youths studying abroad in the USA</li> <li>● Training topics and approaches are flexible and diverse</li> </ul>
Features: Less demanding for time off work or away from home Prepackaged training tours \$\$\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A multibillion-dollar industry by itself</li> <li>● Issue: more working professionals and fewer teenage students</li> <li>● Issue: noncredit bearing</li> </ul>

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An ECMC Group and VICE Media study on Generation Z showed that these individuals are increasingly skeptical of 4-year degree studies. This skepticism fuels interest in short-term CTE and STEM programs that yield quick results and aid in job placement (Burt, 2021). A wide variety of programs exist under names such as VATEA, Tech Prep, Career Ladders, and Career Pathways. In many states, programs approved by the state are also authorized by the federal immigration

office to enroll international students under the M-1 visa. Aviation, renewable energy, coding, and auto-tech programs are popular with M-1 students. In California, credits from CTE programs are considered academic credits and can be applied to students' other degree studies.

### **Entry Point #10: Short-term Certification/Non-degree Training**

These programs are designed for specific training topics (such as management, soccer camp, etc.) and often last a week or a month, offering no academic credit. Some of the trainees are management-level personnel who may not immediately identify as students for an entry point. However, as parents, they often end up sending their children to study in the U.S. There are instances where groups of students attend summer camp programs at Harvard or Yale. While these programs do not offer academic credit, the students' experiences in the U.S. often influence their decision to pursue studies at a U.S. university. For instance, tourists visiting Honolulu have been known to enroll in universities, as fondly recounted by one of the chapter authors.

A relevant aspect of this topic pertains to international students who initially arrived in the U.S. on J-1 visas or even B-visitor visas. With a philosophy that encourages students to value and pursue their educational goals, educational institutions may view these students' experiences as entry points, potentially leading to their decision to complete an undergraduate degree. One of the authors personally experienced hosting a group of foreign high school students touring the U.S. who missed their connecting flight home. The day spent on his campus was so impactful to the students that they all applied and eventually came to study on his campus after finishing high school.

Stackable Credits via Career Technical Education at a Glance:

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Route:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any sequence of a certificate or degree may be used for satisfying another degree</li> </ul>
Use earned certificates or degrees or courses for another future degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helps with students who “stop and go”</li> <li>Issue: must have good understanding of the mapping of degrees</li> </ul>
Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issue: not often practiced cross institutions</li> </ul>
Value added	

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This chapter explores nine additional entry points beyond the conventional University Freshman Admission (UFA). It is incumbent upon educators to expand students' perspectives through deliberate presentations on all entry

points. For U.S. institutions, it is essential to monitor application data to ensure a diverse range of entry points aligns with the varied backgrounds of students. Rather than solely focusing on those who meet the universities' requirements, institutions should also identify students better suited for alternative entry points and purposefully direct them there.

Businesses should invest in these entry points, mirroring the efforts of pathway programs that address the needs of students who may not immediately meet all university eligibility standards. The scale of opportunities is directly proportional to our willingness to invest. It's important to remember that all students, irrespective of their abilities and challenges, are our students and our future.

To effectively address the issue of 'talent is everywhere, opportunities are not', we must proactively gather data, develop tools, and advocate for diverse entry points. Further recommendations for action are provided in the final chapter of this book.

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## Chapter 2

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# Diverse Entry Points to Degree Studies in the United States

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### **Abstract**

There are many entry points for more than one million international students at higher education institutions in the U.S. While international students may enroll directly in undergraduate or graduate programs or pursue study at community colleges, others take advantage of the many additional pipelines to higher education, including high school studies and intensive English programs. Drawing upon quantitative data from the *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange* and the Department of Homeland Security's Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), this chapter explores the landscape of international students at U.S. colleges and universities and the possible origins of their academic journeys, as well as pathways to study for prospective students looking to learn in the U.S.

**Keywords:** International students, global student mobility, Open Doors, SEVIS, high schools, community colleges, intensive English programs, entry points

## **Introduction**

The expansion of global mobility in secondary and tertiary education has created new and diverse opportunities for students to consider an academic degree outside of their home country. Many students who otherwise would not have been able to pursue academic study overseas are now considering their options and related factors around the quality of education, cost, and pathways to the workforce or additional academic study. With a globally mobile student population of more than 6 million in 2021 (UNESCO, 2023), the United States remains the top destination for international students. In 2022-2023, the United States hosted more than one million international students at U.S. colleges and universities and an additional 51,272 students at U.S. secondary institutions.

As the Association of International Enrollment Management (AIRC, 2023) *indicated*, there are a number of entry points to include secondary schools, community colleges, four-year institutions of higher education, intensive English programs, short-term exchange programs, vocational programs, and virtual educational programs. As we move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, as student mobility begins to rebound, there will continue to be increased global competition for international students. With 92% of U.S. higher education institutions citing the desire to expand international student enrollment over the next five years, understanding the unique and diverse profiles of international students participating in many of these entry points can help institutions better attract and recruit students as well as encourage future study beyond each entry point (Baer & Martel, 2023).

This chapter will discuss the diverse entry points for international students in the U.S. with a focus on those directly enrolling in undergraduate or graduate programs, high schools, and intensive English programs.

## **Academic Enrollment in the U.S. Higher Education Institutions**

The most well-known and significant pipeline for accessing the U.S. higher education system is direct enrollment at a college or university in an undergraduate, graduate, or non-degree program. The United States has nearly 4,000 degree-granting U.S. higher education institutions, the largest academic market in the world, meaning that prospective students have diverse options for where and what to study (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). As such, international students are often attracted to the United States due to the wide range of schools and programs, the high quality of the U.S. higher education system, the welcoming environment, and the support that many colleges and

universities offer for international students (Institute of International Education, 2015).

The data from the *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange* provide a robust understanding of the trends in international student enrollment over time and the current profile of students entering this pipeline. The IIE has published *Open Doors* data on international student enrollment since 1949 and has been supported in this research by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs since 1972. This longitudinal study provides us with nearly 75 years of data and insights into the trends of international student enrollment in the U.S. higher education system. Through this data lens, we are able to understand the evolution of this main pathway for international academic study across multiple academic levels, institution types, and places of origin. Unless otherwise specified, the data in this chapter are from historical and current analyses of data from the *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*.

Over the past 75 years, *Open Doors* has reported on how the number of overall international students grew from approximately 25,000 in 1948-1949 to more than 1 million in 2022-2023. Throughout most of this time, the number of international students has steadily grown, except for when external shocks caused slight downturns, such as the period following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, soon after each of these events, the number of international students quickly rebounded.

In the 2022-2023 academic year, U.S. colleges and universities hosted 1,057,188 international students from more than 210 places of origin around the world. Of the more than one million students, 858,395 international students directly enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and non-degree programs, and 198,793 international students in Optional Practical Training (OPT).

To better understand the flows of international students directly enrolling at U.S. institutions and expanding enrollment in the future, *Open Doors* provides insights into both new enrollment and academic levels and places of origin.

### *New Enrollment*

New enrollment reflects international students studying at their U.S. higher education institution for the first time and is important because it shows the pipeline through which international students enter the U.S. tertiary system. *Open Doors* tracks new enrollments by academic level, enabling us to see flows of

students starting at the freshman or associate's levels in undergraduate education, as well as those starting their master's or doctorate.

The enrollment of new international students can be especially sensitive and often provides an indication of the future direction of overall international student mobility. For example, this was particularly true amid the COVID-19 pandemic from 2019-2020 to 2022-2023. As a result of worldwide closures and restrictions on travel, the new international student pipeline was significantly affected in the 2020-2021 academic year, resulting in a 46% decrease in new international students. Signs of improvement came just one year later, when new international student enrollment soared by 80% in 2021-22. New enrollments increased by an additional 14% to more than 298,000 new international students in 2022-2023, which exceeded pre-pandemic levels from 2019-2020 and nearly reached an all-time high. Should new enrollment continue to increase, it is likely that overall international student enrollment will once again surpass pre-pandemic numbers.

### *Academic Levels and Places of Origin*

As institutions work to expand their international student enrollment, it is important to understand what types of students are pursuing this pathway of direct enrollment. As of 2022-2023, two notable trends from the *Open Doors* data were increases in graduate-level studies and emerging places of origin.

For most of the past forty years, more undergraduates than graduate students have pursued study in the U.S. However, beginning in 2021-2022, the number of graduate students surpassed the number of undergraduate students for the first time in a decade. By 2022-2023, there were nearly 120,000 more graduate students (467,027) than undergraduates (347,602) studying at U.S. institutions.

An increase in the number of graduate students in 2022-2023 was noted across nearly all of the top 25 places of origin. The growth in Indian graduate students was particularly notable; they grew by 63% to 165,936 and surpassed China in 2022-2023. China remained the second leading place of origin at the graduate level, with 126,028 students. While these top two places of origin comprise a majority of the graduate study body (63%), there was also strong growth of more than twenty% among many emerging markets, including Nigeria (+33%), Bangladesh (+23%), Nepal (+21%), Pakistan (+25%), Ghana (+39%), and Indonesia (+22%).

Over the past decade, there has been a significant amount of fluctuation in the undergraduate pipeline. In 2012-2013, there were 339,993 international

undergraduate students, which rapidly expanded to reach a high of 442,746 in 2017-2018. Since then, the number of international undergraduate students has fallen to 347,602 by 2022-2023.

Several factors contributed to this period of growth and decline. The significant increase in the number of undergraduates was primarily driven by the swift influx of undergraduates from China, which grew from 93,789 to 148,593. Another contributing factor was the rise of large, government-funded scholarship programs, such as the Saudi Arabian government's scholarship program, now known as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' External Scholarship Program (Ministry of Education – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2023). This scholarship provided opportunities for students to begin studying in intensive English programs and then transition to undergraduate and graduate studies.

Since then, there have been changes in the eligibility of governmental scholarship programs, leading to smaller cohorts coming to the U.S. For example, 27,646 undergraduates were studying in the U.S. from Saudi Arabia in 2017-2018, and 7,507 were studying in 2022-2023. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted undergraduate student mobility flows from China due to travel restrictions and expanded access to undergraduate programs at home, which decreased from more than 148,593 to approximately 100,349 over the same period of 2017-2018 to 2022-2023.

While there have been significant declines at the undergraduate level since 2017-2018, there are promising signs for the future. The number of international undergraduate students increased in 2022-2023, and the *Fall 2023 Snapshot Report on International Student Enrollment* indicates that this number will continue to grow in 2023-2024 (Baer & Martel, 2023). In addition, historical data indicate that the U.S. has the capacity to host more international students at the undergraduate level, given that five years ago, 100,000 more students were enrolled than currently enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities.

### *International Students at Community Colleges*

The number of undergraduate students included is the level of international students enrolling in community colleges, which is another important pathway for entering U.S. higher education. With more than 1,000 community colleges across the United States, these inclusive institutions support workforce and skill development and can provide coursework for students proceeding to a four-year institution (American Association of Community Colleges, 2023). There are numerous benefits that community colleges can provide to international

students. Many students can use community colleges as an affordable way to begin their studies in the U.S. before transferring to a four-year institution. Furthermore, many community colleges have articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities that allow students to transfer after two years. Given the “community” focus of community colleges, many institutions also endeavor to work closely with advising and helping students succeed on campus and can provide a positive entry point for understanding the U.S.

To understand international student mobility trends at community colleges, our analysis focused on associate degree granting colleges, as defined by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2023). Associate’s colleges are traditionally two-year institutions that confer an associate degree as the highest degree level offered. In addition to two-year colleges, institutions classified as baccalaureate/associate’s colleges are also included under the umbrella of community colleges, as they predominantly offer associate degrees.

Over the past 50 years, the number of international students at community colleges has grown from just over 15,000, first reported in 1971. Since then, the number of international students at community colleges has often fluctuated, with data showcasing periods of both growth and decline. The number of students at community colleges reached a high of 96,472 in 2016-2017 and declined over the past five years until 2021-2022. The first declines were due to a downturn in the number of new enrollments until 2019-2020. Like many of the other student mobility pathways discussed in this chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the number of international students at community colleges. In 2019–2020, the total number of international students fell by 24%, from 79,187 to 60,170. Even as other U.S. institutional types began to rebound in 2021-2022, the number of international students at community colleges continued to decline, falling to 49,099 students. Positively, as of the 2022-2023 academic year, the number of students at community colleges had increased for the first time since 2016-2017, growing by 7% to 52,622.

To better understand this pathway, it is important to understand the profile of the students who have chosen to pursue enrollment at community colleges. The leading places of origin for international students at community colleges in 2022-2023 were China, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil. This number varies from that of the international undergraduate student population, where the top places of origin were China, India, South Korea, Vietnam, and Canada. While the undergraduate statistics show that students from China and India composed 38% of the total international student population, the top two places of origin of international students at community colleges, China and Vietnam,

comprise only 16% of the total international student population. This indicates the unique draw community colleges have among students from a wide range of places of origin. Furthermore, students from Vietnam, Japan, Brazil, Nepal, Mexico, Colombia, and Nigeria composed a greater proportion of international students at community colleges than in the undergraduate statistics.

As international students look to the future, community colleges offer an excellent option for students worldwide. However, as we think about community colleges as a pipeline, there are unique challenges that many community colleges face in recruiting international students. Mason (2022) notes that many community colleges may not have mandates from leadership, recruitment budgets, or internationalization strategies and that there may be challenges in helping international students understand how the community college system in the U.S. works. This has led community colleges to focus on creatively leveraging alums, relatives, and heritage ties to attract students. Furthermore, with many community colleges being known pathways to four-year institutions, there are opportunities to leverage joint recruitment opportunities. Many four-year institutions also view community colleges as important pipelines for their schools, with recent research highlighting that more than a quarter of institutions are recruiting international students from community colleges (Martel & Baer, 2022).

We see from the history of data collection that after each decline, the numbers have returned stronger than ever at community colleges. We also know that the current number of international students at community colleges has room for growth, given historical data showing that five years ago, there were nearly 100,000 students at community colleges. As we look to the future, this approach remains a promising pipeline because international students seek affordable opportunities to pursue higher education in the U.S.

While direct enrollment remains a robust and popular pathway with much support, diversifying approaches to student recruitment can increase this student pipeline. As such, institutions need to expand their recruitment approach beyond direct enrollment at two- and four-year institutions to consider the many diverse entry points to university study, particularly at the undergraduate level.

### **International High School Students**

Each year, a significant proportion of international students enter the U.S. well before they reach university or college experience and choose to begin their education abroad in U.S. high schools. Programs for international students

in high schools offer an important entry point for learning about the U.S. education system, learning more about life in the U.S., usually with a host family or stay, and gaining the necessary U.S.-based credentials for university applications. Analyses of international students at U.S. high schools provide important insights into the trends in secondary schools and the choices these students make in continuing to study in U.S. universities (Mason & Andrejko, 2022; Farrugia, 2017). International high school students enter the U.S. on F-1 or J-1 visas and different types of academic exchange. Our trend analysis analyzes aggregate visa data from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Students with an F-1 visa are nonimmigrants who come to the U.S. to “pursue a full course of academic study in SEVP-approved schools” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2023). Students on a J-1 visa also come to study at an accredited secondary school; however, these stays are usually shorter, such as a semester. Both types of students can live with an American host family or at an accredited boarding school.

In the fall of 2022, 51,272 students were enrolled as degree-seeking or exchange students at U.S. secondary schools. Of these, 31,806 were on an F-1 visa, and 19,466 were on a J-1 visa. Over time, the majority of students have enrolled in an F-1 visa, and in 2022, F-students accounted for 62% of the full total. The COVID-19 pandemic affected international student high school enrollment gravely, and data from 2021 and 2022 signals a return. Interestingly, the J-1 student numbers rebounded more quickly than did the F-1 student numbers, possibly because these exchanges were shorter in duration.

Trends before and after the pandemic also signal the realities of international student mobility from Asia. Prior to the pandemic, in 2018, Asian students made up 75% of all international secondary students. A large portion of these students were from China, many of whom had the opportunity to start their U.S. education at a high school. In fall 2022, students from Asia made up only half, or 50%, of all secondary students. Conversely, the proportion of students from Europe increased from 10% in 2018 to 23% in 2022. This could be affected by continued travel restrictions in China and other countries through 2022; thus, a much more risk-averse student and parent population are less willing to enroll underage students in high schools. Since many students also stay with other families or in a boarding school, considerations around COVID-19 protocols were also prudent. For example, more than 90% of F-1 students were enrolled in private high schools.

Finally, the places of origin of high school students are also diverse and show varying trends. The F-1 students enrolled in the fall of 2022 were primarily

from China (27%), followed by South Korea (8%) and Spain (6%). The total number of students from China has decreased from a high of 33,275 in 2018 to 8,626 in 2022. Again, with the easing of restrictions, these markets may open up further in the coming years. Students on a J-1 visa were predominantly from Europe, including Spain (20%), Germany (19%), and Italy (14%). The short-term exchange market is more popular for European students, who look to come to the U.S. for a semester or academic year program rather than pursuing their full high school degree abroad.

### **Intensive English Programs**

Intensive English Programs (IEP) have historically been one of the first touchpoints for many international students coming to the U.S. to pursue higher education. Intensive English programs are educational programs that serve non-native English-speaking international students at varying levels of English proficiency with instruction in grammar, reading, writing, and speaking (Reese & Helms, 2018). Reese and Helms also note that these programs focus on English for high-level daily communication and academic study; often require a minimum of 18 hours of coursework per week; and are principally non-credit-bearing courses. IEPs also serve diverse cohorts of students and may be working with many different types of students, including juniors under the age of 18 who may also be touring the United States, college-age students who need to improve their English before being admitted to a college or university, English teachers in other countries improving their proficiency before teaching English to students in their home country, or business professionals expanding their English language skills to work with U.S. companies.

IIE has been conducting an annual survey through *Open Doors* to learn more about IEP participation since 1978, and this commitment to collecting comprehensive nationwide data on the IEP industry continues today. The survey collects information both on IEPs affiliated with U.S. colleges and universities and independent providers during the full calendar year, which allows us to provide a more robust understanding of this market than the data collected in the International Student Census. The addition of this survey was to better understand how many students pursue this pathway, given how IEPs can be an important option for students who need additional English language training before pursuing further academic study. Indeed, 44% of students attending college and university-affiliated IEPs in 2022 planned to pursue additional studies in the U.S.

When *Open Doors* first began collecting data on IEP enrollment, approximately 23,000 international students participated in these programs in the late 1970s. Through our data collection over the past forty years, we learned that IEPs have traditionally experienced significant fluctuations in growth and decline. This is likely due to the nature of IEP programs versus international students in full degree programs. International undergraduate and graduate students are often committed to multi-year programs and less susceptible than shorter-term IEP programs to market disruptions, changes in scholarship programs, or health crises, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Conversely, IEPs can often be quick to rebound and adapt to the shifting market and often indicate the trajectory of the overall international student enrollment market.

To showcase this, we can look at the trends in IEP enrollment over the past decade. Most recently, there was a significant period of growth, beginning from when IEPs hosted approximately 50,000 students in 2010 and continuing to host more than 133,335 international students in 2015. This growth was driven principally by international students participating in the Saudi Arabian government scholarship program. However, changes to this program led to a dramatic decline in the number of IEP students, which was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic when enrollment numbers fell to 37,000 students. However, IEPs quickly rebounded in 2022 when enrollment numbers increased by 63%, with 64,106 international students studying at IEPs throughout the U.S. While IEP enrollments remain below the peak level recorded, they continue to be higher than the level of enrollment recorded before the Saudi Arabian government scholarship program.

To understand the profile of where students at IEPs come from, it is important to look at this information by the types of IEPs they attend, which include IEPs that are affiliated with higher education institutions and those that are independent providers of English language training. For programs affiliated with colleges and universities, we see a much stronger representation of international students from Asia, including both China and Japan, but also South Korea and Taiwan. Additionally, robust numbers from Latin America and the Caribbean, including Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, have been reported. These trends more closely mirror the overall trends noted earlier regarding the overall undergraduate population. Interestingly, approximately 44% of students in programs affiliated with higher education institutions plan to continue further academic study in the U.S. at either undergraduate or graduate programs.

The profile of students for programs that are not affiliated with higher education institutions differs significantly. These programs draw much more international

students from European places of origin, with seven of the top ten places of origin being in Europe, including Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Switzerland. Independent providers of intensive English tend to have students who come for shorter-term durations, and many are only here for their English language learning experience, as only 9% intend to pursue further academic study. While these students may not be moving directly into higher education programs, U.S. colleges and universities should still consider connecting with these independent providers, as the individuals participating in these programs have developed English language proficiency and knowledge of the U.S. cultural context and could constitute a good group of prospective students for future study in the U.S.

In recent years, several factors have affected the pipeline of students pursuing IEPs, including increasing global competition, growing capacity for English training in a student's home country, and the advent of ed-tech tools that facilitate language training. However, IEPs continue to provide an opportunity for students who need additional language skills to become proficient while also offering robust support services. As IEPs can often scale nimbly to meet student demand, this is another pipeline for individuals interested in increasing their English language proficiency.

## **Conclusion**

With approximately 4,000 higher education institutions, more than 2,000 high schools with exchange students, and more than 700 intensive English programs, the U.S. offers many entry points to educational opportunities for international students. As such, the U.S. has the capacity to provide the right educational opportunity to meet the needs of many prospective international students, whether they are coming for short-term exchange, English language training, or full degrees. For practitioners focused on recruiting international students for the future, it is important to think about how each of these options can meet the needs of international students and how they may build off each other. Each of these are known entry points to the U.S. educational system and can often lead to future study; future research could build upon the known data from the *Open Doors* IEP Survey, which captures how many students intend to pursue further academic study. This approach would allow us to better understand how many high school, community college, exchange, or online students continue on to higher education opportunities in the U.S. While future research can inform the field, the data from *Open Doors* and SEVIS provide a robust understanding of more than 1.1 million students pursuing these options across the United States in 2022-2023. As more students pursue education outside of their home countries

in today's interconnected world, the U.S. can leverage these many entry points to remain the leading destination globally for educational exchange and build upon our long legacy of welcoming diverse international students from around the world.

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## Chapter 3

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# Revolutionizing English Language Learning and Assessment

## The AI-Powered Transformation

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### **Abstract**

English proficiency can potentially transform lives, especially for second language speakers, opening doors to better job opportunities and access to quality education abroad. However, traditional English language education and testing have been characterized by high costs and limited accessibility, hindering the aspirations of many people. This chapter explores how innovations in artificial intelligence (AI) are revolutionizing English language learning and assessment, specifically through the case of the Duolingo English Test (DET). The transformative impact of AI on English language testing is evident in its ability to offer personalized and efficient learning experiences. By leveraging AI algorithms, the DET creates adaptive tests that dynamically adjust based on a test-taker's responses, resulting in a more precise evaluation in less time. Moreover, AI aids in the development of test items, streamlining the process and reducing costs, thus offering a more affordable and accessible testing option compared to traditional methods. The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the significance of “digital-first” testing, with AI-powered solutions emerging as essential, student-centered alternatives when in-person testing centers were

unavailable. The adoption of AI in English language testing is accelerating, promising a future where barriers to educational opportunities are significantly lowered.

**Keywords:** English proficiency, standardized testing, artificial intelligence, Duolingo English Test, adaptive testing, test development, accessibility, digital-first testing, entry points

### **AI-powered English Acquisition and Assessment**

This chapter highlights how innovative English language testing is transforming the assessment landscape, democratizing access to learning opportunities, and making English proficiency a viable pathway to a brighter future. The simple truth is that with a strong command of the English language, one's life can be drastically improved. For non-native speakers of English, becoming proficient in English can open many doors. For example, consider how knowledge of the language can boost one's earning potential in a non-English speaking economy—think of a server at a local restaurant compared with a server at a high-end resort. Moreover, for those who have aspirations to improve their career prospects by pursuing an education outside of their home country, strong English proficiency is often required to pursue that degree.

Universities in Anglophone destinations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia have had long-held monopolies as host countries for international students, while English-medium programs in non-English speaking countries are quickly gaining distinction (OECD, 2022; Agnew & Neghina, 2021). For many students, however, acquiring the necessary level of English proficiency for these programs and then proving that they have met the required level has not been easy. First, it is expensive. The English language learning market is a multi-billion dollar industry, indicating that the premium is being placed on language acquisition. For many, achieving English proficiency testing goals means families paying for private language education, tutors, test preparation courses, and, ultimately, exams.

Second, it is inaccessible. Studying English at an English language school in an English-speaking country—an immersive experience—has often been seen as the gold standard but is cost-prohibitive for many students and their families. When traveling internationally is not an option, in-country opportunities present accessibility challenges as well. For example, taking time to travel to a school or

center during designated times when it is open or appointments are available can be a considerable burden or even an impossibility.

However, innovations in technology have changed this dilemma. Artificial intelligence (AI) is poised to considerably transform the landscape of both English language learning and assessment. With ongoing advancements in natural language processing and machine learning, AI technologies will continue to enhance the way English is taught and evaluated, from question generation and adaptive testing to scoring and feedback mechanisms. By leveraging AI, standardized English language tests—gatekeepers for many—can become more personalized, efficient, and accurate, ultimately revolutionizing the way language proficiency is assessed.

The field has witnessed the beginning of this transformation with the Duolingo language app—the most downloaded education app in the world—and with the Duolingo English Test (DET), a fully digital English proficiency test. Both utilize the power of AI. This chapter will explore the evolution of AI-powered learning and assessment tools and the benefits that come with them.

### **English Learning Opportunities**

It is a commonly held belief that access to education can be a “great equalizer,” meaning that education can close the economic gap between the rich and poor. However, in the Global South, access to early childhood English education is often limited to those whose families have money. This perpetuates the cycle of wealthy people having greater access to opportunities that often afford their younger generations the privilege of leading more prosperous lives. Luis von Ahn, a Guatemalan computer scientist, academician, inventor, and entrepreneur who experienced this firsthand, was determined to change this cycle. Von Ahn set out to make the best education in the world universally available, creating Duolingo in 2011, and he started with language learning (Chocano, 2023).

Teaching English in a free and accessible way became a priority for von Ahn, and he strongly agreed that an app was the way to do this, combining human expertise and AI to deliver effective, high-quality learning experiences (Chocano, 2023). The creation of language courses at Duolingo is an illustrative example. The early stages—curriculum design and raw content creation—involve in-house learning experts, while exercise creation and personalization, which require scale and learner customization, rely more heavily on AI (Pajak & Bicknell 2022). This “human-in-the-loop” model combines humans and AI in a way that leverages the strengths of each where both technology and human expertise are melded

for optimized outcomes. For example, computer algorithms automatically create learning exercises from the content developed by expert curricula and content developers. This helps scale the exercises more quickly while ensuring that the building blocks for that exercise are accurate. Perhaps where AI excels most is assembling personalized lessons that are tailored to a learner's specific needs (Bicknell & Brust, 2000).

Research shows that this accessible, AI- and human-powered teaching model works. English language learners are able to improve their proficiency by using the app (Jiang & Pajak, 2022). However, proving one's proficiency for high stakes' purposes such as university admission has long been viewed as a hurdle to overcome for students interested in studying abroad.

Luis von Ahn himself experienced this as a prospective international student. With no language testing seats available in Guatemala, he and his mother traveled to El Salvador to sit for this required exam, which was necessary for an undergraduate program in the U.S. (Chocano, 2023).

### **Changes to the English Language Proficiency Testing Sector**

After his own negative personal experience with testing, von Ahn, armed with computer science expertise and determination to lower barriers to accessing education sought to use the power of AI in the English language proficiency testing sector. Von Ahn is not alone in his experiences. Students must often travel up to hundreds — if not thousands — of miles away from their homes, across borders and cultures to sit for the required tests to not give up on their dreams (Duolingo, n.d.). The fact that these scenarios were tolerated by students and their families is an indication of how important international education opportunities were to them.

This was only part of the motivation for von Ahn, however. The English proficiency testing industry has been slow to evolve, and it is well documented that the traditional center-based testing model was failing to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse international student population (Reuters, n.d.).

Von Ahn's own experience as an international student was validated by feedback from English language learners on the Duolingo app, many of whom reached out to the company seeking a way to prove their proficiency gains in order to apply for school, enhance their job prospects, or immigrate to a new country. At that time, the idea for the Duolingo English Test had hatched.

The Duolingo English Test was developed as the first “fully digital” English proficiency test—meaning a test that was designed specifically to be taken virtually—in order to offer an accessible alternative to traditional tests administered at test centers. Launched in 2016, DET utilizes AI tools that have transformed test development, administration, security and proctoring processes. Because of the accessibility advantages for students gained by utilizing innovative technology, dozens of U.S. universities were eager to utilize the new tool.

As with any new product, there were few early adopters relative to the thousands of universities that require English proficiency tests for admission. However, cautious observers, skeptical of the innovative and unknown technology that powered the test, would soon be willing to utilize the tool when the situation demanded they did so.

This occurred during the pandemic, when standardized testing centers across the globe closed due to health restrictions and personal safety concerns. While many U.S. universities became “test optional” for curriculum-agnostic tests, eliminating earlier requirements that prospective students include SAT, ACT and GRE test scores in their applications, English test scores remained mandatory in most cases (Redden, 2019), even as testing centers worldwide remained closed.

Prior to the pandemic, the English language testing field had been slow to embrace technology. In fact, the global health crisis forced the largest wave of digital innovation in English language testing in recent decades because the pandemic exacerbated underlying issues with in-person testing. At this time, traditional tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL, were converted to online and at-home formats to allow students to fulfill English language testing requirements for university entry while confined at home (Hunter, 2021).

In contrast, the practical usefulness of the DET—which was solely and purposefully designed from the ground up in a digital format—became all the more apparent. After the pandemic, the online versions of several traditional English language tests, such as the IELTS indicator, were discontinued (IELTS). This finding suggested that retrofitting pen-and-paper tests for online delivery may not be effective.

### **Advantages of an AI-powered English Proficiency Test**

As with language learning, technology holds the power to solve many of the ailments plaguing the English language proficiency testing market space. To meet evolving student demands for increased convenience, more testing organizations

are now embracing this approach. However, even though the use of technology is becoming more accepted in the sector, affordability remains the unique value proposition of solely “digital first” tests.

Therefore, how can AI transform English language testing?

Historically, test development has been slow and laborious. This is because test items have traditionally been developed by human experts alone, a time-intensive and costly process that has restricted the pace of evolution of the assessment industry. Like in the development of language courses, the English language test development process involves many stages, from establishing a theoretical framework, building test specifications, creating test items, reviewing and piloting items, and evaluating the quality of items (AERA, et al., 2014), all of which have been performed by humans.

However, technological tools can enhance efficiencies at each step in the development process, from maximizing human capabilities to reducing the amount of time it takes to accomplish necessary metrics within the development stages and enabling scaling more quickly. When trained by human experts, AI can analyze speech patterns, grammar usage, vocabulary, and pronunciation in real time almost immediately.

One of the ways AI is utilized for DET is through computer adaptive design, where the difficulty level and content of the test are dynamically adjusted based on the test-taker's responses. The primary advantage of this approach is that it can be used to gauge test-taker ability more precisely with fewer items (Cardwell et al, 2023). This approach has enormous accessibility gains for test takers, who can complete a test in less than one hour, and for institutions, who can receive scores in two days. Accomplishing computer-adaptive testing, however, relies on an extensive item bank. The pace of item development on DET needed to exceed the capacity of humans alone—the traditional approach—which is where AI shines in test development.

The ability of generative AI to produce text that resembles human-generated text is transforming test item development. Like with language course development, humans are heavily involved in this process. At Duolingo's DET, experts in the fields of machine learning, natural language processing, and applied linguistics work collaboratively to develop high-quality prompts, which then become input for automatically generated item content for the test. A prompt, like a blueprint, describes the fundamental structure of a test item and how it should be designed to ensure that it effectively measures a test taker's proficiency. The automatically

generated items are then reviewed by trained human raters for quality, fairness and bias.

By streamlining the test development process using human-in-the-loop AI, the efficiencies and cost savings are vast compared to those of traditional human- and time-intensive item development processes. These savings are then passed onto the test taker as they can access a faster test at a much more affordable price.

### **Future of English Language Testing**

For international students pursuing study at Anglophone host destinations, the central role that English testing has played in the application process has remained largely unchanged. Despite the access challenges faced by students around the world, the English language testing sector has not been able to readily embrace change. Students have tolerated those hardships only because of how powerfully they associate English language ability with enhanced prospects of prosperity.

However, with the emergence of AI and the transformative power that this technological advancement has taken on industry, English language testing is being revolutionized. While the pandemic highlighted how “digital-first” tests could help bridge a gap when students could not access testing centers, the capacity for technology to lower barriers was explored *prior* to the crisis. Using AI to address long-standing testing challenges was already in practice, and that capacity will only accelerate in the years to come.

It is rare to have a front-row seat to witness true change. However, because AI development has been so rapid, what might have taken years to accomplish in the past is now occurring in a matter of months. The change we are seeing is widespread — as we have discussed, implementing AI in English language testing provides benefits across a variety of areas, from student access to efficiency in test development as well as assessment mechanisms. The English testing industry is finally benefiting from the transformative power of technology, which, while innovating at a pace never before seen, democratizes access not only to testing but also to learning opportunities overall.

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# Secondary School Initiatives as Entry Points to Higher Education Enrollment for International Students in the U.S.

## Pathway Toward Increased Intercultural Understanding

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### **Abstract**

In this chapter, the authors highlight several initiatives within international education at the secondary level that enhance international students' sense of belonging, academic success, and intercultural competence, and can increase their enrollment in U.S. higher education institutions and foster enhanced intercultural understanding. By exploring high school international education programs, academic support and guidance, community engagement and service learning, peer support networks, dual enrollment programs, internships, and gap year programs, the authors consider how these initiatives contribute to broadening entry points, therefore increasing international enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities. The authors provided summary data seen rarely in published reports.

Keywords: international students, secondary students, intercultural competence, sense of belonging, college recruitment, entry points

## Introduction

In an increasingly polarized world, where xenophobia and nationalism run rampant, the role of international education becomes all the more crucial. International education helps bridge divides between “us and them” by emphasizing our shared humanity and the responsibilities we have to each other to live in a world where all thrive. Thus, by promoting intercultural competence development and fostering deeper understanding of each other, international education serves as a powerful way to address divisive forces within societies. In so doing, international education, with its core focus on developing students’ global citizenship and intercultural competence, plays a key role in building a more inclusive and peaceful world (Deardorff & Jones, 2021).

Asada (2021) asserted international programs for students are a key strategy for, not only the internationalization of higher education, but also for nurturing in international students worldwide, and while in 2022-2023 it experienced the fastest growth in international enrollments in over four decades, the nation has still not surpassed its record high of over 300,000 enrollments in the 2015-2016 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2023). And with over 4,000 accredited institutions in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, there is, indeed, the capacity to grow these numbers (Institute of International Education, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the field of international exchange worldwide, drastically curbing student mobility. However, the U.S. has long experienced additional complications that contribute to a hesitation by some foreign nationals to pursue an American education. Some students considering studying abroad in a predominantly English-speaking country have voiced concerns over safety and security in the U.S., as well as noting its steadily increasing tuition and fees (Calitz et al., 2020). Heightened reports of racism on campuses after the 2017 travel bans have dissuaded some students from demographic groups identified in the ban from pursuing a U.S. education (Torodan & Peterson, 2020). The dismantling of diversity/equity/inclusion offices and initiatives within numerous public universities in the US also creates a more hostile environment. And for countless international students eager to study in the U.S., fear of visa delays and denials are enough to steer their enrollment decisions elsewhere (Wilke, 2023).

Thus, given a divisive political climate (Kang, 2020), a heightened spotlight on campus violence (Bonistall Postell 2020), and visa worries (Wilke, 2023), many

students who had originally intended to study in the U.S., instead, enroll in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Canada or the United Kingdom (Knox, 2023). Therefore, leaders of international offices in U.S. institutions must rethink their international recruitment strategies in order to create innovative solutions to address issues of politics and perceptions of U.S. higher education, to increase access, and to grow both domestic and international enrollments.

Compounding safety, financial, and visa issues are recent polls about a lack of trust in U.S. higher education to deliver on expected value in relation to cost. Post-pandemic Gallup polls illustrate a sharp decline in confidence in American education, indicating only about half of all Americans believe the higher education system is leading the country in a positive direction (Gallup Organization, 2023). This trend is mirrored in the public distrust expressed through surveys regarding religion, medicine, science, climate, and all branches of government, and is largely divided along partisan lines (Sudermann, 2023). Thus, experts implore higher education leaders to communicate more clearly the value of higher education, and at an earlier stage in the recruitment process (Sudermann, 2023). As such, more outreach is essential to international students and families in K12 settings that promote the value of US higher education through case studies about students' experiences, employability, and the benefit to the local and global communities.

### **Secondary School Initiatives as Entry Points to Higher Education Enrollment**

In an interconnected and globalized society, American high school exchange programs can serve as a conduit for international students to access U.S. higher education opportunities and can contribute to fostering their intercultural competence (Manning, 2022). As international students engage in American high school environments, they navigate diverse cultural, academic, and social experiences that help shape their sense of belonging and cultural identity (Manning, 2022). Cultural immersion is a foundational component of a high school exchange initiative, aiming to provide international students with deep insights into the host culture and societal norms (Manning, 2022). Such high school exchange programs have existed for nearly 100 years, dating back to the American Field Service (AFS)'s groundbreaking international secondary exchanges dating back to just after the first World War, with a vision to build a more peaceful world by promoting understanding among cultures.

High school international education programs have proliferated and evolved over the years, often including language courses, mentorship initiatives, and

cross-cultural activities designed to foster meaningful interactions between international and local students (Cheng & Yang, 2019). By immersing themselves in U.S. American cultural experiences, international high school students in the U.S. not only enhance their socio-linguistic skills but also, develop a nuanced understanding of cultural norms, social expectations, and academic systems (Cheng & Yang, 2019). This immersion can contribute significantly to students' sense of belonging within the school community and prepare them for U.S. higher education settings characterized by diversity and global perspectives.

Creating targeted entry points via secondary schools for international students to pursue U.S. higher education is, indeed, a less explored strategy to address internationalization and enrollment efforts at the postsecondary level. The first seminal quantitative analysis that examined enrollment trends of detailed of international students at the secondary level was conducted 2014 by Christine Farrugia of the Institute of international Education (Nicola, 2021). And scant peer-reviewed research has been published since.

There are over 15,000 public and private high schools in the U.S. that enroll international students (Department of Homeland Security, 2022). In 2022, there were 53,517 international students participating in K12 programs, representing a year-on-year increase of 7.8% from the previous year (Department of Homeland Security, 2022). Moreover, the K12 international education sector has not fully rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic, with over 5,600 hundred less K12 international students studying in the U.S. in 2021 than in the previous academic year (Redden, 2021). Despite that, the overall number of international students studying in American secondary schools has considerably increased in the past 15 years, the literature examining this distinctive demographic has not (Nicola, 2021).

However, in the few existing studies examining international secondary students in the U.S., there are numerous factors that are indicated as instrumental in building students' intercultural competence and increasing their readiness for American colleges and universities. Engaging international students in college and career readiness efforts at the secondary level can help foster a sense of belonging and build trust in U.S. educational institutions. Such initiatives include robust high school support systems, dual enrollment, community engagement, service learning, internships, STEM tech career academies, summer programs for secondary students on postsecondary campuses, and gap year programs. The chapter explores each of these briefly for their history and impact.

In addition to these initiatives, it is important to note that teacher education and preparation remain paramount in developing intercultural competence

in all students (Deardorff and Jones, 2022; Dimitrov and Deardorff, 2023). Teacher education focused on teachers' intercultural competence development, coupled with a more globally focused curriculum, become crucial elements in more adequately preparing students for postsecondary education and future jobs (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2020). In fact, the OECD engaged in testing the global competence of 15-year-old students around the world through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Results from this national-level assessment indicated that connecting with diverse others, learning different languages and engaging in multiple global learning activities are positively associated with global competence development. Further, teachers reported great need for further professional development in areas such as teaching intercultural communication and teaching in multilingual/multicultural settings. Other research has indicated that secondary students have already engaged in various aspects of global learning and global competence development, which means postsecondary institutions need to build on this learning in meeting students where they are in their intercultural journeys. Too often, students are further along in their intercultural competence development than teachers, which points to the crucial role of teacher education, both pre-service and in-service.

### **High School Support Systems**

Advisors, counselors, and academic mentors can play a pivotal role in providing personalized support, addressing social, linguistic, and academic challenges, and facilitating college readiness of international students (Bryan et al., 2022). Additionally, initiatives such as peer tutoring, study groups, and intensive academic workshops can enhance international students' academic skills, self-efficacy, and confidence in their abilities to succeed in rigorous academic environments (Gebregergis et al., 2020). These support mechanisms can not only help promote academic achievement but also can contribute to a heightened sense of belonging and empowerment among international students, enhancing their holistic educational experiences and increasing their access to U.S. higher education (Crooks, et al., 2022).

Shea (2019) examined the experiences of Chinese students enrolled at U.S. high schools and indicated the significant degree to which these minors experienced "homesickness, low self-esteem, difficulty navigating classroom and social interactions, and institutional barriers stemming from homestay agencies that inhibited their smooth transition" to the U.S. (Nicola, 2021). Chan (2019) studied the sociocultural adjustment of international Chinese students,

underscoring “acculturative stressors” from speaking English throughout the day as well as feelings of isolation (Nicola, 2021).

Peer support networks and cultural clubs within high schools also serve as key platforms for international students to connect, share experiences, and celebrate diversity. These networks provide emotional support, mentorship, and opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. Leask (2009) asserted internationalization occurs in both formal and informal school environments. Moreover, Leask proffered both are equally critical in supporting and fostering the intercultural practices of the other. By fostering inclusive and supportive environments, peer networks and cultural clubs contribute to students’ sense of belonging, mental well-being, and cultural identity development. Additionally, participation in extracurricular activities within these clubs as well as on sports teams enhances students’ leadership skills, social competencies, and global perspectives, better preparing them for active engagement in higher education and global communities.

It is important to note the importance of intentionally and adequately preparing school staff in honing their intercultural skills and competencies so that they are more successful in engaging with and supporting international students. This may mean that school leadership must provide the necessary ongoing professional development and training to ensure that school staff and teachers are engaged in continual learning and intercultural growth.

### **Dual Enrollment Programs**

Dual enrollment programs offer international high school students unique opportunities to experience higher education settings and academic rigor. In dual enrollment programs, high school students register for one or two freshmen-level credit-bearing classes in their junior or senior year (Cherney et al., 2020). These programs can enhance students’ academic preparedness for college and expose them to diverse learning environments, faculty interactions, and college resources. While many less-selective HEIs have adopted strategies such as offering direct enrollment for local charter and partner schools (Davis, 2023), these partnerships do not always result in a predictable pipeline of students, as many students and their families are concerned with rankings and attribute a highly-ranked school with status (Kaur, 2021).

Cherney et al. (2020) proffered for HEI leadership, directing students to resources to attain an affordable degree is a critical component of community development in the local community (Cherney et al., 2020). According to the National Student

Clearinghouse Research Center (2023) dual enrollment students surpassed 1.4 million in the fall of 2022, and account for nearly 20% of all community college students. Dual-enrollment programs provide community colleges “a consistent source of students” who are more likely to enroll at the institutions where they are taking their college-level courses (Blake, 2023). In fact, the Community College Research Center at Columbia University’s Teachers College reported that the sole demographic of students attending two-year public institutions that didn’t witness a decline in enrollment during the pandemic was dual-enrollment students under 18 years old (Fink, 2023). As such, dual enrollment programs offer students an international opportunity to build connections with faculty and near-peers, whilst becoming acclimated to the local HEI campus.

### **Community Engagement, Service Learning, and Internships**

Engaging international students in community engagement, service-learning projects, and high school internships provides valuable experiential learning opportunities that promote holistic development and social integration and that boost employability through the honing of leadership and career readiness skills. Through community engagement initiatives, students can foster empathy, civic responsibility, and a deeper connection to local communities, transcending cultural barriers and nurturing a sense of shared responsibility. However, many international students vie for spots in top research institutions, leaving smaller, rural, and lesser known HEIs at a disadvantage (Akiba, 2021). Thus, Akiba (2021) asserted “not all institutions should try to compete head-to-head with large Carnegie R1 (research one) institutions in recruiting international students, but rather [they should] pursue an alternative niche market” (pg. 321). The author suggested service learning and community engagement as an attractive niche for international students. Moreover, students who have had experience participating in community engagement and service learning in the U.S. during their secondary education have already gained experience in engaging in this type of learning and therefore may seek institutions that emphasize such offerings.

High school internships further enable students to apply classroom knowledge in real-world contexts, develop professional skills, and explore career pathways, enhancing their readiness for higher education and future careers (Vu et al., 2022). Internship programs help bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world industry experiences, preparing students for successful transitions into higher education and the workforce. However, international students at HEIs may struggle with American work norms and cultural differences in the workplace, and lack of perceived agency can inhibit a productive internship experience (Vu et al., 2022). As such, beginning internships at the secondary

level, with ample support from both the high school and the employer, can better prepare students for future internships and other work-integrated learning experiences. Student success can be further enhanced in adequate preparation of students before they engage in such internship experiences – this may mean providing specific training to all students in general workplace expectations, intercultural communication, and work ethics and expectations. Such preparation and support become essential before students go into an internship placement.

### **STEM Tech Career Academies**

STEM Tech Career Academies offer high school students a structured educational trajectory centered on a specific industry within the STEM fields, coupled with opportunities for college-level coursework and internships aimed at providing practical experience in high-demand sectors such as information technology, engineering, healthcare, life sciences, and advanced manufacturing (mass.gov, 2024). These programs serve as a platform for students to gain valuable insights into potential career paths, helping them make informed decisions regarding their college majors or post-secondary career aspirations. Similar to dual enrollment, through STEM Tech Career Academies, students can concurrently earn a high school diploma and a post-secondary credential at a community college, free of charge. STEM Tech Career Academies integrate technical curricula, work-based learning experiences, post-secondary courses, and comprehensive college and career coaching (Gay, 2020). These initiatives often draw inspiration from the P-Tech model, an approach in which students earn both a high school diploma and an industry-recognized associate degree, gaining relevant work experience within burgeoning industries (Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education [MBAE], 2021). Graduates of P-Tech programs often receive preferential hiring considerations from participating employers, further underscoring the effectiveness of such integrated education and career pathways (MBAE, 2021). As well, increasingly, Historically Black Colleges and Universities are using high school STEM academies on their campuses as a way to recruit both domestic and international students of color (Gay, 2020).

### **Summer Programs on Postsecondary Campuses and Gap Year Initiatives**

Some colleges and universities offer short-term programs for international high school students during summer months, providing housing in college dormitories, meals in the dining hall, and evening and weekend enrichment activities on campus to afford students an academic experience in a collegiate setting. These programs provide international students an opportunity to gain

familiarity with the campus and to make connections with HEI faculty, staff, and students. And, as many international students seeking to attend American universities do not attend in-person tours or events prior to acceptance, these types of programs can be influential in the decision-making process of prospective applicants. All the Ivy League schools offer summer programs for international students and other R1 universities such as MIT, Virginia Tech, UCLA, and Boston University, offer college credit (summerapply.com, 2024). Many of the programs are STEM-focused and most provide partial or full financial aid, including tuition waivers, paid stipends, and travel expenses for international students. Summer programs on HEI campuses can increase sense of belonging for students as they become acclimated to the university campus and staff. Rivas et al. (2019) implored experiencing affirming interactions on campus fosters psychological wellness and better acclimation of international students to the host institution.

Similarly, gap year programs, which provide students with a year-long break between high school and college, can include additional learning experiences such as volunteer work, internships, and cultural immersion opportunities. “Under the heading of taking a gap year, young people on *academic transition trajectories* are often granted a time out after upper secondary, during which they can recuperate from competitive school experiences and resolve uncertainties about which type of higher education to pursue” (Vogt, 2018, pg.47). Structured gap year initiatives can contribute to students’ personal growth, self-discovery, and global perspectives, enriching their educational journeys and preparing them for the challenges and opportunities of higher education. In the competitive landscape for recruiting international students, some American HEIS have used summer and gap year programs offerings as a way to attract international students (Bamberger, 2020). In addition, the gap year, as well as first-semester study abroad programs, have also served as a short-term solution to the housing crisis that has plagued many campus communities, with a specific emphasis on deferred students.

## **Conclusion**

High school international education programs that incorporate initiatives such as cultural immersion programs, academic support systems, community engagement opportunities, peer support networks, dual enrollment programs, internships, and gap year initiatives, can play an integral role in shaping international students’ educational experiences, sense of belonging, and intercultural competence, particularly when intentionally addressed. In providing such opportunities, it is incumbent upon schools themselves,

and especially the school leadership, to ensure that staff are adequately prepared to work successfully with diverse students through intentional and ongoing intercultural competence professional development. Further, students themselves must be prepared interculturally to engage in these opportunities, instead of “thrown into” them (Vande Berg et al., 2012; Deardorff, 2015). By providing holistic support to international students, fostering inclusive environments, and promoting global perspectives for all, these initiatives can contribute to increased international enrollment in U.S. institutions of higher education and prepare students for active participation in global communities. As educators, policymakers, and researchers continue to prioritize internationalization and intercultural learning, it is crucial to recognize the primary benefits of high school international education with the increased enrollment of international students in creating a more inclusive, diverse, and interconnected global society. Moreover, it is incumbent upon international educators to recognize high schools as not only an entry point for international students into US higher education, but also as a vital step in developing all students’ intercultural competence which begins long before students matriculate into postsecondary degree programs.

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## Bios

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# University Transfer Admissions and Community College Ranking

## A Proven Entry Point to U.S. Undergraduate Education

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### **Abstract**

This chapter delves into the history of community colleges, highlighting the unique practice of course and student transfer in U.S. higher education. We present a comparative analysis of the 2 primary entry points to enrollment in U.S. undergraduate institutions: University Freshman Admissions (UFA) and University Transfer Admissions (UTA). Drawing from our collective experience spanning over 50 years in the field, we advocate for the distinct benefits of UTA for the majority of applicants. We offer assessment tools and other resources to assist students in navigating their path to earning an undergraduate degree in the U.S. We posit that a genuine commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion necessitates support for a variety of entry points for applicants, equal consideration for transfer and direct admissions, and an open, inclusive approach to all students for U.S. institutions to maintain competitiveness.

**Keywords:** Community college role, transfer success, university transfer admission, self-assessment of university eligibility, UTA, value of international students, society bias, entry points

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

Robert L. Frost

## **Introduction**

The concept of transferring courses and students between institutions is largely unique to the United States, a practice deeply embedded in the country's egalitarian tradition. It primarily focuses on educational efficiency and secondarily on equal opportunity.

Community colleges in the United States, initially known as junior colleges or two-year colleges, trace their origins back to the Morrill Act of 1862 (the Land Grant Act), which significantly broadened access to public higher education in the U.S. William Rainey Harper, the inaugural president of the University of Chicago, is credited with the creation of the junior college. In the 1890s, Harper divided the newly established university in Chicago into two sections—a senior college and a junior college. He later played a pivotal role in the founding of junior colleges in Illinois and beyond. The first public junior college was established in Joliet, Illinois, in 1901, influenced by Harper (Galizio, Boggs, 2022). In 1907, California introduced the public two-year college. Under its statewide system, which includes junior college branches of state universities, nearly half of all college students in California are enrolled in community colleges (Drury, 2003).

Initially designed to provide the first two years of baccalaureate education, community colleges have evolved into comprehensive institutions. They cater to the postsecondary educational needs of communities in various ways, including lifelong learning, vocational and technical education, and community and contract education. Programs in these areas serve as entry points for both domestic and international students seeking to eventually earn a university degree (StateUniversity.com, 2023).

In the mid-20th century, California began the process of aligning its 3 major segments of higher education. The Donahue Higher Education Act, also known as the California Master Plan for Higher Education, was enacted by the California State Legislature on April 6, 1960. The Act organized the state's UC, CSU, and community college systems to ensure that Californians had guaranteed access to higher education. Among the many consumer protections, one of the most historic achievements was the course articulation system between the community

colleges and the state's 2 other major segments: the University of California and California State University.

### **The Systems and Practices in the U.S.**

Transfer education encompasses two elements: 1) enrolling in courses that are mutually recognized by two institutions, typically a 2-year community college and a 4-year university, and 2) the process by which a student fulfills the receiving institution's course prerequisites and admission criteria. To initiate a discussion on this subject with an audience of international students, it is essential to provide an overview of the U.S. secondary and postsecondary education systems.

These systems are distinct compared to most of the world. In secondary schools, students allocate considerable time to research, group activities, and hands-on tasks. The curriculum varies from state to state. Schools do not conduct classes for 8 hours a day, 6 days a week. There are no national graduation exams. Standardized tests are not the sole criterion for college admission. Each course has a predetermined number of credit hours that students must fulfill. The Grade Point Average (GPA), typically represented on a 4-point scale, is used in lieu of the standardized percentage systems prevalent in other countries.

In college, professors pose thought-provoking questions, encourage students to research answers, and foster open-mindedness in their quest for knowledge. Undergraduate coursework is divided into lower and upper divisions, with the lower division comprising the first two years of classes primarily aimed at fulfilling general education requirements. Students have the freedom to change majors, choose courses, and even contest the grades they receive. Since each course carries its own credit hours, once a student completes a course, the earned credit hours are permanently recorded as academic credits.

### **The Academic Credit System and Its Fundamental Importance**

In the U.S., college courses taken at a properly accredited institution, or one that maintains acceptable standards, are granted permanent credits. These credits contribute towards students' academic goals, such as obtaining a degree. Each hour of instruction in a semester or quarter period is assigned one credit, allowing students to accumulate these credits through courses taken during the appropriate academic term. Each credit represents one hour of classroom instruction and two hours of extracurricular activities, as defined by the Carnegie Credits (Silva, 2013). This system standardizes student assessment across higher learning institutions, despite the varied and often low-validity approaches of oral

or written processes. The credits earned become a permanent academic asset that can be applied towards college graduation units or course requirements.

The U.S. course credit system enhances the reliability and security of the transfer pathway. It ensures that earned credits can be transferred between institutions that recognize the proper articulation of the course content taken to meet course requirements, or simply to use them as credits for elective courses that contribute towards earning a degree. Thus, students can take courses in community colleges to prepare for transfer, and the credits earned are used to meet credit or unit requirements for transfer. This allows students to progress in their education across institutions and work towards earning degrees. Consequently, international students can enroll in community colleges with the assurance that if they earn transferable credits, they can carry those credits with them to higher education institutions to transfer and earn their degrees without wasting their time, money, or effort.

Therefore, the combination of articulation agreements and the credit system, along with other institutional efforts to make the transfer path attainable, provide a secure and advantageous entry point for both domestic and international students to earn their undergraduate degrees.

In 2018, the College University Partnership, an organization suggested by colleagues at Stanford University and led by UC Berkeley and San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley, included 130 predominantly U.S. universities. This group renamed this entry point University Freshman Admissions (UFA). This effort aims to systematically recognize and standardize the two main approaches taken by students to enter undergraduate institutions: UFA and University Transfer Admission (UTA).

### **University Transfer Admission (UTA)**

While the unique structure and practice of transfer education may be more familiar to domestic students and guidance counselors, it remains somewhat enigmatic to prospective international students who are keen to pursue their undergraduate degree in the U.S. The conventional understanding of a university system that provides opportunities for international high school seniors to apply for freshman admission is well-known. However, the community college transfer pathway is less understood and embraced. Over several decades, the authors have discovered that professionals outside the U.S. often lack detailed knowledge or articulation about these statistics.

Taking California as an example, a highly sought-after study destination, 30% of the juniors (third-year students) at the University of California (UC) campuses are community college transfers (University of California Office of the President, 2015). According to the Key Facts from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2023), this figure rises to 51% at California State Universities (CSUs). At UC Berkeley, the transfer admission rate is four times higher than the freshman admission rate (24% vs. 6%) (University of California InfoCenter, 2019).

According to the National Center for Science and Engineering Students (NCSES, 2019), 48% of bachelor's degree earners in 2007 began their journey at a community college. Sandra Craft from ThinkImpact corroborated this ratio using 2015–2016 data, indicating that 49% of all individuals who completed their undergraduate studies initially enrolled in a community college (Craft S., 2021). This equates to approximately 2 million transfer students per year.

Interestingly, even the transfer admission rate at Ivy League schools (Transfer Web, 2021) seems to suggest a higher likelihood of success than the international freshman admission rate (Larriva, M., 2023). On average, transfer students have twice the chance of gaining admission. It's important to note that some of these students may undergo lateral transfers.

Table 1: Ivy League Schools Admissions Rate (International vs. Transfer) 2023-2024

	Class of 2023-2024	Class of 2023-2024
	Int'l Admission Rate	Transfer Admission Rate
Brown	4.3	3.5
Columbia	3.1	10.1
Cornell	8.6	18.4
Dartmouth	5.9	28.6
Harvard	2.5	1.2
UPenn	5.5	7.9
Princeton	3.8	1.7
Yale	5.9	1.7
Average	*counts unavailable for computing avg.	10%

As a result, numerous prospective international students find themselves disheartened when they are not admitted to top-tier universities as freshmen due to limited availability and intense competition. Disappointed, they either

settle for a less preferred institution or abandon the idea of studying in the U.S. Moreover, a significant number of students never reach the application phase for studying abroad because they find the University Freshman Admissions (UFA) process daunting and biased towards prestige. These students remain unnoticed and silent, and indeed, opportunities are lost for these talents. What they are not aware of, and have not been adequately informed about, is an alternative entry point to earning an undergraduate degree in the U.S. They can enroll in a community college, complete lower-division courses towards their degree and major, transfer as a junior to a university, and complete the upper-division curriculum to earn their degree. This route is known as University Transfer Admission (UTA).

Given that the educational systems of many prospective international students differ significantly from those in the U.S., it's unsurprising that they seldom consider the transfer path as an entry point. It is crucial that global outreach continues to inform and educate students, educators, families, and societies abroad about UTA. This will broaden opportunities for students and aid in diversifying U.S. institutions. International students interested in studying in the U.S. can benefit from preparing for both UFA and UTA to increase their chances of admission and widen their options. While ample information is available regarding UFA - the university freshman admission process and path - a detailed exploration of UTA - the transfer pathway - would be advantageous.

The UFA system has long been a source of privilege for a large population of students in the U.S. Alongside this, prestige bias is ingrained in the entire college application and admission process, favoring families or schools with abundant resources, while those with fewer resources are often overlooked because pay-to-play is perilously close to being openly allowed (Murrell, 2019). It is well-documented that children from ultra-wealthy families have a 34% higher chance of admission to Ivy League schools than everyone else (Zou, 2023). This has a trickle-down effect, causing institutions to lean towards elitism instead of focusing on students' best interests. Coupled with the practice of legacy admissions, the chances of middle-class and lower middle-class families, where the majority of international students belong, getting a shot at both private and public Ivy League schools are further reduced, if not eliminated. As an equalizer of opportunity, community colleges provide students of all ages, socioeconomic statuses, and educational backgrounds with a fresh start and transfer them to universities protected by law to successfully complete their undergraduate degrees. The process is so accessible, tangible, attainable, and reliable that it has become the cornerstone of undergraduate education across the states, with more than 50% of bachelor's degrees granted to transfer students according to the

National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) of the National Science Foundation (NCSES, 2019).

The figure below illustrates the two entry points for attending an undergraduate school in the U.S. It clearly shows that it does not matter where you go to college, it matters where you graduate. The institution you initially attend is of less significance; what truly matters is the university from which you ultimately earn your degree.

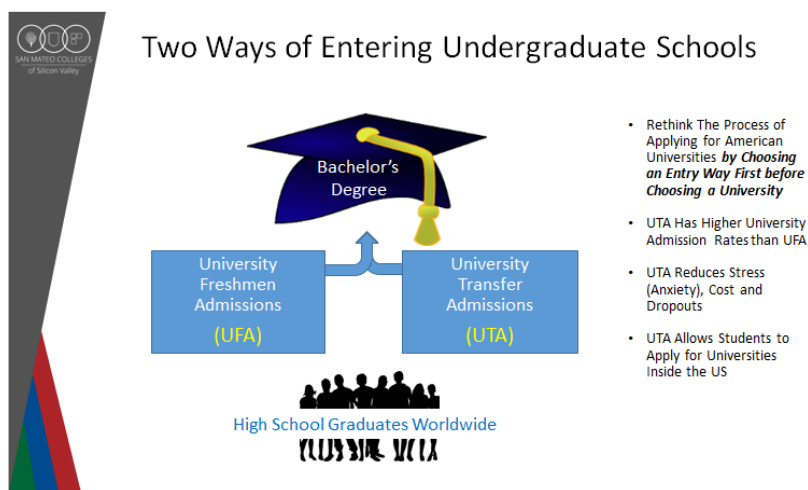


Figure 1. Entering Undergraduate Schools through UFA or UTA

### Accessible, Tangible, and Dependable

Community colleges are accessible through the hassle-free admission process, which enables all students to enroll with a simplified application and no academic eligibility requirements. The path *tangible* is the transfer preparation process, which has been properly streamlined to enable students to follow easily. The relationships between community colleges and universities foster the transfer process and maintain open *access* to prospective transfer students. What makes the system *dependable* is the solid course articulation agreements between community colleges and universities and the well-established U.S. course credit system.

## Accessible

Community colleges in the U.S. have simplified the application process. Students are required to submit an admission application, but they are not obligated to provide an academic record, letter of recommendation, personal statement, or details of extracurricular activities. These requirements, which are mandatory for University Freshman Admission (UFA), can make the process more complex and competitive. High school students often find themselves overwhelmed by these UFA expectations, which can impact their access to universities. However, University Transfer Admission (UTA) with community colleges offers open access, allowing students to enroll and commence their college education without complications or delays.

Table 2. Admissions Eligibilities Between UFA and UTA

Eligibilities for UFA and UTA	UFA	UTA	
	University Freshman Admission	Community College Freshman Admission	Transfer Admission to Universities
	4 Years	2 Years	2 Years
Age	18	16+	18
GPA Weight	High	Medium	Medium-High
Annual Cost of Attendance	\$45,000-\$65,000	\$25,000	\$45,000-\$65,000
Standard Tests (SAT/ACT)	Yes	No	No
Class Rank	Yes	No	No
Recommendation Letters	Yes	No	No
Community Service/Leadership	Yes	No	Yes
Personal Statement	Yes	No	Yes
English Language	Yes (High)	Yes (Medium)	No
High School Diploma	Yes	No (if over 18)	No
Comprehensive Review	Yes (7 Items)	No	Yes (2 Items)
High School Credits	AB, IB, A-level	AP, IB	No
High School Transcripts	Original	Copy Permitted	No
<b>Admission Rates to Top 50 Universities</b>	<b>8-30%</b>	<b>Not Applicable</b>	<b>30-70%</b>

Source: Habte, Luan, Williams (2020)

Upon admission to a community college, students undertake English and mathematics assessment exams to determine their educational level. They then enroll in the appropriate course and continue with their lower-division curriculum towards transfer. This process is equally applicable to prospective international students, who can apply to community colleges, secure admission with ease, and commence their college education in the U.S. This entry point can alleviate the stress experienced by many students vying for the limited freshman applicant spots at highly ranked universities.

Table 2 compares University Freshman Admissions (UFA) and University Transfer Admissions (UTA). While UFA is a one-step process, UTA is a two-step process that offers a more accommodating entry point for students. UTA has

significant advantages over the one-step process as it provides students with time, free resources, and a wider selection of universities to choose from while they are studying on a U.S. campus. For UFA, students must satisfy 13 of the 14 items and achieve the highest possible scores while still in high school in their home country. Rather than viewing UFA as a merit-based competition—which it is not due to inherent inequality and bias—it is in fact a mechanism often cleverly disguised and conveniently overlooked by the adults involved to result in rejecting vast number of student applicants and denying their best opportunities in life

Table 2. Admissions Eligibilities Between UFA and UTAF  
For University Transfer Admission (UTA), students are eligible to apply once they reach the age of 16. Seven of the 14 items required for UFA are not needed for UTA. Given the difficulty in satisfying these 7 requirements, such as class rank and SAT/ACT scores, UTA reduces the overall burden by more than 50% when these items are excluded. Two factors that often significantly impact students' ability to meet UFA eligibility criteria—financing and English proficiency—are less stringent for UTA. After 2 years of studying at a community college, students can transfer to a university as a junior without needing to meet the aforementioned seven requirements. This is because they have already been college students for 2 years, progressing much like a university sophomore matriculating into a junior year, where the primary requirements are academic GPA and tuition payment. Their experience on an American college campus and within the community allows them to submit more authentic materials for the university's comprehensive (holistic) review.

An additional benefit of community college education is the significantly lower tuition cost compared to universities. This factor alone makes this path much more accessible for many prospective students, both domestically and internationally, as the savings on tuition provide a substantial benefit. Smaller classrooms allow for more accessible instructors, fostering close relationships with students and faculty and enabling students to receive more individual attention and support. Furthermore, community colleges offer courses and support for students to develop their skills across various subjects and personal interests, providing opportunities for students to grow and mature strategically. International students can take language courses to improve their proficiency, develop skills and personal hobbies to broaden their interests, diversify their academic and extracurricular engagement, and become more familiar with the culture and system amidst diverse student populations and larger communities. The accessibility of community colleges is a crucial consideration for prospective international students seeking a well-rounded, holistic education.

As outlined in Chapter 1, society exhibits a disproportionate interest in 4-year university (UFA). A significant amount of resources are allocated to these endeavors, with extraordinarily expensive high schools being established to prepare students for top universities. Additionally, a robust industry thrives on the efforts made by students and their parents at every stage of the UFA process. For instance, Alan Blinder of The New York Times discussed the financial benefits accrued by the publisher of the U.S. News and World Reports ranking (Blinder, 2024). Young minds are highly susceptible to influence, and the pressure from peers can be intense. The call to consider alternative entry points may be overlooked. Nevertheless, ethical educators should adopt a pragmatic approach. Without factual knowledge of one's eligibility for 4-year university admission, all other considerations are irrelevant.

Table 3. Self-Assessment of UFA and UTA Qualifications

	UFA Self-Assessment	Your Points	Uni A Points	Uni B Points
1	English Proficiency			
2	High School GPA			
3	International High School / Private School			
4	AP / IB / College Credits			
5	SAT / ACT			
6	Strengths and Weaknesses			
7	Knowledge of U.S. Universities and Colleges			
8	Your Experiences Matched with Comprehensive Review			
9	Amount of Assistance Needed for University / College Search			
10	Finance			

*Note:* the scores are assigned based on separate rubrics. For example, for Item 1 - English Proficiency, if using TOEFL, use the 10 of the 11 bands, eliminating the lowest band of 0 scores. If the student obtained a score of 119, which is Band 10, then assign 10 points under "Your Points." If the score is 62, which is Band 4, assign a score of 4.

Table 3 serves as an assessment tool for international students to evaluate their realistic situation against the requirements of studying in the U.S. at any institution. Without this, students can easily be swayed by flashy marketing pitches and misguided pressure. It acts as a reality check. To conduct the self-assessment, students provide honest answers to each of the 10 items in the Score column. They then compare these scores with the expectations of their universities of interest (Uni A, Uni B, etc). In theory, they can include as many universities as they wish. Ultimately, universities with scores higher than those of the students are eliminated. The remaining ones are the schools they should

consider applying to. In summary, if a student has low scores for items such as AP/IB, or SAT/ACT, Knowledge of U.S. Universities and Colleges, finance, the student should seriously consider Undergraduate Transfer Admission (UTA) described in Table 3 for UTA eligibility. Please refer to Table 3 for UTA eligibility.

### **Tangible**

The transfer process is efficiently and securely structured, enabling students to understand the process from the onset of their college education. Academic counselors are on hand to guide students along the path that has been established for the transfer process. A wealth of literature, guidance, and established support systems are available at community colleges and universities to assist students in planning their transfer curriculum. Universities have negotiated reserved spaces for transfer students and have developed an infrastructure to facilitate the transition. Community colleges have clearly defined the process, ensuring students are aware of the expectations they need to meet in order to transfer. If students adhere to the guidelines, successfully complete the required lower-division courses for transfer or their major prerequisite courses, and engage in extracurricular activities that contribute to their development as well-rounded applicants, they will be well-prepared for transfer. The guidelines and numerous support systems that aid in learning, adjusting, and providing specialized attention as needed are available for students to leverage and secure their path to a successful transfer. Consequently, international students should strongly consider this viable transfer pathway to enhance their access to reputable transfer institutions.

### **Attainable/Dependable**

The factors contributing to the feasibility of the transfer process are diverse. In addition to the tangible transfer path delineated by community colleges, universities have also collaborated to further secure this process. Articulations from course to course have been established between community colleges and universities, allowing students to enroll in suitable courses where they can complete lower-division courses for transfer. For instance, in California, a well-established articulation agreement is publicly available on a website called ASSIST.org. This resource is used by students, counselors, educators, college departments, and university admissions officers for preparation and admission purposes. Students can access the course and admission requirements they need to fulfill on the site to plan their transfer path.

The subsequent figure represents the search results on ASSIST.org, demonstrating the articulation between a set of degree math classes taught at the College of San Mateo (CSM) and the corresponding degree math courses taught at UC Berkeley. The comparison clearly indicates that if a student has taken Math 251 at CSM, they will not need to take Math 1A at UC Berkeley if they choose to attend. While the credits and course names may differ, which is expected, it is legally accurate to state that UC Berkeley accepts math courses offered at CSM or any colleges that articulate with UC Berkeley, and vice versa. This approach is widely adopted in the U.S., and it may seem unimaginable to most of the world. In reality, few educators outside the U.S. believe that the world’s top public university would allow a community college course to replace its own. It is understandable that few would believe in the legitimacy of Undergraduate Transfer Admission (UTA). Therefore, education and training on the flexibility and effectiveness of UTA are urgently needed.

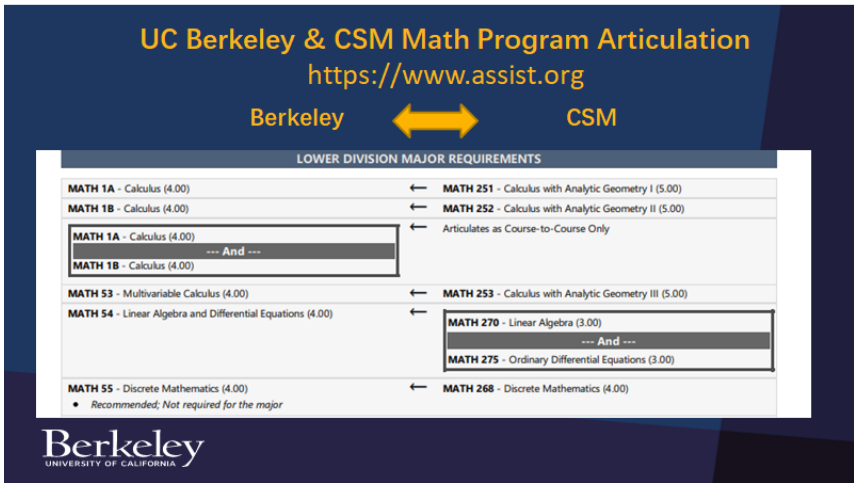


Figure 2, Comparing Math Credit Articulation between UC Berkeley and College of San Mateo. Source: screenshot of assist.org

The articulation agreement is honored by both institutions, providing students with clarity and security in adhering to the agreement. The transparency and accessibility of these agreements simplify transfer path planning and make admission more achievable. When students follow the correct path, excel academically, and meet all the established guidelines, they enhance and secure their access to the universities that are obligated to honor these agreements.

In addition to the articulation agreements, universities in the vicinity of community colleges increase their accessibility and visibility to prospective

students. They do this by providing admission information, dispatching university representatives to educate students about the transfer process, offering in-service training to counselors, conducting outreach, providing academic enrichment programs, and allowing access to university courses for exposure and to meet certain requirements. The collaborations between universities and community colleges inspire, motivate, and encourage prospective transfer students to stay focused and steadfast on their path.

International students have the opportunity to explore various universities during their enrollment in community colleges, allowing them to broaden their options and find a suitable fit before transferring. This provides them with an added advantage in gaining access to a reputable school, as the transfer path is clearly outlined, guided, and supported by both community colleges and universities. This gives them the confidence to explore and scrutinize their choices. Universities also reserve enrollment spaces for transfer students to ensure access. These systems in place make transferring more achievable and tangible compared to the freshman admission pathway.

### **Educationally Sound Ranking of Community Colleges**

For many, a significant obstacle in promoting the benefits of University Transfer Admission (UTA) is the lack of a fundamental tool: a ranking system for community colleges. This issue often surfaces among audiences who, having grasped the overall advantages of UTA, are left pondering which colleges to consider. As of 2019-2020, there were 1,303 community colleges and 2,679 four-year institutions in the U.S. (NCES, 2020). Accustomed to the convenience of university rankings, these audiences frequently seek a similar system to simplify their decision-making process for community colleges. Regrettably, much to everyone's disappointment, no such ranking system exists for community colleges. Moreover, there is no educationally sound method for creating one, nor should there be.

Ranking serves the purpose of distinguishing overall performance among many choices on an extensive list of items of ratings. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), known for providing world university rankings, suggested that rankings are about *who* performs the best overall, while ratings can indicate who has done *what* well (QS, 2024). In mathematics, ranking takes two forms. One is classification, where affinity groups are formed through select characteristics, and the other is arranging a list of items using an interval scale, with each value being a composite of measurable units. The former is often a horizontal grouping on a Cartesian plane. An example of this would be the Carnegie Classification of Institutions.

There is no clear way to make a subjective judgment on which group is better and by how much. The latter, on the other hand, allows our analog brains to see the scale as an indication of how far each item is from each other; therefore, determinations of how much better vs worse, expensive vs cheap, cold vs hot can be made, which leads to a ranked order. Within the interval scale, a range is chosen, typically from 1 to 100 or from 1 to infinity. Students' grades are often standardized on a scale ranging from 1 to 100, with 100 being the best. University rankings use the range of 1 to infinity, with 1 being the best.

However, a dilemma exists for any attempt to rank community colleges. Each community college primarily serves its local community. A naturally formed affinity grouping is not influenced by any external factors other than what is inside the community. Unless there is a universal way of measuring all community colleges so that they can be arranged on a ranked scale, community colleges exist on a Cartesian surface, disallowing value judgments to be easily made about them. However, there are several factors that may not be universal yet meaningful for a specific purpose. For example, one can reasonably request data on the number of students who transfer from a given community college to universities. However, not all community colleges focus on transfers as their primary mission, and their transfer numbers can be a result of how close they are geographically to the universities and other factors, such as the age of the student body.

Nevertheless, tangible data can be gathered to assist in selecting community colleges that are conducive to UTA. With a combined experience of 50 years, the authors have identified the following data points as beneficial for guiding students who aim to succeed in UTA. These data points include *transfer outcomes*, *location*, and a *caring college* environment, abbreviated as TLC. This approach combines both Cartesian groupings and ranked order measurements. In theory, once data have been collected and standardized, they can be plotted in a three-dimensional Euclidean space. However, this method does not serve as a model for determining rankings (Zhao and Luan, 2006). Instead, it serves as a model to determine which grouping of community colleges a student might choose for further research before applying. According to Dunbar's Number, a group of no more than 150 can be reasonably managed. Empirically speaking, there are around 100 U.S. community colleges that have been actively recruiting international students. This system is far superior to a ranked order, such as university rankings, which, while attractive, involves many compromises.

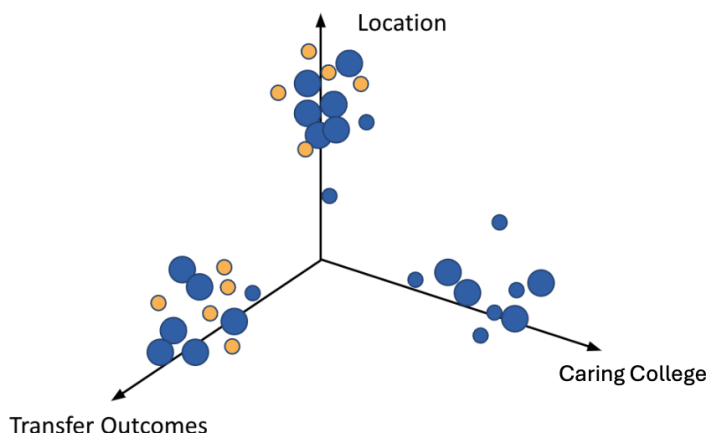


Figure 3 - Identifying Community Colleges Most Advantageous to UTA Based on TLC.

*Transfer Outcomes:* Again, using California as an example, some community colleges have developed strong relationships with neighboring universities. As a result, a significantly greater number of students transfer. One can use either the pure count of the transfer or the transfer rate depending on the situation. For example, a small college would have fewer transfers than a large one. In that case, the rate of transfer is more meaningful.

*Location:* California as a whole is a better environment for UTA, as explained earlier. Among the 112 community colleges, those that are physically close to major universities tend to have more students transferring successfully than do those that are in rural areas. Recently, one may add safety as both a modifying and mediating factor in determining location.

*Caring College:* it takes a village. Since community colleges exist to serve their local community, their funding, academic focus, student goals, and many other factors together or separately exert strong influence on campus culture and operations. The extent to which the institution prepares students for transfer undoubtedly affects the outcome. Does the college have a transfer center? How many counselors are full-time transfer advisors? How many universities are partners with the college?

Collectively, these factors hold strong predictive value for student success in University Transfer Admission (UTA). However, currently, individuals must

search in various disparate locations to compile data on transfer outcomes, location, and caring college. There is a clear need for efforts to systematically gather and present this TLC information. Doing so would address the existing information gap in this critical area.

### **The Value Proposition**

We must value the presence of international students in the U.S. While the U.S. continues to be the most desirable study destination among international students, a systematic awareness campaign of one of the most vibrant and proven degree attainment processes through UTA is highly desirable and urgent. It opens doors much wider for students, therefore benefiting U.S. institutions and the country's goal of global mobility.

Discussion of UTA with a focus on global mobilizers is because of the benefits that international students will garner and contribute and because the U.S. as a whole will greatly strengthen its academic rigor, student diversity, and equal opportunities. The U.S. higher education system offers flexibility and access for students to study a subject of their choice, enabling them to increase the possibility of exploring and expressing their talents, capacities, interests, and passions as opposed to educational systems that might force them to conform to predetermined decisions. Additionally, the focus on research, critical thinking, and self-exploration, development, and expression in higher education enables international students to examine academic thought and insight into the freedom and inspiration that enhances personal development and intellectual autonomy. This priceless opportunity and liberty in intellectual exploration will remain an influential lifelong asset that will contribute to enlightenment wherever graduates go, especially when they return to their home countries.

Many of them come from homogeneous societies. Their enrollment in community colleges where there is a higher degree of diversity will enable them to develop a more informed, tolerant and inclusive self that can navigate across cultures, systems, and diverse populations. They will also have opportunities to garner increased language proficiency, as they are able to take courses and have lived experiences inside the colleges' surrounding communities that will allow them to practice and develop their language skills while in community colleges. With students who have real-life experiences away from relatively closed university communities, international students in community colleges will have more realistic life experiences and more exposure to a wide spectrum of societal issues and infrastructures that can help to mature and expand their worldview. These are but some of the many benefits of international students who will have

the privilege of studying in the U.S. and even more so for those who choose UTA. Thus, studying in the U.S. for many international students will be transformative and life altering; thus, utilizing all available gateways to explore the U.S. higher education system would benefit international students.

Moreover, the country still needs to continue attracting talent to maintain its economic vitality. As this book argues, talent is everywhere; opportunities are not. Community colleges are a matter of fact Statue of Liberty in education because they welcome people of all ages, all capabilities, all walks of life and most importantly all colors and creeds. Community colleges open doors to welcome all who come to the U.S. for a chance at life. Community colleges exist to uplift high-potential and low-resource talent so that they can add to and build upon the economic, cultural and scientific success of the nation. Indeed, a strong economy will build a strong nation with political stability and cultural plurality. Most of the students up to this point who are recruited to the U.S. are predominantly people of color, but they are from more privileged families. Our current practice, for example, UFA, is to conveniently ignore the large portion of students who are equally talented but less fortunate to have the same privilege and resources. This runs contrary to the founding principles of this nation.

Furthermore, the value of international students, particularly in the U.S., remains underappreciated. The U.S. socioeconomic, racial, and cultural infrastructures, combined with its complex history and geographical location, make the experiences and contributions of international students uniquely valuable. Beyond their obvious commercial value, as they typically pay higher college tuition than domestic students, international students' intrinsic contributions are often overlooked. In 2022 alone, international students contributed over \$38 billion to the U.S. economy (IIE, 2023). These students, who arrive in the U.S. as adults with significant levels of learning and are ready to bear the high cost of education, have the potential to make remarkable contributions to society through discovery, invention, and engineering in science and multifaceted brilliance in arts. It is worth noting that these individuals reach adulthood without any investment from the U.S. and are likely to be self-supported during their years of study in the U.S. Nevertheless, their U.S. education benefits the world. Therefore, the intrinsic value of international students that goes beyond financial contributions deserves serious consideration as a matter of national policy and economic security.

The U.S., a nation shaped by racial tension, slavery, indigenous genocide, and continuous immigration, is both a melting pot and a source of tension among diverse populations. This intersectionality leads to stereotypical profiling and

racial and cultural bias, complicating the clear recognition of international students' contributions as a distinct group. Drawing from the authors' combined 40 years of experience working with international students, we have observed that these students typically arrive with a strong sense of focus, self-worth, and appreciation for their culture, and they are primarily open and dedicated to academic engagement. It is important to note that the perceptions and struggles of immigrants are distinct from the challenges and motivations of international students. We urge institutions and practitioners to continue fostering the growth of international students, while protecting them from immediate exposure to societal biases in the U.S. Empowered by confidence and passion, international students enrich learning communities and the broader community they influence by offering diversity of thought, ideas, culture, and systems. They serve as ambassadors of their respective countries and people, leaving a lasting impression of value, honor, respect, and proper representation in their surroundings.

Thus, keeping the doors of the United States open to international students is far more beneficial than their economic contributions. Global mobility inside the U.S. is the open space to breathe in new ideas, insights, contributions, reflections, and ambassadorship that foster more humane, respectful, and inclusive outlook and relationships. Community colleges will continue to open for this infusion to take place by enabling international students to come to the U.S. and engage in their study. The need to keep open doors for the contribution of international students in the U.S. academic arena and beyond remains to be apparent and necessary.

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**Bios**

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# Community Engagement and Branch Campus as an Entry Point to US Higher Education

## A Case of One International Branch Campus

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### **Abstract**

International Branch Campuses (IBC) represent one strategy for internationalizing U.S. higher education. Indeed, recruiting from locales around the IBC presents a clear entry point for students to gain access to U.S. higher education. This chapter describes the relationships that one IBC has with its local community, from outreach in teaching high school subjects in English in local high schools to supporting lifelong learning efforts. This chapter describes the efforts to engage in the community, the specific programs taking the IBC faculty into the community, and the resulting effects of these relationships on student recruitment. We argue that leveraging local cultures at IBCs to support local needs and meet students where they are providing opportunities for both sustaining the IBC and providing specific entry points for students living near the IBC to access not only a U.S. education close to home but also an opportunity to study in the U.S.

**Keywords:** international branch campuses; community engagement; recruitment; entry points

## **Introduction**

International Branch Campuses (IBC) represent one strategy for internationalizing U.S. higher education (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012). One of the priorities and challenges of IBCs is to penetrate the local community and be accepted as “one of us.” Meeting this challenge propels the IBC into the forefront within the community, being seen as accepted not only as an educational institution but also as one that is valued in the community. For an IBC, this inclusion is a key mechanism through which it provides entry points to access to higher education in the U.S. community.

Like in many Asian countries, in Korean culture, education, especially higher education, increases with socioeconomic status. In this context, having their children study abroad, especially in Europe or the U.S., is desirable for many middle-class parents. Understanding this cultural and social context and locating an IBC in Korea could allow for the home institution to build a sustainable organization abroad. Sustainability, however, must also mean that families in the host country, in this case Korea, accept the IBC as an U.S. university. Thus, being included in the local community is critical for the IBC’s success.

This chapter shares the story of how one IBC, George Mason University Korea, was able to move from being seen as an outsider organization to being a member of the local community.

### **George Mason University Korea – The Beginning**

When George Mason University Korea opened at the Incheon Global Campus in 2014, few members of the Incheon community were aware that the Korean government had provided logistical and financial support to the launching of this IBC. This lack of knowledge quickly led to perceptions of Mason Korea as a U.S. university that intended to steal top talent from Korean universities, that is, students with strong academic performance and English skills and who have the highest TOEFL scores. Incheon citizens began to believe that Mason Korea (and the other universities at the Incheon Global Campus) were the epitome of the “ivory tower”, who preferred to remain separate from the community we inhabited. This perception, which included the belief that Mason Korea admissions were highly competitive and selective due to the English requirement, affected recruitment efforts in Incheon and other surrounding cities.

Rather than allowing this perception to become reality, Mason Korea utilized the globally minded faculty and administrative talent, many of whom were Korean American, to change the local perception of the university. In the next section, we

provide a history of how members of an outsider university (IBC) worked within the city to transform Mason Korea's image into one of a university seeking to give to, rather than to take from, its community.

### **Connecting with the Community**

It soon became clear that many local and greater Seoul metropolitan area high schools did not welcome Mason Korea's recruiters. As noted above, the recruiters were seen as foreigners attempting to steal students away from Korean universities. Rather than focusing on high school students and being seen as directly competing against Korean universities, Mason Korea collaborated with officials from the Incheon Metropolitan Office of Education and high school college/career counselors to launch Mason Dream in 2018. This program was a mixture of academic seminars led by Korean American faculty and discussions led by current Mason Korea students describing their educational experience. These sessions demystified Mason Korea as a university and allowed middle school students a chance to try out a U.S. education in English for a day. To complete the college visit, the middle school students took a campus tour and ate at the campus cafeteria. As they would visit a U.S. college campus, the students left with Mason Korea branded gifts. The students and their chaperone teachers shared their experiences with family, friends, and school administrators. The service of engaging in college preparation for middle school students was welcomed by the community, especially among schools serving lower-income families. The demand for participation in the program among Incheon schools led to a tripling of the number of Mason Dream programs per year, a practice discontinued only due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the Mason Dream program supported middle school students, a different program was built in collaboration with the Incheon high schools. As a U.S.-based IBC, all Mason Korea instruction is in English. The Mason Korea Career Development Center partnered with local high schools to offer peer mentoring in conversational and professional/business English to Korean high school students. The director recruited Mason Korea students with strong English skills, including Korean students whose high school education was abroad or at an international high school. The application and interview process highlighted the need for professional and continued engagement by Mason Korea students, ensuring that they would support their local Korean peers while simultaneously demonstrating the kind of training college students would receive by attending Mason Korea. The peer mentors were deployed to high schools throughout Incheon, with additional mentors supporting high schools serving lower-income families. Grant funding supported mentor transportation and a

stipend, allowing the mentors to visit high schools twice a week. This program, while successful in introducing Korean students trained at a U.S. university to Korean high school students, was also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The peer mentor program solidified Mason Korea's reputation as a contributor to Incheon. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the program director was approached by a local non-governmental organization to expand the mentorship program. The expansion would partner peer mentors with high school students from a remote island of Incheon City to support their engagement with UN SDGs. In this partnership, high school students were mentored on the academic research process and English presentation skills. As the partnership began, the pandemic emerged. Mason Korea student mentors moved their mentorship online. The culmination of this partnership was a (socially distanced) in-person presentation by high school students at the Mason Korea campus. The participants were the Superintendent of the Incheon Ministry of Education, members of the Incheon City administrative team, high school administrators and teachers, students and their parents, and Mason Korea faculty and students, along with other community members. The student presentations provided such exemplary evidence of the value of Mason Korea community engagement that the Incheon government officials inquired about expanding this type of partnership to additional districts within the city as well as expanding community engagement overall. No longer seen as outsiders, community members, such as city council members and high school principals, began to seek ways to partner with Mason Korea.

### **Expanding the Partnership**

In the IBC, faculty members who have a full understanding of both the host country and the home country of the university play a key role in building a relationship with the local community. Faculty members who understand the local culture through education and work experience at U.S. universities are instrumental in building a positive reputation for the IBC. They act as the bridge between the IBC and the local community.

In Korean culture, the profession of professor is a highly regarded position. Mason Korea was privileged to recruit several faculty members who were Korean and who had been trained and previously employed in U.S. higher education. These faculty members met the community expectations of a professor. They also understood the Korean context and could both literally and figuratively translate the mission, goals, and opportunities at Mason Korea to Incheon citizens. These faculty members, selected because of their dedication to a U.S. undergraduate

educational experience, were critical in expanding partnerships between Mason Korea and Incheon.

The Korean faculty at Mason Korea successfully secured funding from the Korean government to build additional programs to make the U.S. university experience accessible to Incheon citizens. One local grant allowed Mason Korea to hold university classes at Incheon high schools several times throughout the academic semester. Mason Korea faculty visit high schools, teaching Mason Korea classes in which current Korean high school students are interested. Recent courses have included International Politics, Economics, Conflict Analysis and Resolution, English Communication, and K-Pop Culture. The Mason Korea faculty teaches high school students just as they teach their university students; for in some cases, only six months of education separate the two groups of students. High school students gain firsthand experience as to what Mason Korea means by U.S. education. Faculty members ask high school students to engage in class, just as they do their university students, from active learning in small group activities to answering questions posed during the course lecture. We found this partnership with local high schools to be beneficial in two ways. First, we demonstrated our desire to support the local community, gaining the trust of local government officials and high school administrators. Second, we have seen an increase in our local applications. Some of the students who participate in this program apply to Mason Korea. In their essays, they describe how the experience of taking a class with a Mason Korea faculty member at their high school shaped their desire to be in a classroom where they could demonstrate their interest and engagement with faculty whom they felt would help them be successful. Students felt more comfortable and confident in their choice of Mason Korea after taking classes in high school with the Mason Korea faculty.

One significant government-funded project was secured by the Korean faculty through the National Human Resources Administration. This funding supported the creation of a professional development training program for Korean government officials interested in working with U.S. entities. The curriculum provided direct training for U.S. business transactions in both English and Korean. Additional grant funding allowed securing a contract with the National University of Education to provide similar training for Korean teachers and school administrators, again in English and Korean. By utilizing the skills of the Korean faculty at Mason Korea, the critical audiences of government officials and education administrators became more familiar with the university. Mason Korea was seen less as an outsider organization and more as a community member, accessible to all. Given that these training opportunities were open to officials who have no formal power over Mason Korea, the goal

was not to change policy. Instead, these professional development and executive education partnerships, launched by the Mason Korea Korean faculty, served to further the notion of the university as a community member. The Korean faculty understood the local Korean context and could translate their own U.S. education and teaching experience into a consulting and advocacy role at Mason Korea. Their work, in turn, allowed Mason Korea to be seen as a positive contributor to the Incheon community.

### **Reflection**

An IBC will be successful only if it can be seen as a local university rather than an outsider pushing into the local community. In Incheon, South Korea, officials, educators, parents, and high school students have had positive experiences with George Mason University Korea and are thus more likely to recommend this IBC as a university for Korean students. We argue that the success of George Mason University Korea, measured by its upcoming 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and continual expansion in enrollment, is in part a function of the work of the leadership and faculty to understand and work with the local community. As a legitimate university for Korean students to attend, Mason Korea has become an entry point to U.S. higher education for Korean students.

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### **Bios**

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## Chapter 7

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# Breaking Barriers

## The Rise of Three California Community Colleges

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### **Abstract**

This chapter presents strategies and examples from 3 lesser-known community colleges in California. Their examples illustrate how, despite lacking initial prestige and reputation, the 3 colleges succeeded in securing a spot in the Top 20 rankings by the Institute of International Education (IIE) and culminated in recognition from the White House in the form of the Excellence in Exports award for U.S. higher education. The approaches employed were often contrarian and outside the box. For instance, they recruited universities before recruiting students, hosted parental seminars rather than student-only ones, paired with transfer staff from universities at fairs, established horizontal and vertical pipelines, built possibly the largest university transfer network in the U.S. while removing any barriers within their control, leveraged third-party promotions rather than paying directly for search engines, readied their global online courses before the global pandemic, and stayed ahead of geopolitical shifts. These and other innovative strategies played a crucial role in their success and could serve as a roadmap for other institutions facing similar challenges.

**Keywords:** transfer network, vertical integration, universal academic credits, in-country orientation, in-country staff, value-added marketing, 80/20 rule, operational efficiency, scaling, entry points

## Introduction

Figure 1 illustrates the journey and accomplishments of the San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley from 2012 to 2022. Their experience, particularly the “how” described in this chapter, may be useful to readers. The chapter explores the 10-year journey during which the 3 colleges went from approximately 80 international students to more than 1,500 in 5 years through a number of exciting innovative approaches. Hopefully, their story will help smaller and less well-known schools gain market share and results.



Figure 1: Scoreboard of the 10 Year Journey of San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley

When the Board of Trustees directed the Chancellor to develop international education, the San Mateo County Community College District (SMCCCD) had a modest international student population of approximately 80 across its three colleges. The prevailing marketing wisdom suggested that it would take 3 years to establish a reputation and 5 years to see significant results. However, SMCCCD set ambitious goals: to achieve financial stability and positive cash flow for the 3 colleges, to foster an environment conducive to international student learning and attractive to students, and to increase their numbers by 20% annually and cumulatively. They achieved all three goals within 5 years.

By 2017, the 3 colleges were enjoying a budget surplus from international education revenue, with 80% of the funds directly supporting classroom instruction. Their international students had access to one of the nation's largest networks of universities offering guaranteed transfer packages. According to

their board reports and published data, their transfer rate exceeded 95%, student satisfaction was over 95%, and a third of their students transferred to the top 100 universities in the U.S. and abroad. In 2018, their numbers had increased tenfold (1000%) since the initiative began five years earlier.

Their guiding principle was simple: students first. Their vision was to serve as a model for smaller and lesser-known institutions aiming to compete at a higher level. They faced numerous challenges, but their journey was about overcoming disadvantages and highlighting the positives. Above all, their survival strategies were characterized by exciting innovation, daring approaches, and unconventional methods.

In headline fashion, these are some of the most effective measures they took.

### **Recruiting Universities Before Recruiting Students**

Rather than initiating their journey with a recruitment trip abroad, they first took the time to analyze their strengths and weaknesses. This introspection led to the development of a network of domestic universities that offered guaranteed transfer agreements with the 3 colleges. This strategic move proved to be highly beneficial. It allowed them to present parents with a clear path to a degree for their children, and highlighted the added value of using the three colleges as a stepping stone to better opportunities. This approach offered a more favorable comparison between University Transfer Admission (UTA) and traditional University Freshman Admission (UFA). For more details, refer to Chapters 1 and 5.

### **Kids Are Easily Wowed, but Parents Are Your Target Audience**

Initially, they prepared many presents and marketing materials to bring with them on the trips. They also generated youth-oriented promotional videos and images to help attract young people. They would log hundreds of contacts each time. However, they found that most of the contacts never replied to their customized email follow-up. They quickly learned that attracting international students to a community college had to be through students' parents. Consequently, they began to devote more resources to hosting parental sessions, and if they had parents visiting their booth at a recruitment event, they would carry on an in-depth conversation with them. These efforts paid off. They ended up with more than half of their students coming through their interactions with the parents who then became their best unpaid promoters. The parents believed in the 3 colleges and wanted more of their friends' children to attend them. Words

cannot describe the feeling when the parents shook hands with the colleges' representatives at the booth saying "my child is now in your hands".

### **Turning Perceived Weaknesses into Strengths**

Opinions abroad tend to look at the unique features of community colleges as negatives. Open enrollment is perceived as having no standards. The wide range of student age and inclusion of job training are all negatives because they are different from the standard image of undergraduate campuses in elite universities. However, community colleges have turned around the negative views by clearly and proudly stating that open enrollment is the American way of giving all who desire to learn a chance. Instead of requiring students to take SAT/ACT tests, which are not equally available throughout the world and U.S., community colleges have their own homegrown assessment tests that can accurately place students in the right class at the right level. Regarding age, working adults and retired individuals are not taking transfer courses as the 18 year olds. However, having them on community college campuses gives young students the chance to network and learn from those who have made it in the workforce. That is often something unavailable on typical university campuses.

### **Keeping Messages Simple in All Matters Everywhere**

Early on, they discussed engaging a sophisticated web design firm to make their website splashy. They soon realized that the users of their website were primarily parents, recruitment agents, and school counselors who needed information and instructions on the application process, not glitzy images. In other words, the users wanted the website to be a transaction site. Excessive marketing on the site would defeat the purpose. This was quite an epiphany. As a result, the 3 colleges eliminated large digital spreads, which took up time and bandwidth to load on the users' ends. They began to present on their homepage the entry points to study with them and the respective steps.

They spent an enormous amount of time on their brochures; not in making them glamorous and fleshy but to hone their messages to keep them simple and as easy to read and memorable as possible. In the early days of their journey when they were almost unknown abroad, they spent time developing deeper bonds with recruitment agent partners and made sure they put the 3 colleges prominently on their respective websites, which collectively allowed the 3 colleges to appear often and everywhere in all search engines. By avoiding to pay advertisement dollars directly to search engines, their resources were wisely spent on growing third-party relationships who in turn promoted the 3 colleges to prominent

showings on search engines. It appeared to be against the grain and contrarian but worked well.



Figure 2: Minimalist Design of Homepage

### Adopting New Tech Only When It Can Scale

In line with the unconventional approach of promoting the 3 colleges via third parties’ website links vs. paying for search engines, they also postponed their engagement with Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms. The rationale behind this decision was clear: their initial small international student base was not a critical mass and would not generate enough “likes”, and China, their potentially largest source of students, had restrictions on Western social

media. Given that applications for community colleges are generally simpler with fewer requirements, they initially used paper-based applications. They continued this approach until they were ready to transition to online applications. Upon doing so, they became the first in California to launch an application portal for international students using Salesforce in 2016.

### **Being a Large Fish in Fairs**

Early on, they noticed that community colleges were overshadowed by universities at recruitment fairs. The presence of well recognized and selective universities excited the student visitors and gave them the impression that they would have a good chance at being admitted if they applied. They would then question the need to consider a community college with no ranking, no demanding admission criteria, and tuition often less than their international high school. Therefore, the 3 colleges requested and sought out fairs that would highlight community colleges. They partnered with vendors and schools to host their own fairs and seminars. Additionally, they brought transfer admissions officers from highly ranked universities to their events. Awareness of their institutional brand spread quickly, and their reputation began to be associated with well-recognized universities. A search on Baidu (China's Google) showed them #1 to #6 rankings in China.

### **Instilling Pride in Selecting Transfer Colleges**

Pride and prestige are undoubtedly key components in parents' minds when it comes to their children going to college. The 3 colleges understood that scholarships were part of this combination, therefore, they engaged with local community supporters to develop the Global Beca Scholarship. While the amount was small (\$250-\$3000) per award, it created a distinct image of excellence and prestige.

They also developed the EducationUSA Scholarship, which would waive a student's application fee if he or she stated on the application form that he or she had met with an EducationUSA advisor for any reason. The honor-based scholarship served them well and promoted EducationUSA.

### **Being Unconventional**

- In-country Pre-departure Orientations



Source: base map layer from [mrmussabaum.com](http://mrmussabaum.com)

This was one of the most successful recruitment events offered by the colleges. They brought an admissions officer (typically PDSO) and a counselor every year in late June to countries with the largest number of admitted students. They partnered with either agents or directly with the US Commercial Services or EducationUSA to host the sessions. Many times, as an exception, they were invited to the Embassy or Consulate for their single institution

event. This was because very few, if any, community colleges would conduct in-person in-country pre-departures. Furthermore, late June/early July is not a busy time for recruitment. While they typically opt for the cheapest flights (staff rarely flew business class unless they used their own miles and points) and less expensive hotels, they would, however, host events in 5-star hotels, including Ritz Carlton and Park Hyatt. They would never do something like this in the U.S., but the cultures in many countries would associate an institution's reputation and brand with where they host events. At almost all stops, they would attract curious parents who brought their college-age children who had not applied for any colleges. After attending the session, the parents would decide to have their children apply on the spot. Their eventual enrollment was more than paid for the cost of these trips.

- Keeping up with the Joneses

While American tradition is light on fanfare and extravagance, they thought otherwise for their recruitment abroad. They partnered with a local Napa winery to label the wines with the 3 colleges' brand and logo. This proved to be an outstanding move because the recipients would display the wine gift as their valued possession with class and taste. Of course, the colleges made sure only select guests would receive the wine, and they were legally cleared to be able to purchase the wine as gifts for distinguished guests. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they purchased masks and printed their logos on them as exhibit table gifts. They noticed that their typical arrow-shaped college banners would disappear in a sea of college banners.



They designed their own pennant in the form of a shield while incorporating all 3 colleges' logos. They published biannual newsletters to inform their partners and the global community of their exciting news and transfer successes of their students. These newsletters were professionally designed, and each piece of news was carefully worded for brevity and emphasis. They noticed that the readers often would contact the colleges first when they were placing a student due to the unique newsletters and their long shelf life.



**Exciting Updates**

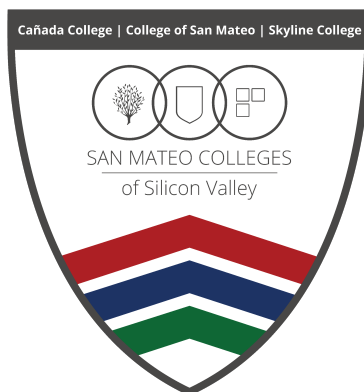
- Global Online Learning (GOL) provides current high school students, students over 18, and high school graduates an opportunity to take asynchronous online classes to earn credits accepted by 140+ universities.
- All three colleges are now accepting Duolingo English Test (85+), TOEFL iBT Special Home Edition (56+), and PTE (42+). Click [HERE](#) for a complete list of all test scores accepted.
- Many of the 151 universities in our CUP network are offering transfer scholarships.
- Global Beca International Student Scholarship and Aspiring Alumni Scholarships are offered to students at all three colleges. Check them out [HERE](#)!

**Featured Articles**

- Our Colleges Received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Export – Highest Honor Given to the Field
- Wallethub Ranks College of San Mateo Third Best in Nation
  - Published in September 2020 on Climate Online
- International ACAC Conference Spotlights Non-traditional HEI Options
- Attending Community College: The Next Wave for Indian Students
  - Published in April 2018 in the Landmark Magazine of Indo-America Society
- Joint Press Release with UC Berkeley
- Press article on San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley's Guaranteed Transfer to Elite US Universities
- UC Berkeley and San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley Executive Briefing
- UC Berkeley and San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley Executive Briefing (Chinese)

**Newsletters**

- October 2021
- April 2021
- November 2020
- November 2019
- March 2019
- October 2018
- February 2018
- September 2017
- March 2017
- November 2016
- May 2016
- September 2015
- May 2015
- October 2014
- March 2013
- June 2012
- February 2012
- December 2011



- In-house Homestay and EdBnB

Housing was one of the most important logistical efforts, and it also weighed heavily on the minds of parents. They hired an in-house homestay coordinator whose job was to develop a network of local families who were willing to open their homes to international students for a reasonable monthly fee. Later, they moved to develop a network of apartments that would accommodate their students for a reasonable monthly rent. They called this their EdBnB.

- Traveling with Executives

Who traveled was an important institutional decision. A factor in the decision was how effective the person could be as a spokesperson of the colleges. While most schools would send an admissions staff member to be on the road, and the 3 colleges did that routinely, they also asked chancellors, presidents, vice presidents, deans and executive directors to be on the road. Their presence with their titles would bring attention to their events because it showed their seriousness toward inviting international students. To meet the college president meant a lot to the visitors, and it helped open doors. Their one-two punch was that they would then have their staff members conduct follow-ups. Having executives travel for international recruitment also made these leaders keenly aware of the difficulty of working and the joy of seeing the students they met on their own college campus. While the international trip was extra grueling for them, surprisingly every single one of them genuinely appreciated the chance to be part of international education.

- In-country Representatives

Someone once said that international education is all about personal relationships. Even if people live in the digital era, in-person communication can never be replaced. This is why colleges travel to foreign lands for the purpose of bearing witness to their colleges and developing meaningful and long-lasting relationships. However, the drawbacks are also obvious: it is hard to maintain the relationship once you leave the country, and it is costly and almost impossible to have your U.S. staff in all places all at once. The 3 colleges consulted with legal counsel and developed contracts and resources to hire professionals in foreign countries to represent them exclusively. They became their eyes and ears, and they were also their first line of contact. At one time, they had full-time representatives in five of the most promising countries and several more on a part-time basis. Their highly productive work drove up and secured their enrollments. The investment in these contract staff more than paid for itself many times over.

- In-country Printing

With in-country representatives, they then delegated many tasks to be done locally in their countries. Printing and producing college pennants, bags, etc., were among the most costly items if performed entirely in the U.S. Often, international mailing encountered delays, misdelivery and customs withholds. The in-country representatives worked directly with local vendors or through their agents to produce large quantities of materials and shipped or even hand-delivered to the designated offices or events. They also allowed agents to stamp their brochures with their own logos on the colleges' brochures in an area reserved for that purpose. This approach worked well toward the spirit of collaboration.

- Removing All Barriers within Their Control

Additionally, the 3 colleges eliminated admission essays because they did not necessarily find them a true reflection of the applicants' personality and capability. They also made an exception for mainland Chinese applicants by allowing them to apply and be admitted while in Grade 11 if they were from a public high school, in response to the needs expressed by the U.S. Embassy in China. They stopped using an external transcript evaluator because the colleges followed the same philosophy as the one used for domestic student admissions by treating transcripts only as a reference. They would rely more on their own assessment tests of math and English to properly place the students in courses.

### **Vertical Integration for Strong Pipelines**

The nature of transfer programs at community colleges is meant for students to move smoothly to their university of choice. At the beginning of this vertical pipeline, this also means that the colleges must make sure students find it smooth and easy to reach their campuses. To that end, the 3 colleges developed the following programs.

- High School Counselor Residency

During the summer, various programs are available on U.S. colleges and university campuses for recruitment agents and school counselors to visit. They thought that a better approach was to offer those visitors a longer stay of up to 1 week for them to deepen their bond with the colleges. Hence, the name Residency. The program ran for 2 years successfully until COVID-19. Each time, approximately 12 school counselors and agents were carefully selected to attend

the residency. The colleges paid for their flight to the campuses and their hotels, meals, and local travel.

- SVIEP (Silicon Valley Intensive English Program)

While many colleges were dropping their own language schools, the 3 colleges decided to start their Silicon Valley Intensive English Program and to have it located directly on their campuses. SVIEP students were closely connected with colleges' regular academic programs and they shared student resources, including libraries and facilities. SVIEP survived the challenges from COVID-19 and consistently provided approximately 10-20% enrollment in their international program.

- University Access Program (UAP)

Students were frequently asked about summer enrollment to earn credit and to polish their English before the fall semester classes started. Since they could not admit students to summer semesters for academic studies, the 3 colleges incorporated their intensive English program SVIEP (Silicon Valley Intensive English Program) by pairing it with one or two credit-bearing courses. The program allowed the students additional time to improve their English skills to be far beyond the minimum admissions requirement and to build their academic credits as well as their bond with the colleges.

- Study & Work in Canada or Australia with Silicon Valley Education

As they developed their network of guaranteed transfer universities domestically, the 3 colleges attracted foreign universities to their network that in turn attracted more students to them. However, the U.S. government's policy requiring students to leave the U.S. upon completion of studies without the prospect of automatic work permits posed a challenge. It is widely known that for every Indian student coming to the U.S., 2 choose Canada or the United Kingdom (UK) due to better prospects for work and resident permits. The 3 colleges connected the dots by initially attracting students to Silicon Valley for two years of enriching experience and 60 academic credits, and then facilitating their transfer to partner universities in the UK, Canada, and Australia. They developed and promoted this program as part of their recruitment strategy.

### **Building an Ecosystem of Offerings**

Community colleges are more comprehensive than some universities and liberal arts institutions if one considers the full spate of general education courses plus

career technical education, job training, and lifelong learning. The 3 colleges tried to extend this feature to international students based on their needs.

- UCP (University Credit Program)

The colleges believe that academic credit is the basis for student mobility because it is used for the student to satisfy his or her next level of study. In that vein, they rebranded credits earned from the 3 colleges as the University Credit Program credits.

- Scalable Global Online Learning (GOL)

Once they reframed credits as part of the University Credit Program, they decided to offer courses online to international audiences with gumption and credibility. They started planning for GOL in 2018, and serendipitously they were ready when COVID-19 struck. A unique feature of GOL was that every online course was facilitated locally. While this required some effort, it significantly mitigated issues of loneliness and self-discipline, as GOL was deployed through local high schools or learning centers where students had access to tutors and supervision. This was one of the reasons for them to receive the prestigious Presidential Award of Excellence in Export through the U.S. Commerce Department in 2020.

GOL aligns the interests of all stakeholders, including high schools and parents. In addition, this alignment eliminates students' housing costs and the complexities of securing student visas. As a result, the hub-and-spoke design of GOL, with its inherent advantages, is well-positioned to scale both in terms of quantity and speed.

- College University Partnership (CUP)

The San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley have a reputation for having the largest transfer network of universities. With such a diverse group of institutions in location, ranking and offerings, it was important to organize activities and to identify them as a group. They decided to form a separate non-profit organization called the University College Partnership (CUP).

- Global UTA Seminars

Once CUP was formed, they communicated directly with the provost offices and transfer centers about its purpose and invited them to participate in transfer events. One of the popular activities during the COVID-19 years was university transfer admission (UTA) seminars, where they would have at least

two universities joining them in promoting transfer education in general for all community colleges, with case studies from their colleges serving as examples.

- UC Berkeley & Stanford Summer Academics

To better utilize the summer time for high school students interested in studying in the U.S., they worked with personnel from UC Berkeley and Stanford University to develop summer academics that allowed students to take credit courses at either university depending on their eligibility and interest. Their credits were inter-transferable among the 3 colleges and UC Berkeley and Stanford. During their study, their extracurricular activities included visiting the 3 colleges' campuses and neighboring high-tech companies.

The strategies outlined in this chapter played a pivotal role in the accelerated growth of the San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley. This growth was achieved through innovative and contrarian approaches, as well as outside-the-box thinking. As U.S. Army General Omar Bradley once said, "Wars are won through logistics, not strategies."

Due to the constraints of chapter length, the leadership, team efforts, resource allocation, and visioning efforts that contributed to the colleges' success are not detailed in this chapter. However, it is important to note that the exceptional team of staff and colleagues, along with their can-do attitude, were instrumental in their success.

As the author of this chapter, I had the honor of being part of this incredible team and leading the colleges from obscurity to numerous accomplishments. Hopefully the strategies and experiences shared here will prove beneficial to other institutions facing similar challenges.

## **Bio**

**Jing Luan, Ph.D.** is Provost Emeritus of San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley (San Mateo Community College District). His strengths are strategic thinking and logistical execution that led to the publication of the seminal work on data mining (big data) for American higher education in 2003 and the Presidential Award of Excellence in higher education export through the US Commerce Department on behalf of the White House in 2020. As an executive in higher education over the span of decades, he has been a speaker, writer, promoter on the topics of data mining, strategic planning, global mobility, leadership and organization development. E-mail: [jingluan@my.smccd.edu](mailto:jingluan@my.smccd.edu)

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## Chapter 8

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# University Transfer Admissions Success and Dispelling Myths

Jing Luan

*Provost Emeritus, San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley, USA*

### **Abstract**

This chapter begins by showcasing case studies of former University Transfer Admissions (UTA) students who have either attended community colleges or successfully transferred to top universities. These cases feature both celebrities and regular students who opted for UTA, highlighting their unique journeys. Collectively, these stories provide compelling evidence to demonstrate UTA's effectiveness for both American and international students. The chapter then proceeds to debunk 10 prevalent myths held by various stakeholders. These misconceptions contribute to the ongoing resistance towards entry points, particularly UTA. These myths, rooted in pride, prejudice, and a singular focus on profit at the expense of student interest, are the primary reasons for the underutilization of certain entry points. Each myth is evaluated and assigned a 'truth score' and a 'harm score' to gauge its impact and validity.

**Keywords:** case studies, successful UTA students, root cause, myths, misconception, misinformation, prejudice, national strategies, entry points

### **Introduction**

Chapter 1 succinctly outlines ten distinct entry points for securing an undergraduate degree in the U.S. These entry points, however, are not all

leveraged to the same extent due to a variety of factors. Interestingly, it is often the lesser-known entry points that present the most advantageous opportunities for students with specific needs or circumstances. Take, for instance, the Lateral Transfer Entry Point. This pathway, which facilitates student transfers between institutions of equivalent standing, can breathe new life into the academic journey of students who may otherwise struggle to flourish. This approach underscores the importance of recognizing and utilizing these less conventional, yet highly effective, entry points.

Elon Musk transferred from Queen's University in Canada to the University of Pennsylvania and eventually accomplished great business and industrial feats. The 44<sup>th</sup> U.S. President, Barack Obama, attended Occidental College – a private liberal arts college - before transferring to Columbia University. Peter Park, California's youngest lawyer at age 17, skipped regular college coursework by taking CLEPS (Completion of College Level Proficiency Exams) to gain entry to Northwestern California University School of Law. Prior to that, he graduated from high school at age 15 through the California High School Proficiency Exam, which is the University Credit Program entry point.

Upon finishing middle school, the chapter author crammed all 3 years of high school coursework into one semester to take part in the grueling College Entrance Exams in China to gain entrance to university at age 14 (the author skipped a year of primary school, too). In the author's case, he knew by instinct that his particular learning style meant that he would not survive the high school years due to its "slow" pace and highly structured hours, so testing into college was the right thing to do and changed his entire life.

Leading by example is a powerful tool. As the renowned theologian and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Albert Schweitzer once said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing" (Wikiquote, 2024). To illustrate this point, let's first examine the journeys of celebrated figures such as Steve Jobs and Walt Disney, who attended community colleges before reaching the pinnacle of their respective fields. This will be followed by a few case studies of students who successfully transferred from community colleges to top universities.

Let us first look at some celebrated American personalities whose education started in a community college.



Arnold Schwarzenegger – a famous actor, businessman, and politician, attended Santa Monica College before transferring to the University of Wisconsin-Superior. (Image: Tibrina Hobson, Getty Images)



Jim Sinegal, Costco Founder, attended San Diego City College. (Image: George Anders)



Tom Hanks – actor and philanthropist – attended Chabot College before transferring to California State University – Sacramento. (Image: Anthony Harvey, Getty Images)



Halle Berry – actor and fashion icon – attended Cuyahoga Community College. (Image: Kevork Djansezian, Stringer via Getty Images)



Sarah Palin – a politician – attended Idaho College and several universities. (Image: The Denver Post, Getting Images)



Walt Disney – entertainment empire builder and creator, and pioneer of animation – attended the Kansas City Art Institute. (Image: Disney)



George Lucas – creator of syndicated Star Wars, Indiana Jones and founder of Lucas Film Ltd. – attended Modesto Junior College before transferring to the University of Southern California. (Image: Toshifumi Kitamura, Getty Images)



Aaron Rogers – one of the most famed athletes and Super Bowl Champion, philanthropist – attended Butte Community College before transferring to UC Berkeley. (Image: Ronaldo Modra, Getty Images)



Steve Jobs – Co-founder of Apple, CEO of Pixar Animation Studios, and Visionary Leader of consumer products – attended Reed College. (Image: David Paul Morris via Getty Images)



Jim Belushi – actor, musician, and comedian – attended the College of DuPage. (Image: wireimage.com)



Morgan Freeman – highly acclaimed actor, producer, and narrator – attended Los Angeles City College. (Image: Kevin Winter, Getty Images)



Amy Tan – author of *Joy Luck Club* – attended San Jose City College before transferring to San Francisco State University. (Image: Amy Sussman, Getty Images)



Jim Lehrer – a well-respected news anchor – attended Victoria College before transferring to the University of Missouri. (Image: The Washington Post, Getting Images)



Clint Eastwood – legendary actor, filmmaker, musician, and politician – attended Los Angeles City College. (Image: Far Out/TCM)



Queen Latifah – a multi-talented actress and musician – attended Borough of Manhattan Community College. (Image: Kevin Mazur, Getty Images)



Bill Crystal—a highly accomplished actor, director, writer, comedian, and TV host—attended Nassau Community College before transferring to NYU. (Jamie McCathy, Getty Images)



John Madden – an influential figure in American football both as a player, coach, and later a broadcaster – attended College of San Mateo before transferring to Cal Poly. (Fox/courtesy Everett Collection)



Oprah Winfrey – a media mogul – attended Tennessee State Technical College before transferring to Tennessee State University. (Getty Images)



Craig Venter – a prominent American biologist for his role in sequencing the human genome and entrepreneur – attended College of San Mateo before transferring to UC San Diego. (Image: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory)



Colin Powell – former U.S. Secretary of State – attended City College of New York before transferring to the City University of New York (CUNY). (Image, U.S. State Department)



Steve Wozniak – co-founder of Apple – attended De Anza College.  
(Andreas Rentz, Getty Images)



Steven Spielberg – one of the most influential filmmakers and directors in the history of cinema – attended Brookdale Community College.  
(Image: La Ronge Northerner)

Sources:

<https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/slideshows/famous-people-who-attended-community-college>

<https://www.ranker.com/list/community-college-celebs/rydavis>

<https://www.coccco.edu/About-Us/Notable-Alumni>

The University Transfer Admission (UTA) entry point is predominantly utilized by domestic students. However, as highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2, it holds immense value and potential for international students. Our research indicates that there are annually over 360,000 seats available at a minimum in community colleges. If leveraged by international students, this could lead to tuition savings of up to \$7 billion for them and offer a multitude of university choices, including many top-tier institutions.

The following sections introduce a small sample of students who have made giant leaps from humble circumstances to the top universities. They are among the 250,000 transfer students annually on community college campuses (CCRC, 2024). Different from their UFA peers, they may have chosen community colleges as an entry point for many reasons, but their destination is incredibly remarkable and newsworthy. After all, education is about changing lives for the betterment of the world. In comparison to UFA students, community college transfer students consistently report having superior academic support, bolstered self-esteem, and a wider range of options when selecting prestigious universities. In her recent book, *Make College Your Superpower*, Anna Esaki-Smith (2024), herself a graduate of an Ivy League school, remarked, "It's not where you go, it's what you know." This reinforces the message from our book very well. We emphasize that it doesn't matter where you attend college; what matters is where you graduate. We encourage readers to explore both books to gain the most comprehensive and convincing arguments for selecting the right entry points to U.S. education.

Let's enjoy their stories and life journeys. (*Note: all photos are from the student contributors unless otherwise noted*).



**Nick Shafer**  
(domestic)  
Foothill College  
UC Berkeley  
Oxford

Nick Shafer's educational journey from Foothill College to UC Berkeley to Oxford underscores the transformative impact of UTA. After broadening his horizons across Nepal, India, and Morocco, Shafer recognized the value of flexibility and affordability in community college education. Leveraging his experience, he secured prestigious scholarships and fellowships, including the Ibrahim Leadership and Dialogue Program and the Boren Scholarship.

At UC Berkeley, Shafer excelled academically and emerged as a leader in Middle Eastern studies, graduating with honors. Shafer's pursuit of the Marshall Scholarship enabled him to study governance and Middle Eastern politics at Oxford. He co-founded Global Community College Transfers to advocate for greater access to international opportunities.

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“After moving from Venezuela in 2018, I couldn't afford attending a four-year university. Therefore, attending the Honors College at Lone Star College allowed me to pursue my Honors Associate's degree under a scholarship, integrate myself in a community of scholars, and expand my research and presentation skills. Collaborating with my peers to exchange feedback on our research papers and application essays nourished my sense of belonging and made my transfer applications more competitive than if I had applied after high school.

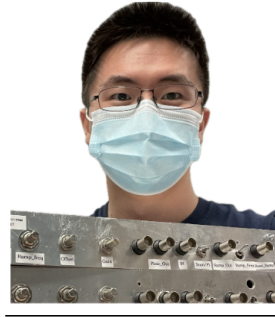
In addition, the Honors Directors and professors at Lone Star College were always eager to advise and share program and scholarship opportunities. Thanks to the supportive community I have at Lone Star College, I am now able to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Biomedical Engineering at Cornell University under the Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship.”



**Angelica Bernal  
Penalosa**  
(Venezuela)  
Lone Star College  
Cornell University

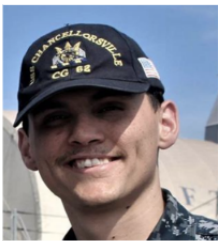
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"I always harbored the intention of studying in the US. When I learned that San Mateo College of Silicon Valley was admitting Chinese students over the age of 17, I seized the opportunity. The application process proved remarkably flexible, and I commenced my freshman year at the College of San Mateo, majoring in Physics, without undergoing the grueling GaoKao examination in China. Subsequently, I transferred to UC Santa Barbara to pursue my upper division studies while conducting research projects in biophysics and astronomy. It was there that I found my passion for doing research in experimental physics. After I graduated I was offered a great opportunity of working with Professor Dmitry Budker at UC Berkeley and Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz in Germany, where I was mentored in advancing my research skills. Following the completion of my research, I was extended an invitation to pursue my Master's/Ph.D. studies at Northwestern University in Evanston, complete with a full fellowship. Currently, I am immersed in the study of advanced physics and engaged in research focused on analyzing gravitational waves. Notably, I have published in top-tier journals within my field. I can say it with conviction that UTA gave me the foundation and much needed tuition savings and, most importantly, multiple choices for selecting the best university of my dreams."



Aaron Wang (China)  
College of San Mateo  
UC Santa Barbara  
Northwestern University

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Rick Holder (domestic)  
Foothill College  
University of Chicago  
Oxford University

Ricky Holder's journey from community college to the University of Chicago and beyond is driven by his determination to reform the foster care system. Growing up in foster care, separated from his family, Holder embarked on a mission to understand and improve the system that had profoundly affected his life.

After serving in the Navy, Holder pursued higher education, starting at Foothill College. He advocated for foster youth rights and enrolled in programs preparing him for university studies. Through the Warrior-Scholar Project, he found his way to the University of Chicago. Holder's dedication to reforming the system earned him the prestigious Marshall Scholarship, enabling him to pursue an MPhil in comparative social policy at the University of Oxford. His goal is to build a world-class welfare system

for American children in foster care, preventing family separation and improving outcomes for vulnerable youth.

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At 16, Dolly AuBuchon faced frustration with the educational system and dropped out of high school. Later, at 21 and 8.5 months pregnant, she took the GED (General Educational Development) test and continued at Tyler Junior College (TJC), where she pursued an Associate of Applied Science in Public Administration. Balancing full-time work and college, she completed her degree online, fitting it around her work schedule.



**Dolly AuBuchon**  
(domestic)  
Tyler Junior College  
Stanford University

Accepted to Stanford University to pursue public administration and international affairs. Despite never dreaming of gaining admission, she took the shot and succeeded. She said the application process for Stanford was straightforward. The challenging part was writing the essays. Her advice to others: "Write from the heart and be real." Stanford seeks authenticity, not embellished stories.

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**Luka Radosavljevic**  
(South Africa)  
Cañada College  
Cornell University  
Stanford University

Luka Radosavljevic, hailing from South Africa, was blessed with two incredibly supportive parents. As an international student, he demonstrated unwavering dedication to his academic pursuits. He earned the Global Beca Scholarship from Cañada College.

After completing his three years at Cañada College, he applied to Cornell University, successfully transferring with all three years' worth of academic credits. While his journey mirrors that of many successful transfers, he describes it as "an amazing journey."

At Cornell, he pursued a major in Material Engineering and harbored a long-standing aspiration to study at Stanford University. In 2022, his dream materialized as he embarked on his Master of Science (MS) in Materials Science and Engineering (MSE) at Stanford.



**Karan Soni (Nepal)**  
College of San Mateo  
UC Berkeley

"Born and raised in Nepal, my journey to higher education has been marked by perseverance and a quest for excellence. As a first-generation college student, I was driven by a steadfast determination to secure a brighter future, buoyed by unwavering support from my family, teachers, and friends. I was admitted and provided with a Global Beca Scholarship. Choosing to attend the College of San Mateo (CSM) was influenced by its academic renown and welcoming environment for diversity and inclusivity. Engaging with supportive teachers, I embraced opportunities for leadership, participating in student government and the Alpha Gamma Sigma Honors Society. My other extracurricular activities included tutoring in Physics and Math, where I shared my passion for learning with fellow students from diverse backgrounds. These experiences fostered lifelong friendships and gratitude for the lessons learned.

Transitioning to UC Berkeley, I delved into mechanical engineering, benefiting from renowned professors and a rigorous academic environment. Armed with a bachelor's degree from Berkeley, I entered the professional realm as a precision mechanical design engineer at Keysight Technologies, contributing to cutting-edge innovations in semiconductor technology. From Nepal to CSM, UC Berkeley, and beyond, my journey underscores the transformative impact of education and the limitless opportunities it affords those who dare to dream."

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Bernardo Fichman Lacerda came to Cañada College as a group from Brazil. He and his friends all performed extremely well. He is among the 3 who were admitted to UC Berkeley to study Engineering.



**Bernardo Fichman  
Lacerda (Brazil)**  
Cañada College  
UC Berkeley



Ran Hu (Candice)  
(China)  
Cañada College  
UC Berkeley

"As a child growing up in a small town in China, the prevailing ethos revolved around diligent studying and aspirations for admission to China's top universities. However, my journey took me far beyond those familiar horizons. In middle school, I discovered an international transfer program (aka UTA – university transfer admission) offering a promising entry point to prestigious universities in the U.S., which appeared more accessible than the traditional university freshman admission (UTA) that involves SAT and much more. This program, coupled with two years of study at a community college, provided international students like myself with

robust support and resources from faculty and staff, facilitating preparation for further studies at four-year institutions. It offered a seamless and relatively painless transition for those seeking education abroad. I owe a debt of gratitude to the professors and staff at Cañada College for their patience and helpfulness during my early years in the U.S. They not only assisted me in overcoming language barriers but also charted a clear roadmap for my academic journey, offering invaluable advice on how to strengthen my university application.

With a GPA of 3.97 and active involvement in various social activities, I achieved the seemingly improbable feat of transferring to UC Berkeley. This accomplishment was made possible by the transfer program and the exceptional faculty who supported me every step of the way. Presently, I serve as a Tax Senior at Ernst & Young's San Francisco Office, where my career journey continues to thrive within the taxation realm in the U.S."

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"My educational journey began in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, where I discovered the EducationUSA program, guiding me to an international college fair in March 2016 and ultimately leading me to Skyline College. There, I was fortunate to receive the rare but invaluable Global Beca Scholarship. Adjusting to American culture and academic standards as a college freshman presented challenges, yet with the unwavering support of staff and professors, I overcame these initial hurdles. Driven

by determination, I not only met but exceeded my academic aspirations. Participating in the YALI program as a student ambassador during my second year opened doors to interact with leading companies in Silicon Valley,



Franck Yao (Ivory Coast)  
Skyline College  
Elizabeth City State University  
Forbes Under 30 Scholar

nurturing both personal and professional growth. Subsequently, I secured transfer admission and a full scholarship at Elizabeth City State University, where I earned my bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. I was subsequently recognized as Forbes Under 30 Overachiever in 2019. Currently serving as a Treasury Finance Manager at Microsoft Corporation, I attribute much of my academic and career success to the solid foundation laid by Skyline College. Without hesitation, I would highly recommend it to others seeking a similar path to success.”

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Ryan Liu (domestic)  
Pasadena City College  
Yale University  
University of Oxford

Ryan Liu began his studies at Pasadena City College. While working multiple jobs and as a first-generation college student from a low-income background, he took a chance and applied to Yale University as a transfer student and was successfully admitted. After Yale, he earned his master’s degree from the University of Oxford and his law degree at Yale Law School. He is practicing law in southern California. Ryan’s own experience validated research that community college students who transfer to elite institutions successfully graduate at the same levels as students who enroll directly from high school or transfer from four-year schools. However, far

more students from underserved backgrounds lack access to social and economic mobility, especially those from low-income backgrounds and first-generation college students. Ryan has set out to reduce the unnecessary hurdles on their path to a degree. He said “While my journey was extraordinary, it underscores the importance of creating more pathways for community college students to transfer to top universities.” source: ryanliu.info

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“My name is Oladipo Toriola I was born and raised in Nigeria. I highly recommend Skyline College. The college welcomes you and gave you a great amount of support. I transferred to UC Berkeley but I will never forget my time here in Skyline. Currently I am working full-time as a Mechanical Engineer at Golder, CA.”



Oladipo Toriola (Nigeria)  
Skyline College  
UC Berkeley

\*\*\*



**William Alexander**  
(Indonesia)  
College of San Mateo  
UC Berkeley

"My name is William Alexander, originally from Medan, Indonesia. I learned about the San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley through a friend who was accepted there. It offered a fresh approach to studying in the U.S., boasting attractive facilities and a strong sense of safety and resources. Upon arriving on campus, I was impressed by the supportive staff and dedicated professors who took my academic pursuits seriously.

During my two years studying at the College of San Mateo, I began pursuing my dream of transferring to UC Berkeley. Surprisingly, the application process was straightforward. Drawing from my experiences in leadership and organization both on and off campus, my personal statements reflected authenticity and depth. Unlike many high school graduates applying directly to UC Berkeley while in a foreign country, I experienced far less anxiety and, of course, saved tens of thousands of dollars in tuition. Presently, I am employed full-time as a Research Associate at UPSIDE Foods in California. My journey towards achieving my academic and professional goals has been exhilarating, and my experience with university transfer admission (UTA) has been immensely fulfilling."

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Growing up in Guangzhou, China, Bella Zhang deliberately opted for community college due to financial constraints. She also valued the intimate environment of community colleges, where personalized guidance from both faculty and peers was abundant. This belief was reaffirmed when she transferred to UC Berkeley to pursue Data Science. At Berkeley, the emphasis on independence could be overwhelming, making it easy for students to feel lost without the initial support and guidance she received at her alma mater, Cañada College in Redwood City, California. "I was allowed to make mistakes," she recalls an opportunity that proved invaluable in preparing her for the challenges of Berkeley.



**Bella Zhang**  
(China)  
Cañada College  
UC Berkeley

Her experience at Cañada College not only provided a supportive environment but also offered ample opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities, fulfilling admission requirements for comprehensive review. These authentic

experiences directly contributed to her successful transfer admission to UC Berkeley.

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"I am immensely grateful for my experience at College of San Mateo. As a student who was considered a late bloomer and had primarily lived under the protection of my family, being at CSM provided me with the profound opportunity for self-reflection and personal growth. Beyond the captivating campus location, CSM offered a diverse array of subjects with introductory courses, enabling me to thoroughly explore various academic interests. Their supportive network of information tailored for transfer students gave a strong sense of assurance, offering a clear pathway for students to strive towards their goals.




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Sunny Yu (domestic)  
College of San Mateo  
UC Berkeley

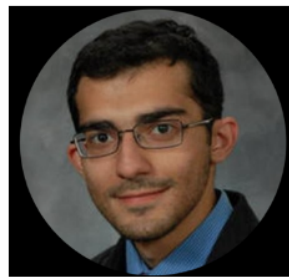
With well-defined criteria and courses geared towards transferring to a preferred university, I was able to gain confidence not only in my academic pursuits but also in my extracurricular activities, such as joining several student organizations, including the student council, and ultimately assuming the role of president of my own student club.

The resources and guidance provided at community college is unparalleled, affording students like myself to consider a multitude of factors that contribute to the decision making process specific to my own transfer needs. The support and expertise offered by the faculty and staff paved the way for a smooth transition to undergraduate student life.

Looking back on my journey post-pandemic, from uncertainty about my path to finding myself as a community college student, having graduated from UC Berkeley, and am currently pursuing post graduate studies at Berkeley Haas, it is evident that there is no singular path to academic excellence. Each individual's journey is uniquely their own, and if given the chance, I would wholeheartedly choose to embark on this journey again."

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"My name is Soroush Motahari from Iran. I was a mechanical engineering major Cañada College before transferring to UC Berkeley. One of the unique aspects of Cañada College was its small size compared to other community colleges therefore the students and the faculty are very close to each other. We were like a big family.




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**Soroush Motahari (Iran)**  
**Cañada College**  
**UC Berkeley**

Soon after I arrived at the college, I was accepted to this family and ever since it's been a phenomenal experience. Everywhere I turn to there's always been help and support. At Cañada College we all help each other to succeed, and the results showed."

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**Pisith Keo (Cambodia)**  
**Cañada College**  
**UC Berkeley**

Pisith Keo, a distinguished graduate of UC Berkeley Haas Business School, exemplifies success as a case study of UTA. His educational journey commenced through a collaboration between San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley and BELTI in Cambodia, bolstered by Education USA at the U.S. embassy.

Notably, Pisith was among the exceptional students selected for admission to Cañada College - one of the three institutions of San Mateo colleges of Silicon Valley and was awarded the Global Beca scholarship. His time at Cañada College was marked by numerous accolades, scholarships, and impactful achievements in student government.

After earning his associate degree in business administration and management, he transferred to the esteemed UC Berkeley Haas Business School. Currently, Pisith is currently living in Cambodia, contributing to his nation's growth and development.

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"My two years at Skyline College allowed me to grow and improve as a student, thanks to the support of the staff, teachers, counselors and programs such as Phi Theta Kappa (International Honor Society) and the Honors Transfer Program. I was able to improve my GPA and gained the confidence to apply to some of the top schools in the region – and I actually got accepted to these! The community of Skyline College is immensely helpful and supportive. I would remember this place forever!"



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**Anthony Petraki  
(Canada)  
Skyline College  
UC Berkeley**

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**Rui (Tiffany) Gwee  
(Malaysia)  
Skyline College  
Johns Hopkins University**

"I've spent two years at Skyline College and I really enjoyed my time here. Thanks to all the help I received from faculty and staff members, I am transferring to Johns Hopkins Business School with \$20,000 scholarship! Unlike a 4-year university, Skyline has a small class size where you get to know your professor better and you get to learn better. I think this is a very good place for international students."

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"I graduated high school thinking that I would never get into my dream universities. Skyline College helped me become the academic I've always wanted to be. Skyline College's resources and amazing faculty transformed the way I looked at higher education and showed me that there is nothing that I can't accomplish. I am now transferring to my dream school and I am so thankful to Skyline College for making it all possible."



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**Caroline Barros  
(Brazil)  
Skyline College  
UC Berkeley**

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"The past two years at Skyline College have been the sweetest memory since I came to the United States. There are so much resources here that helped me transfer to my dream school.

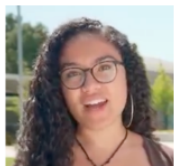



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Mohammad Izwan Bin  
Zainol Bahar (Malaysia)  
UC Berkeley

The tutoring service provided by the Learning Center has helped maintain my GPA. Extracurricular activities that I got involved with helped me improve my English. Furthermore, being a member of Honors Transfer Program and Phi Theta Kappa gave me the opportunity to explore more activities on and off campus."

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Leila Tamale, transferred from College of San Mateo to Stanford University. During her time at CSM, she greatly benefited from the support of CSM Transfer Services, the Ethnic Studies department faculty, and the MANA Learning Community.

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Leila Tamale  
(domestic)  
College of San Mateo  
Stanford University

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Khaoula Aissaoui transferred from Skyline College to Stanford University. Her words of wisdom are "...remember that success is something earned not deserved, something gritted not gifted, and something realized not dreamed. Therefore, keep moving until you do not only reach what you want but what you meant to be!"




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Khaoula Aissaoui (domestic)  
Skyline College  
Stanford University

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Sienny Angky  
(Indonesia)  
Skyline College  
University of San Francisco

Skyline College has helped Sienny Angky not only in her academics but also her character as a person. She transferred to University of San Francisco and continued to earn her Master Degree in Hult International Business School, where she received the prestigious Women in Business scholarship and Global Citizen Grant.

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We have compelling evidence to demonstrate that UTA is highly effective for American students, offering them equal opportunities for education no matter what their backgrounds or circumstances are. The U.S. education system prioritizes merit and ambition, enabling all students to strive for excellence regardless of their resources, family backgrounds, learning styles, or academic preparedness. UFA (University Freshman Admission) and UTA (University Transfer Admission) complement each other's strengths, ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds can succeed.

Community colleges provide a nurturing environment for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those not yet ready for university life or those who just want a simpler process of admissions. By embracing inclusivity and support, these institutions empower individuals to thrive. Together, UFA and UTA bridge gaps and level the educational playing field for all.

However, there is still much work to be done to establish UTA as a primary path for international students seeking an education in the U.S. Numerous domestic and international factors influence current practices, perpetuating disparities in educational opportunities. In extensive research and empirical analysis, the author has identified 10 prevailing myths that contribute to the gap between domestic and international students in choosing between UFA and UTA entry points. These myths, widely accepted, hinder progress and must be challenged. To confront them, the author has meticulously examined each myth and rated its validity and impact on the UTA Scale of Truth and Scale of Damage.

**Myth #1 Institution Overcapacity** – Professionals often discuss the proportion of international students on campus. While there isn't a specific ideal ratio between international and U.S. students, Stewart-Rozema and Pratts (2023) found that international students comprised an average of 5.6% of all college students in the U.S. Knight (2012) highlighted concerns regarding cultural homogenization in light of increasing globalization and student mobility, as well as the balance between "brain drain" and "brain gain." Arguments for an optimal mix of domestic and international students may be irrelevant due to various fluid factors. Firstly, 60% of international students are enrolled in just 5% (or 100 universities) of U.S. institutions, raising concerns about oversaturation primarily for them. Secondly, there is limited literature discussing the negative impacts of oversaturation on institutions. Nonetheless, it is crucial to address situations where students predominantly enrolled in one or two programs or hailed from one or two countries or where a program is disproportionately inundated with international students with specific needs. Adjustments must be made to ensure

resources are available to all students and prevent departments or personnel from being overwhelmed.



**Myth #2 DTLR ("due to limited resources"), We Must Serve Local Students First** - While prioritizing local students due to limited resources may seem logical, the primary goal of international education is to foster diversity and globalize the U.S. campuses, both of which are crucial for institutional relevance and competitiveness. Moreover, the tuition income from international students not only addresses overall institutional needs but also benefits the local community through contributions to housing, tourism, and other indirect areas. For example, in 2017, the San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley, with 1,500 international students, contributed USD \$34 million to the local community and supported 196 jobs (NAFSA, 2018). Therefore, international education should ideally yield a net positive revenue for the institution while advancing the fundamental objectives of diversity and globalization.



**Myth #3 International Students Taking Seats from Domestic Students** - It is a common misconception that international students are occupying seats in classrooms at the expense of domestic students. However, if one has not read institutional reports, which are typically accessible only to more sophisticated users, it is easy to miss the fill rate (number of available seats in a class). Community college classes are often small, sometimes mandated by law not to exceed a certain number of students. Despite this, the average fill rate of classes typically ranges from 65% to 85%. Administrators closely monitor fill rate charts well before classes commence and will open a new "section" (another class with the same content) once it reaches around a 90% fill rate. It generally takes between 3 to 5 international students to cover the cost of opening a new section.

Moreover, international students predominantly enroll in transfer-level classes, which often do not have high fill rates to begin with. These classes may risk cancellation due to low enrollment if not due to the presence of international students.

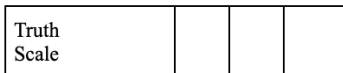
Furthermore, these transfer-level classes, favored by international students, dispel concerns that they are sharing classrooms with retired individuals. In fact, the interaction between international students and older, experienced individuals can be mutually beneficial, as it provides valuable insights and perspectives.



**Myth #4 Higher Visa Denials for Lower-Ranked or Unranked Schools**

- There is no documented case where a student is denied a visa solely because the destination school is either unranked or ranked low by any rating agency. Visa officers primarily assess factors such as the student’s ability to pay and their intentions post-graduation. It is not within their purview or expertise to question the legitimacy of a U.S. institution’s admission decision so long they are legally permitted to issue I-20s. Other factors contribute to higher visa denials for certain types of students who are often associated with specific schools. For instance, community colleges typically offer lower commissions to recruiting agencies, which may attract less prepared students. During the interactions the author had with students in India applying to community colleges, the author encountered cases where applicants had limited English proficiency, struggled to articulate their reasons for studying in the U.S., lacked familiarity with their colleges of admission, and had minimal financial support. Unsurprisingly, these applications often resulted in visa denials, perpetuating the misconception that community colleges admit unqualified prospects and have high visa denials rates.

A more prudent approach for applicants from countries with high visa denial rates would be to first ensure they meet the minimum eligibility criteria for university admission before considering community college study.



**Myth #5 Education Is the Responsibility of Individual States in the U.S.**

- Indeed, the U.S. Constitution makes no mention of education rights and the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez affirmed the individual states’ responsibility to public education. However, international education is first and foremost a process of recruitment. To that end, it requires cohesive messaging and robust support from the government. Unlike counterparts the British Council, the U.S. lacks a dedicated entity or national policy for international education. Consequently,

there is a lack of coordinated efforts to advocate for international education and students. There is no national voice or representative to facilitate dialogues, convey concerns, develop policies, set standards, or allocate resources at a national level. Instead, responsibility falls upon states, individual institutions and a vast patchwork of for-profit entities. The predominant focus on UFA by schools, education agencies, and parents, coupled with the absence of a public media campaign supporting transfer students with data and examples, has led to waning student interest and unregulated profiteering by cottage businesses catering to UFA. At the local level, certain individuals, such as trustees, wield considerable influence over upper management, including the college president. Lack of political will to confront bias against international students directly negates community colleges' ability to recruit. It is important, therefore, for these institutions aiming to recruit internationally to review their mission and to check against their accreditation standards in order to articulate to the stakeholders how internationalization is accomplished.



**Myth #6 “We Only Believe What We See”** - The effectiveness of marketing and promoting community colleges is influenced by several factors. Firstly, the absence of rankings for community colleges leaves a void that fosters rumors, misconceptions, and undermines the value of these institutions. Chapter 5, University Transfer Admission outlines initial rules for ranking community colleges, offering a potential solution to this issue. Secondly, the lack of a strong and unequivocal endorsement of UTA as an equal entry point to UFA for U.S. education further undermines confidence in UTA. Thirdly, inadequate alumni management in community colleges results in a lack of role models and spokespersons to counter misconceptions. The author has observed instances where former UTA students fail to mention their community college alma mater. After years of combating negative public perceptions of community colleges, the author laments the absence of positive imagery, news, and data specifically tailored for international audiences. Community colleges currently lack controlled narratives and training or certification measures for different segments of the international education industry. A single episode of a TV series like “Community,” set in a community college, can undo years of hard work by professionals, including the author.



**Myth #7 “Admitted to a Community College” is Embarrassing** - Education attainment is a pivotal factor in shaping individuals' life perspectives, often representing a significant investment by both families and governments. The prevailing belief has long been that higher education correlates with better job prospects, income, and overall life comfort. While this notion is not inherently flawed, the current education system's structure, akin to a production line from kindergarten straight through to grade 16, is slow to adapt to a rapidly changing world. Emerging trends like distance education, stop-outs, credit by examination, gap years, and, notably, UTA, offer legitimate paths to education attainment and student mobility.

International students are often indoctrinated to view the means of acquiring a U.S. education as equally crucial as the end result. Educators and financiers of elite international high schools intentionally promote the notion that a high price tag equates to a better chance at Ivy League acceptance, without simultaneously being held accountable for failures. Sensationalized stories perpetuated by parents and recruiting agents, focusing on the lucky few who gain direct admission to top-tier schools, reinforce this bias and deepen the prejudice against community colleges. Pursuing admission to prestigious schools through UTA entails delayed gratification, which some find too arduous and unprofitable. Bias (pride and prejudice) clouds objectivity, diverting attention from student interests and equal opportunities. It is imperative to address this issue promptly to ensure fair and factual discourse in education.



**Myth #8 Devalue of Degrees with Community College Credits by Home Countries** - Some entities outside the U.S. regard baccalaureate degrees involving community college transfers as inferior to those completed entirely at a single university. Persistent rumors suggest that diplomas differ between UFA and UTA students. To dispel this notion, the author presented copies of both diplomas and enlisted UTA students who graduated from highly selective universities to show absolutely no difference in markings, color, materials, and wording. While the only document potentially indicating differences is the transcript, which delineates the origins of credits—including those from community colleges, AP, IB, or credits by examination—it actually proves the point that all credits

earned through different means are equal. Second-guessing the issuing university undermines the integrity of academic credentials.



**Myth #9 Missing Out on Dorms and Student Life** - Attending college has long been considered a quintessential rite of passage, as often depicted in popular culture. However, the notion of going to college while staying at home, such as attending a community college or studying through distance education, has not traditionally been embraced as the norm. One argument is that students may miss out on the opportunity to forge lifelong relationships with classmates and experience the vibrant campus and dormitory life typical of universities. While there is some validity to this argument, it is important to recognize that meaningful relationships can develop outside of a traditional four-year college experience. UTA students, for instance, may have two sets of friends and can still engage in campus activities and events. Moreover, dormitory life is not necessarily the most crucial aspect of the student experience.

Instead, for international students, spending the first two years with an American host family (homestay) offers a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the U.S. community in its most condensed form—the American home. This experience provides valuable adult supervision, exposure to the local community, and cultural immersion, which are essential for their personal growth and adaptation. The author personally attests to the profound and lifelong impact of his homestay experience.

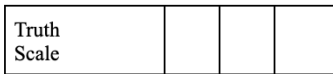


**Myth #10 You Pay for What You Get** - This misconception revolves around the tuition cost disparity between community colleges and four-year universities or liberal arts colleges. Community college tuition is often only a fraction of the cost of attending a public university or even significantly lower than that of a private university:

Full-time	UTA	UFA		
	CCs*	CSU**	UC***	Stanford†
In-State	\$1,993	\$5,742	\$14,436	\$57,693
Out-of-State/Int'l	\$7,120	\$15,246	\$46,636	\$57,693

(\*California Community College Chancellor’s Office; \*\*CSU Chancellor’s Office; \*\*\*UC Office of the President; †Stanford Admissions Office)

This misconception arises from a lack of understanding of how education functions, where price is not necessarily an indicator of quality. Community colleges primarily focus on teaching, with costs covering classrooms, equipment, and faculty and staff salaries. Conversely, universities incur additional expenses such as conducting research, maintaining larger facilities and grounds, and running competitive sports teams, among other high cost items. Lower-division courses at universities are often taught by teaching assistants, and class sizes can be considerably larger, leading to less individual attention. Meanwhile, transfer courses at community colleges are meticulously aligned with university standards, ensuring equivalent quality and rigor, albeit at a lower cost. Therefore, the lower tuition costs at community colleges often translate into equal or even superior quality of learning, contrary to popular belief.



In any given year, approximately 400,000 to 450,000 U.S. community college students transfer to universities, according to Tableau Public, which utilizes data from the National Student Clearinghouse (+tableau public, 2024). This number alone is twice the size of all international undergraduate students currently enrolled in both four-year and two-year institutions in the U.S. and 8.3 times the size of all incoming international freshmen in 2022-2023, which stood at 95,681 (IIE, 2023).

California, often regarded as a model state for promoting course articulation and community college-to-public-university transfer pathways, has achieved remarkable success in this regard. In California, 30% of juniors (third-year students) at University of California (UC) campuses are community college transfers (University of California Accountability Report, 2020). According to Key Facts from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office in 2023, 51% of students at California State Universities (CSUs) are community college transfers. At UC Berkeley, the transfer admission rate is four times greater than the international freshman admission rate (24% vs. 6%) (University of California

InfoCenter, 2019), illustrating its significant role in facilitating upward mobility for academically competitive students from diverse backgrounds. Former UC System President Janet Napolitano stated that transfer students graduate at a rate equal to or higher than those who enter as freshmen (Jamali, 2020).

However, the data from the IIE Open Doors reports paints a stark and concerning picture. Since the academic year 2015-2016, on average a paltry 5% of international undergraduates began their journey at community colleges. This is in direct contrast to the fact that nearly half (49%) of all students who graduated from a four-year university in the U.S. had previously attended a public two-year college (IIE, 2023).

This glaring 1-to-10 disparity is not just a statistic – it is a wake-up call. It flies in the face of principles we hold dear: prioritizing student interests, diversifying institutional representation and student enrollment, eliminating inequities in student outcomes, and promoting inclusivity regardless of financial circumstances and learning styles.

This is a discrepancy – it is an injustice. And it is not something we can afford to ignore. It should be at the forefront of every conversation, every policy decision, and every strategy discussion about international education in the U.S. We must demand better for our students, and we must act now. This is not just a priority – it is an imperative.

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## Bio

**Jing Luan, Ph.D.** is Provost Emeritus of San Mateo Colleges of Silicon Valley (San Mateo Community College District). His strengths are strategic thinking and logistical execution that led to the publication of the seminal work on data mining (big data) for American higher education in 2003 and the Presidential Award of Excellence in higher education export through the US Commerce Department on behalf of the White House in 2020. As an executive in higher education over the span of decades, he has been a speaker, writer, promoter on the topics of data mining, strategic planning, global mobility, leadership and organization development. E-mail: [jingluan@my.smccd.edu](mailto:jingluan@my.smccd.edu)

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## Chapter 9

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# A True American Story

## My Careers in Silicon Valley Companies and the Education Journey to Get There

Ralph Lemke

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### **Abstract**

This chapter, told in the first person, brings to the readers candid conversations and valuable education and career advice from a much accomplished software engineer in Silicon Valley. Having worked close to 40 years in most of the well-known high-tech companies in the world, the author recounted his education through the UTA (University Transfer Education) entry point, and his work experiences in nine high-tech companies as a team member and as a manager. It holds immense significance for readers to recognize that nearly half of American undergraduate degree holders embarked on their educational journey at UTA—just like Ralph—and eventually ascended to the pinnacle of their careers. His observations will provide students seeking careers in the high-tech world with deep insights and profound lessons. He takes the readers through his companies arranged in sizes and describes the working environment, the pros and cons, and what it takes to be successful.

**Keywords:** UTA, community college transfer, job search, job interviews, teamwork, Silicon Valley, career ladder, job performance, success in high demand high output high tech companies, entry points

As a retired software engineer with 40 years of experience, I have worked for various companies in Silicon Valley, including both startups and well-established tech giants. The technology industry has seen a lot of changes since I entered it. Many of the memories from these changes are fun to remember and will at least

be fun for new engineers and might be insightful. Although the technologies have changed in the last 50 years, many of the ways new engineers survive and prosper in large companies have not.

Over the course of my career, I worked for many companies—each stent with a company lasting about 6 to 8 years. Therefore, my views on companies might differ from those of someone who has worked at the same company for 20 to 40 years. For me, the positions have always been about the technologies of the project and the project team with the potential to change the industry.

In this chapter, I talk about how community colleges helped me find my career. I also discuss a few of my experiences in companies of various sizes and give a few examples of the type of jobs I did way back when, mainly for a little humor, but also to show the great changes in technologies that have occurred over my career, while pointing out that these technology changes do not really change the company work environments. And lastly, although I have been in positions of management and architect that did not require actual software programming, my most favorite positions have always permitted time to do some software programming, and thus the following views are from the perspective of a software engineer.

### **Community College**

I grew up in Port Angeles, Washington, a small town with the primary source of employment being logging and lumber activities. Seattle was the closest major city about a 3-hour drive.

When I was in high school, it was a common expectation that a person would graduate high school and find a job at a local mill, Rayonier Pulp and Paper Mill being the most popular place to work. This was especially true if you did not know what you wanted to do with your life — what 17-year-old does? Although I did OK in high school with a little over a B average, I was never really excited about it. I had a part-time job at the local Denny's restaurant and, quite honestly, felt more at home there, at times, than in high school.

Growing up, I went to the local church, Pacific Lutheran Church. I liked playing the piano, and during high school, started to take organ lessons and play for the church. The organ teacher, Mrs. Churchley, was an amazing teacher. Not only did I learn how to play the organ, but I also learned more about college. She would organize “expeditions” to the cathedrals in Seattle to attend organ concerts and take us along with her, where she had organ lessons at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA. These expeditions were amazing not only in allowing me to

play these magnificent organs but to meet her professors, in addition to many world-famous organists. We students were included in the after-lesson/concert meetups. In these sessions, I met people who loved their career — it was their life. Such excitement I had really never seen before. This devotion to their career convinced me that my ambition was to be an organist. And in order to be an organist, I needed to get my music degree.

Going to the nearest well-known University (University of Washington) was expensive and you needed room and board. For a mill worker's income, this was typically not an option. However, there was a community college in Port Angeles. Its tuition was about \$500 for the year (remember it was 1973), a small fraction of the price for the University. I opted for the community college as it was financially viable, allowed me to stay home, and work part-time to help pay for expenses, and it allowed me to get basic courses out of the way since they were transferable to a University - I did not see the point of paying high prices for courses that were not in the direct path of my degree.

At Peninsula College, I took all the required basic courses which could be transferred to a 4-year University. These courses, I discovered, were much different than the courses in high school, not in terms of the content, but in terms of how they were taught and the students attending the classes.

Mr. Churchley, Mrs. Churchley's husband, turned out to be the Chemistry professor at Peninsula College and taught my chemistry courses. Chemistry was one of the basic transferable courses that almost all students had to take. He, like Mrs Churchley, was an amazing teacher. Every lecture was delivered with great enthusiasm and featured a variety of supporting materials such as examples, studies, and current real-world applications related to the topic being discussed in industry or research. In addition, he assigned projects for each of us to carry out in the community. One such project that stands out in my memory was when I was tasked with collecting and analyzing soil samples from the vicinity of a highway to measure lead levels, back when cars were still using leaded gasoline.

You may wonder what made these teachers stand out and if they were really superior to all other teachers. Undoubtedly, they were exceptional educators, but beyond that, they cared about their students on a personal level. Sessions were conducted to learn how to play the organ on a one-to-one basis. In Chemistry, the class size was about 10 to 15 people. Mr. Churchley got to know us all and talked to us outside of class. Students knew their teachers as real people and the teachers knew their students. In the chemistry lab, conversations beyond the experiment took place. Conversations on why you were doing the experiments

and the history behind it. There was individual help in setting up the experiment when students were having problems. What made these professors great was not only their teaching ability but their interest in the students and their devotion to the students.

My courses at Peninsula college included physics, math, English, literature, history, physical education, computer science, and biology. All these courses seemed far more interesting and exciting than similar courses I took in high school. I think that apart from dedicated professors, the students themselves were highly motivated to learn and succeed in the course, not just for the sake of getting a good grade but also because they found the subject matter genuinely fascinating. Unlike high school, I became friends with many students at college. We all found a common enjoyment of classes as well as commiserating about hard work. This camaraderie fostered excitement toward learning and enduring the more rigorous courses than those in high school.

During my time at Peninsula College, I initially thought it was quite a large institution, but it was only marginally bigger than my high school. The library was the central hub of the college, and during breaks, my friends and I would often gather there with the intention of studying, although we often ended up socializing and reflecting on the day's happenings instead.

During the week, a few of us worked at nearby restaurants. If any of us missed a class or didn't have enough time to study because of work commitments, we would pay them a visit during their break or right after their shift (provided it wasn't too late) and offer a 30-minute overview and study advice for the upcoming lecture or test. In that era, we didn't have the ease of access to mobile phones, Zoom, or other social communication technologies that are now commonplace, which made face-to-face interaction a necessity. Nowadays, communication has become effortless, but it's the ability to make friends with numerous classmates in your courses that allows for meaningful interaction.

While attending Peninsula College, I switched my major to Chemistry. This decision stemmed from my fascination with the investigative aspect of science. I discovered the pleasure of innovation and exploration that Chemistry provided, as well as its role in developing materials and medications. Playing the organ helped me clear my thoughts while studying Chemistry satisfied my inquisitive nature.

From Peninsula College, I went to Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) and most of my credits from Peninsula College directly transferred to PLU, allowing me to

choose those courses specific to my BS degree. PLU is a fairly small university in Tacoma WA. I felt that I already knew the university from our excursions there for organ recitals and lessons. In addition, many of the friends I had made at Peninsula College were going there as well. The class sizes at PLU were small compared to a university, and the courses for the last 2 years of college are more directed to a specific major which also helps keep the class size down at that level. Because of the smaller class sizes, the professors were devoted to individual student learning, just as the small community college. Some professors invited their students over for dinner and card games. This bonded the students and professor in addition to getting to know the students individually which helped in advising students on future careers or choices in universities for furthering their education.

I received my bachelor's in chemistry from PLU and then started the Doctorate program in Analytical Chemistry at Indiana University (IU). That was a big leap for me, both in education and distance. I reviewed the research areas of the professors and found a professor who was doing exciting work that I thought would interest me. As a graduate student, IU offered teacher assistant roles that helped pay for room and board. In addition, teacher assistants worked with students in labs and provided study groups for Q&A. I became a teacher's assistant (TA), and although at the time I felt like it was a burden, it did offer me a chance to see how first-year students handled the large classes and labs. Unlike Peninsula College and PLU, IU was a very large university. The first-year Chemistry lecture would have at least 500 students in the lecture hall (If I have overestimated, then I am sorry, I do not know the exact number, I mainly remember a very large lecture hall that was packed with students). Labs, although having fewer students because the labs ran several a day handling smaller groups of people, still had over 50 students in a lab. There was nothing personal about those lectures. The professor did not interact individually with students and students did not get an understanding of the professor. Although great, world-renowned professors and lecturers, their teaching was limited to the lecture in the auditorium.

Since I was a graduate student at IU, that portion of the school felt very similar to Peninsula College and PLU in terms of size and interactions with professors. At the graduate level, classes were relatively small, and we had office hours to talk to the professor about our research, not to mention just daily random hallway conversations. As a graduate student, I spent much of my time doing research in an area very close to all the professors' offices and research labs. It was not only my professor that I talked to on a daily basis, but also the other professors who were happy to talk about the implications of my research to their area.

My major at IU was Analytical Chemistry. Much of the research in Analytical Chemistry involved building instrumentation (such as Laser Spectrometry) and the use of Computers in the building of these tools. My research project was to build a device that could accurately and automatically add microdroplets of reagent to an experiment. This device used a computer to control a very thin vibrating delivery tube (like a syringe) in which the computer selected individual droplets by applying an electric charge between two plates that the droplets traveled through. The charge would significantly change the course of some droplets, so they went into the reaction chamber while other droplets went to a collection chamber.

The computer used in this experiment was called a PDP-12 computer. It was the size of 2 washing machines - one stacked on the other. To start the computer, I would key in the bit sequence (program) to read the paper tape using the console keys. Then I would load the operating system paper tape in the tape reader to boot the computer. Then I would load my program, which I had punched onto paper tape. There was really no concept of debugging except through print lines to the teletype. I became quite good at determining what the computer was up to by observing the CPU register lights located on the front of the PDP-12.

To help me with my computer programming, I decided to enroll in computer courses. Despite being a Chemistry major, I took numerous Computer Science courses, including introductory courses, programming, algorithms, statistics, and even Artificial Intelligence. This was during the early stages of AI, and Indiana University boasted one of the top AI experts at the time.

I became more interested in computer science than I was in Chemistry. By the time I was done with the computer courses that I had only taken to “help me out”, I actually had enough courses for a master’s degree in computer science.

One of the benefits of taking courses from multiple disciplines is the opportunity to speak to many professors, those in computer science and those in chemistry. I could see my interests were changing and that a PhD in Chemistry was no longer my goal. When discussing a PhD program in Computer Science, the professors said that unless I plan on teaching or research, there was little benefit in continuing for a PhD in Computer Science. (Although in looking back, I disagree with them on that statement. A PhD always opens doors in the industry, even if you are not teaching or researching. I do not blame them since times were rapidly changing from what they were used to). I also was getting a little tired of classes and decided to think more about graduating and getting a job. When talking to my Chemistry Professors, I had done more than enough for an MS in Chemistry

and therefore graduated IU with an MS in Analytical Chemistry and Computer Science. Also my GPA went from about 3.3 in high school to a 3.9 when finishing grad school.

### **Transition to a Career**

How did I get to Silicon Valley from Indiana University — that's a long distance. Back in 1980, there were few computer software companies. It was challenging to come across companies offering job opportunities. Universities would host career fairs where students could engage with companies. However, I remember that the firms conducting interviews were predominantly large and established entities such as Shell, IBM, and GTE Sylvania. Startups or medium-sized firms with a primary focus on computer products were not common. During my job search, I interviewed several prominent companies in the eastern and southwestern regions. However, I noticed that software engineering was not the primary focus of many of these companies, rather it played a secondary role in their overall business operations. One of my professors suggested the San Jose / San Francisco area, which was the home to Ames Research, IBM research, GTE Sylvania, NASA, HP, and others — just a handful — nothing like what you would expect today.

The interview process was a little different in 1980. I was treated with great respect, expected to give presentations on my research, and stayed at very nice hotels during the interview process (at least nice for a grad student). It was clear to me, the computer scientist/engineer was a new and emerging beast treated with a little awe and wonder.

I joined GTE Sylvania because the projects seemed very exciting, and they felt more “real world” than some of the other companies. For some reason positions that were related to banking, accounting, or running the company's business did not seem like computer science to me. Which is a good example of why you should talk to people in as many companies as possible to get a more broad perspective of the available positions. Anyway, that began my career in Silicon Valley.

The first year at GTE was exciting to be working at a company and see how it worked. As a new hire without a top-secret clearance, I could not do too much actual development. I did a lot of tasks that were learning experiences on how projects were developed. The main task was documenting existing code. Back then, it was common for engineers to manually draft their programs on paper, which was then given to a secretary to transcribe onto punch cards for the

computer. As a new graduate, one of the talents I brought was the ability to type my own punch cards.

GTE might have been more restrictive than most large companies with respect to what a new graduate is assigned because of the top-secret clearance requirement, but in general, you should not expect to be assigned a major project immediately. You will need time to understand the new environment which will enable you to be a success when you are assigned a more prominent project. The initial projects might test your “PhD ready to conquer the world” patience.

GTE was also exciting from a social aspect. After work, co-workers would meet up for a happy hour a couple times a month. The happy hour was offered at most large restaurants. Small groups of coworkers, dressed in business attire (computer programmers wore suits) with appetizers and drinks, would talk over the day’s events and beyond the standard talk, conversations about new startups that were developing groundbreaking technology. These happy hours were a common way of knowledge transfer at that time with respect to new startups and companies. Of course, if you were really looking for a new position, there were “headhunters” whose job it was to know all the companies and match companies and new hires. But the job search was not easy, unlike today, where a search for the top 100 startups will immediately present a well-documented list of startups that you can review. At that time, the job search was mainly through social connections or a headhunter which presented you with a few jobs they thought you might match.

After the first year at GTE, I left to join a relatively small startup, called VisiCorp, working on technology that was directly competing with Microsoft Windows and Office Products. GTE required a top-secret security clearance and the communication within the company was very restrictive to a “need to know” basis. This restrictive environment strongly conflicted with my young “I want to learn and do everything” attitude. Hindsight says I should have stayed there for a few more years to learn how to build, manage, and architect projects in a well-structured environment. But that is hindsight.

### **Professional Career**

Well - that is how I came to Silicon Valley. Despite the changing landscape of technology over the last 4 decades, the prospect of developing a completely new and innovative technology still exists and perhaps even more so, bringing with it both the excitement of potential success and the disappointment of possible failures. I would like to discuss the differences in environment between companies which I categorize as small startups (under 50), medium (under 500) and large

companies. My career timeline was not a progression of small to large or large to small companies, but rather mixed up throughout my career. Giving the reader a resume of my career will probably not be helpful; however, if I break it down to small, medium, and large companies and use my experiences with these companies as examples, it might be of value, since the various challenges and differences presented by the size of company are still as relevant today as they were during my career. At the start of your career, it is very important that you pick a company that will help you grow in your career and give you guidance and support. You might think that you “know it all” since you just received your BS/MS/PhD and are top in your class, but your first job is like starting a new chapter in your life entitled “Company Career 101,” and you are a freshman. Find a company that will support you so that you can fly high later in your career.

## **Small Startups**

Small startup companies typically consist of very few teams closely linked to the company's success. That is to say, the team and the company are frequently indistinguishable. Small companies often attract individuals with the promise of working on groundbreaking and world-changing technology, or so the spiel goes with the promise that you will be one of the top contributors and innovators.

At a small company, the teams are highly dedicated to delivering the company's products or services. This does not mean people only work on one technology; quite the opposite. They are responsible for developing and integrating many technologies. This includes the client base features, distributed servers, deployment, distributed interfaces, web UI, Application UI, and many more. In larger companies, each of the aforementioned items would be covered by many teams. At a small company, it's not uncommon for one person to handle more than one of these areas, which can make them feel like a jack of all trades, but master of none.

For the most part, the dreams small companies promise have merit, however small companies face many challenges in making the dreams come true. The company might have a few teams that cover the primary technology, however, for marketing and finance, the number of people is very small, or even just one person. Which means the company is placing a lot of faith in the skills of a few marketing and financial people. The final product which the startup is envisioning to build is typically new which may lead to confusing or non-applicable features in the product. Potential customers may recognize the need for the product, but the specific solution offered by the startup may not be exactly what the customer was

expecting. Usually, the startup is marketing to larger companies which may have difficulties incorporating a new product or solution given that many teams in the customer company might have to buy-in to the new technology. This buy-in process can take a very long time — typically a time span that, unless the startup has strong financial backing, might not be able to endure.

For a new graduate, small startups can offer one of the most gratifying and challenging environments. Because each person is responsible for so many components, they will learn more than they thought they could or needed to. Because the team is so focused on one company goal, destructive competition between individuals or teams is rare. That does not mean that there are not very heated discussions and disagreements, but destructive competition where one engineer tries to trip up another engineer to make themselves look better for a promotion or other motive, really does not occur. For very heated debates, you each have the same top boss to resolve the issue immediately. I have found that the small number of people in the company leads to a more “family” environment. People help each other. Look out for each other. And to be sure, there are always family conflicts, but they are usually resolved fast. And if unresolvable issues do arise, then in a startup, it is very likely the only option is to leave the company — so learn to resolve conflicts.

## Small Startup Examples

### **QuantumInKOWNvations.**

In the mid-1980s, after I left VisiCorp, I worked for QuantumInKOWNvations a very small startup with about 10 people. We built a “super spreadsheet” application based on a vector-oriented rule language which would automatically build a UI layout based on the rule relationships. We were targeting the business user working in analytics. I felt strong in this company. I had just left VisiCorp where I learned about bitmap graphics, virtual memory, floating CPUs, spreadsheets, and application API. Our product was the next generation of the spreadsheet. Spreadsheets like VisiCalc and Lotus 123, were a little cumbersome in building a UI that looked like an application rather than a bunch of tabular data. Our spreadsheet took the rule language a step further. One would enter business rules independent of column/row, and from those we would automatically display a UI that looked more like a business application than a traditional spreadsheet. We had to build all the features that are nowadays delegated to the Operation System, ourselves. This included our own graphical UI, including mouse movement and interaction, interrupt processing and of

course the spread sheet itself. We also used add-on floating point processors, if available, where we loaded the floating point instructions for calculating rules. All these features were amazing for a small startup to do.

But even though the technology was fantastic, and the customers thought it was cool, the other spreadsheets at the time met their requirements and were very stable. An individual might like to use the product, but to get a team or company buy-in was another issue. In addition, there was no internet where we could build an advertising site and tie into search engines. We gave presentations at conferences and through contacts of some investors, we did trials to convince companies to use our technology, but that does not bring in money and if you have very little money, you cannot wait for word of mouth to come around. We had a couple of buyers for the company, but the purchase terms were not to our liking — our egos were too large. Lesson learned — keep egos low — recognize a no-win situation and take the path that gives you a chance for a new start with something.

From a team perspective, we were a family. There were no managers. Discussions were a group activity. Everyone worked on everything. Everyone took ownership and pride into the project. I brought my spin cycle to work so I would not spend time traveling to the gym. Others brought their children in when they had no other options. Eight hours a day — what's that — usually 12 hours a day — and weekends were when you could complete the unfinished tasks of the previous week. But it was amazing fun all the way till the end.

### **SpecialtyMD**

SpecialtyMD exemplifies the speed and innovation that can be achieved in technology development by a small startup. Our primary focus was to create an online comparison platform for medical devices, enabling doctors to compare surgical devices and access related articles, conference videos, and presentations on outcomes. We were the pioneers in integrating video streaming solutions with clinical trial information for specialty physicians. Our platform enabled live broadcasts of surgical procedures in real-time, such as heart surgeries, to physicians. Remarkably, even with limited resources in the year 2000, we managed to accomplish this with just one server in our office, as we did not have a server cluster for video broadcasting. We would send one team member to the conference to ensure network stability while another stayed back at the office to ensure the single computer broadcasting the video remained running with power.

In addition, we developed a modeling language that allowed physicians to describe devices quickly and associate them with medical outcomes. The modeling language would automatically create the associated SQL databases and accompanying UI features. Our platform allowed physicians to compare surgical devices and access associated research through a searchable and updatable website. SpecialtyMD's accomplishments serve as a testament to what can be achieved by a startup with limited resources.

Within a span of less than two years, we successfully built all of the necessary components and features. This led to our company's acquisition by Chemdex for around \$120 million. As a B2B e-commerce company, Chemdex was an ideal buyer since they could benefit from our modeling system, and the financial prospects of a B2B e-commerce firm were brighter than those of a medical website. Although I was initially excited about the acquisition and had dreams of becoming one of those wealthy dot.com entrepreneurs, however, we were not aware that Chemdex was at the start of a fast downfall. We received stock options in Chemdex when they purchased our company, but these options had restrictions on when they could be sold. When we joined, the stock was about \$240, but Chemdex, by the time I was able to sell my options, their value had diminished significantly, to the point where they were worth nothing more than a dinner at Denny's.

## **Radiance**

SpecialtyMD engineers regrouped after a brief stint at Ventro to establish Radiance, a startup focused on the reliable delivery of massive datasets over unreliable networks. To accomplish this, Radiance engineers created pioneering algorithms to encrypt, route, and deliver data, which they called "TrueDelivery." At the time, even though the internet had been around for a while, it was still in its infancy, especially in terms of transmitting enormous amounts of data to regions with exceedingly low transmission speeds. Radiance utilized this technology in numerous projects, including:

- One project was delivering electronic flight books to the airplane for the pilots, previously pilots had to carry a case of paper flight books with them for each flight. This project was tested on the Boeing 787. What an experience to develop software that ran on the computers of the 787. The software could not run while the plane was in flight, so we monitored the in-flight vs. on-the-ground events. One of the exciting pieces of code I wrote was to intercept the "landing gear up/ landing gear down" events – not too sure why this should be particularly exciting

because it was trivial with all the supporting software on the plane, but it is still one of the first things I tell people when I discuss history. Another amazing feature of these planes was the size and services provided by their onboard computers. I was under the mistaken impression that they would be weak computers with few features. Their computers had a database, web services, and other features in redundant CPUs.

- In another project we transmitted files to a Naval Submarines in stealth mode (interesting in that submarines do no packet transmission acknowledgments as commonly done in internet transmission, so the sender has no clue the receiver received the packet, but rather relied on a structure of the data such that even if packets were lost, the whole content could be reconstructed).
- We also created a large document transfer program that would transfer documents for companies that had remote offices in China, South America, and Europe. The given way for transmitting large datasets, at that time, was to back up the data on magnetic tape and ship the tapes to their destination.
- Also had plugins to email and other applications to allow the sending of very large data via email.

All these projects might be considered achievable nowadays because the internet has vastly improved in speed and stability even in remote areas, but using the technology of the time, these projects were amazing. Unlike SpecialtyMD, where we sold the company as soon as the technology was first proving itself, with Radiance, we tried to make a long-term business of it.

However, getting past the trial phases on the above projects took a long time and it was unclear if a long-term business could be achieved. We did find a market that was very promising, and that market was the transmission and caching of video content (like movies) for the streaming of movies to home users for TiVo and other budding online streaming services. Streaming movies is a little complex in that the movie needs to be cached in a network provider close to the end user. This reduces the distance between the user and data as well as reducing the costs by minimizing the number of network providers through which the data must pass.

The board of directors brought in a new CEO who had a background in networks. (It is not clear how all that happened other than one day he appeared).

This created a rift in the company. The new CEO also brought in a new VP of engineering. Most of the original Radiance developers (including me) were not happy with the situation and left the company. Perhaps our egos had something to do with our discontent and perhaps we should have had some input or upfront briefing on the occurring changes. The company survived and, to my surprise, was eventually sold to Comcast.

Key takeaways from small companies in general

- Learning skills to work with teams that are under different management hierarchies is not readily achievable. This includes cross-team expectations with respect to deliverables, time schedules, project timelines management of people. This is especially important when you have the team and are relying on deliverables from other teams.
- In many ways, a small company resembles a family. External modifications to the company can disrupt this family dynamic, particularly if the current employees are not given any input regarding the changes.
- New graduates are often drawn to small companies because they believe they can be part of building the next Apple or Microsoft and do not want to feel like a mere cog in a large corporate machine. However, I would recommend spending a few years working at a larger company to gain valuable experience in product development, architecture, and team management. This knowledge can then be applied to the goal of building a successful small company, if that remains the ultimate objective.

## Medium-Sized Companies

In contrast, medium-sized companies typically have many teams, but the overall product features are small enough to keep the teams focused. In addition, the company size is still small enough allowing one to get to know all members of management and most of the team members. This organizational approach frequently fosters a strong sense of solidarity among teams and the members of teams regardless of which team they belong to, which ultimately generates a unified company-wide focus. With the larger number of teams in a medium-sized company, the concept of team dependencies starts to emerge and requires project managers and product managers to manage these dependencies and scheduling of

deliverables. Conflicts start to occur when schedules are not kept, or a deliverable has issues (i.e., unstable or dropped functionality). But again, these issues are typically manageable because there is still not that much distance to the “top guy” who has the final say and can drive agreement on solutions to issues.

In a medium-sized company, you still get the feeling of family in your team and most probably in many other teams. A big plus is that you do not need to be a master of all technologies. You can master your technology and make outstanding components in that technology that you have had time to concentrate on solutions.

In the following examples of medium-sized companies I worked for, which I give as examples to illustrate the excitement, team building, great team interactions, and difficulties encountered in these companies. Medium-sized companies may be perceived to be more stable because they have more investor backing and at least have a marketing and finance team which may allow them to know their customers better and avoid financial bumps, they too, are victims of financing and marketing that affect small companies.

## **Medium Examples**

### **VisiCorp**

VisiCorp is an example of a medium-sized company at which I worked (although, at the time it was considered a fairly large software company, comparable to the size of Microsoft at the time). I joined VisiCorp right after I worked for GTE Sylvania. I was still considered a young college grad to most people. VisiCorp was competing with Microsoft for the common business applications (Word, Calc, Draw, Database, ...) and VisiCorp had the lead. It had a graphical user interface (GUI), with mouse control and overlapping windows with menus, and was able to run multiple applications at once. At that time, Microsoft had none of these features. These technologies developed at VisiCorp were amazing. I remember digging into code to see how bitmap graphics, overlapping windowing, mouse control, virtual memory, concurrent applications, and rule-based systems all worked. I recall being assigned to a team when I started the company, but at the end of my stint at the company, I was going through many projects helping with debugging, time optimization, and just helping whoever needed help.

VisiON was presented at COMDEX just prior to its release. I went to the conference with my team to see all the amazing new technologies. VisiON was presented and blew everyone away. Later, it was said that Bill Gates saw VisiON

at the conference which got him excited in the GUI windowing environment, which subsequently led to merger talks between Microsoft and VisiON.

One must wonder then, if VisiCorp was so far ahead of Microsoft, how did it fail? I still wonder about that today. But I believe it boiled down to these issues:

- The technology was too far ahead of its time. It required the computer to have a 64K memory, hard disk, and mouse. Both very expensive and non-standard at the time. If I recall correctly, a basic mouse could be in the range of \$100 and a 15M (yes Megabyte) hard disk over \$1500. To run the VisiON applications, one had a large expenditure in extra technology. The company would have to survive at least another 3 or 4 years before the extra hard hardware would become standard or the price lowered so that it was an attractive option.
- In VisiCorp, before most engineers at my level knew there were issues, we observed that some of the top people in the company were leaving. There were rumors saying that conflicts at the top level were the root of jumping ship. Some conflicts were a result of the failed merger between VisiCorp and Microsoft which was rooted in disagreements on who was to be top dog after the merger.
- Again, uncontrolled egos can have a large effect on the success of the company. And perhaps if everyone kept their egos under control, I too, could have bought an island from Hawaii.

## **Borland**

In the late 1980s, I joined Borland after leaving QuantumInKNOWvations. Borland was developing the premier application development environments based on Pascal, C++, Paradox, and dBase. I worked with the Paradox for Windows team. I was responsible for developing the database query language, parser, and execution engine. This position was a little different from my other companies. Firstly, the supporting technology in the Operating System and UI was strong enough so that we did not have to develop graphical interfaces, memory management, or disk access and caching. We could concentrate on our application. I remember joking that since we do not have to build the Operating System, we now have to put more functionality into our applications to make them more usable.

During my time at Borland, I had the privilege of collaborating with significant figures and pioneers in the field of Computer Science. Although they may

not have been as renowned at the time, they ultimately went on to develop groundbreaking technologies such as C-Sharp, .NET, MS SQL, and more. One noteworthy distinction between their careers and mine is that they tended to join larger companies and progress within those organizations, whereas I often opted for startups.

Despite releasing quality products that captured significant consumer interest, Borland faced fierce competition from Microsoft, which had a significant advantage due to its popular MSDOS, Windows, Word, and Excel offerings. While Borland's products were arguably superior to Microsoft's, the latter's stable income from its existing products enabled it to offer development tools at much lower prices, making it difficult for Borland to compete.

Key take-a-ways from medium companies in general

- You can develop the skills to work with other teams. This includes cross-team expectations with respect to deliverables, time schedules, project timelines management of people. Management is a tight group and helps make sure people understand, monitor and agree on deliverables.
- They have many of the same attractions as a small company but typically with more stability.
- However, they are still susceptible to the difficulties experienced by small companies that affect the entire company, including financing, marketing, and leader egos.
- Smaller companies may find themselves in competition with larger enterprises that can afford to offer products at significantly lower prices. This is often due to the larger companies having established "cash cows" that generate substantial income to support the organization as a whole.

## **Large Companies**

I have had the opportunity to work at large companies that are household names: Oracle, Microsoft, Yahoo, and I rounded up my professional life at Apple. It is important to note that the work environment can differ significantly depending on the specific team with which you are involved. While I have had positive and enviable experiences with these companies, I am also aware of instances where others have encountered negative experiences. Teams in large companies can sometimes be viewed as small companies in their own right. You can work

on projects that comprise a greater whole, but not work with or even know about other teams comprising the entire product. On huge products, like Apple Maps or Bing search, your evolution might be quite small. And unless you have management that gives you a total view of the projects and teams within the entire product and how important your specific work is, you may feel that your work is insignificant without a purpose. As a positive example I'll give, when I was at Microsoft, I worked on a project that was part of the search team, but it was remote from the main team. At least twice a year, the VP of search would make a trip to our office, visit each one of the engineers and tell them specially how important their work was and how it fit into the over scheme. I was blown away that he knew what I was working on, let alone explain how it was helping the whole. Now that is what I call an ego boost and feeling of inclusion. I have also worked for a company that was secretive. You might not know (or be allowed to know) what another team was working on, and they might be located on the same floor as you. Rules might state that any conversation about work on the office floor must be moved to a meeting room that can be secure. In a less open environment, you may experience a sense of isolation and discomfort with engaging in casual hallway conversations about daily events or seeking advice from colleagues with specific expertise. When working in an open environment, casual conversations in hallways can involve colleagues, managers, architects, and even high-level executives who happen to be present. These informal discussions can be incredibly valuable for gaining additional expert insights, even if you're simply joining a conversation in passing. Initially, working in a restrictive environment may not be a significant issue since you have the support of your team. However, as you progress, it can become an additional hurdle that you must navigate while working with the company's various teams and technologies.

In a typical large company, a major product is usually managed by a hierarchy of managers and architects, each leading their own teams. It's uncommon for technology to be neatly divided into completely independent teams, as there are often dependencies between them. This can create a problem if one team agrees to provide technology to another team, especially if it's not their primary focus. If your team depends on this secondary technology and the providing team decides to abandon it, your team may be left scrambling to either move or re-implement the technology within a timeframe that is likely incompatible with your schedule and team resources.

There can be unintentional team competition in a large company. Teams can have common issues (like workflow systems, programming language, or deployments) for which each team has chosen a different technology. As the teams grow, they

find they must unify. That can be an extremely tough battle. Even if they agree on a common technology, there can be residual fights that make producing the common technology very difficult if not impossible. Consequently, it is crucial to assess the team you will be joining prior to accepting a position with a large company. It is important to know how the teams interact, the technology of each team, and how that technology fits into the overall product.

Let me give two examples of companies which will be label company “A” and company “B”, each having a product with at least 20 to 30 teams working on the product.

Company A – has many teams each who have developed services with their own choice of support tools.

- Programming languages (C++, Python, Java, Scala)
- Code builder SBT, Maven, ANT
- Microservice intercommunication (Kafka, REST-API, REST-NONAPI standard but used as such)
- Shared libraries - client is required to make all changes if base library is changed.
- Base Libraries change without notification to clients.
- Workflow (each team have their own workflow product)
- Database (PostgreSQL, Cassandra, MongoDB)

Company B

- Company B did not believe in using a lot of open-source code. They built their own technologies. I am not advocating building your own base technology, that is a lot of investment and some of it a pain to use. But since it was used by everyone, everyone suffered the same pain and could ask for assistance from anyone since there were a lot of experts and inevitably someone else also had the same issue you experienced. It also led to everyone using the same programming language, Database, Micro-service communications, and shared libraries with full ownership of shared libraries such that changes to a shared library would result in pull requests to client code from the people who owned the shared library. This was an amazing environment in which to

develop technology.

In company A, there were a lot of obstacles in the development software because there were no common standards. Open-source applications/libraries have many choices for providing the same technologies and if not managed, it can lead to fragmented development environments. If using several microservices, a client might have to develop a module to talk to each microservice since each microservice uses a different communication protocol. A large company needs to have very strong standards in development and cannot have each team doing their own thing.

In company B, the standardization of development environments came because of not having the multiple choices that open-source allows. I believe even if company B were using open source, they had a strong management of product development standards to avoid the issues of company A.

## **Examples of Large Companies**

### **Microsoft**

After leaving Radiance, I joined Microsoft. Microsoft has a remote development location in Mt View. A new team was starting up. It was a platform for asking and answering questions called Live Q&A. It was able to provide answers to questions that a search engine could not easily provide. In addition, the platform provided polls, quizzes, and integration for Facebook friends. This was exciting for me because the platform was worldwide, required a lot of data servers to handle thousands of requests a second, and used the Bing search backend as a database for data.

The project was really fun. Some of the highlights I would like to draw attention to:

- The search development teams supported the libraries they created. For the libraries we used, we would get pull requests to our code that updated our code for the use of the library and make changes that better used their code. We did not register our use of it, they scanned the code repository for uses of their code.
- The operations support was fantastic. Any config changes we needed in our code to support deployment and network operation were automatically made.

- The main Bing architect would visit a few times a year to review architecture, give over product updates, and receive our requests for updates/changes.

However, there were also some issues that arose. By the end of the project, I had taken on the role of manager and one of my responsibilities was to conduct individual evaluations. I made sure to work diligently to ensure that each team member was performing above expectations and doing an outstanding job. However, Microsoft had a policy at the time that required 10 percent of employees to be ranked as "underachievers" in reviews, known as "stack ranking." Despite all members of my team achieving at least the expected level, when the reviews were merged with those of other teams, one of my team members was deemed an underachiever. This team member did not deserve such a rating as they were hard-working and made significant contributions. When I challenged the decision, the response was that the other teams were working on more critical technology. I felt that I had failed good, hard-working people and lost a lot of respect for Microsoft due to this review practice. However, I believe that Microsoft no longer practices stack ranking.

The project ultimately reached its end, and as I was working in a remote office, I had access to excellent opportunities in the Redmond office in Washington state. However, despite these prospects, I was not willing to leave the Bay Area and was unable to find a team working on a technology that interested me at the Bay Area office.

## **Yahoo**

Although I may have implied otherwise, it's important to recognize that not all big corporations are stable. In fact, when major issues arise, it can be like a star exploding, causing dramatic and far-reaching consequences. After Microsoft, I joined Yahoo. There were several people from the Silicon Valley Microsoft Office that joined Yahoo, as well as several of my friends from prior startups just joined Yahoo, one as CTO and other as Chief Architect. We knew that Yahoo was having issues, but I thought the power we were bringing to the company to turn it around was great. (Hell people, I was in my early 50s at the time and I still had the dot.com attribute of "we can do it!!"). To begin with, the management at Yahoo was in shambles. They were losing one CEO, including some top management and gaining a new CEO and supporting management. Most of the disarray existed before getting the new top management and it was their job to fix things. I personally knew the new commanders and was excited about the change. Prior to the management change, many of the projects were in maintenance mode and

the maintenance had been shipped to other countries. This left many existing and operating products virtually abandoned with no team having ownership or engineers who deeply knew the technology.

My first project was to rewrite the back end of Yahoo Video Messenger. They were relying on licensed software, which was to expire in a year unless the license was renewed for a large sum of money. The project was described as just replacing that library with the open-source version from Google. Not long after getting into the project I found that it could not be just a library replacement. It essentially amounted to rewriting the product, including UI. And I had 6 months and no team. I did get another engineer and we did complete the back end, but the UI was not complete, nor did they have people scheduled to work on the project. My UI skills consisted of creating a type-in box with a submit button – I was not going to be able to create the top-notch UI required for this product for Web, Android phones, and Apple Phones.

While the backend video application sat waiting for a UI, I heard they needed someone to add an autocomplete search to the Yahoo Video Website. The current Yahoo search engine did not support an auto-complete mode. It sounded doable since the video content was from a fixed source with the number of Videos being under 10K (and the promise that in the future the search engine would support auto-complete and be able to handle more than 10K if necessary). That meant the entire content could fit in one machine and you do not have to worry about all the complexities of a distributed search engine. It required many servers for redundancy and datacenter locality, but they would all be the same content. Just a standard deployment. The actual backend servers were very fun and relatively easy to write. The UI team incorporated the new API in a non-datacenter test version.

Here was the problem, I needed servers in the data centers – I requested 12 in each of the required data centers. I got none – I thought to myself: this was a required, agreed upon, and scheduled product – how could there be none. At a lunch conversation with another team lead that I had become friends with, I was discussing the server issues as well as issues I was having getting other teams to cooperate in the release of the feature. He said they had a couple spares they could loan me and, as an aside, gave me the “life at Yahoo” spiel. He said the only reason he offered the servers was because I did a small project for them for which I had specific knowledge on how to complete and it saved their butts (so to speak). The project was not assigned to me, I just heard they needed some help and offered it. His main theme was that teams, and people, in general only looked out for themselves in Yahoo. His spare servers got me through functional and first round

of live testing. After some persistence, I was able to obtain my official servers. I had to sit on the desk of the operations person and jokingly threaten not to budge until my request was granted – well – he thought I was joking away. I got 3 servers in each of 3 datacenters, less than a third of what I thought would safely handle the load with no disruptions during deployment or with servers going offline for extended periods of time. I did not blame the operations person as his ability to act was limited by bureaucracy and supply issues. He did his best to assist me. The responsibility for the issue lay with the terribly inadequate management of the data center. As an example of good management, in Microsoft I had asked for 60 servers in each datacenter. The operations person said “sorry, cannot do, the minimum we can give is 120 per datacenter. It will be ready in a couple days” – Twice as many as I asked for – and I found out I really needed that many servers to handle the load – and I am sure the operations person knew I would need them as well from the product specs. Microsoft knew what it meant to provide data center support.

## **Apple**

I will only give you an example of the last project I did before retirement from Apple. If you look at Apple maps zoomed way out (low zoom) so that the streets vanish, and then very slowly zoom in (higher zoom), you will start to see major road infrastructures appear. It is innovative in that it uses commonly traveled roads in areas where a well-structured road network is unavailable. So that even small roads can be visible at a low zoom if it is the common route between large cities. That was my team’s project. I mention this because in most companies all my work, although amazing technology, never was viewable by a large global audience. At most large companies, my work was in the backend infrastructure, which only other developers appreciated or niche end-users. The Apple roads project was the first large project that was visible by the global audience. Many of my team members were very early in their career. These young engineers got to experience what it was like to work with multiple teams (with both the positive and negative interactions), and to have management team support which enabled them to be a success.

### Key takeaways for a large company

- Large companies are very different from small startups. Within a specific team, it can feel like a startup with respect to a “family” atmosphere and difficulties in cross team interaction can be negotiated by management.
- Your team will get a lot of support, including a manager, project

manager, program manager, networking teams, tools teams, test teams, and more. You will have support so that your project can be a success. All this support comes at a price, which is, you will need good communication skills and continually work on those skills, especially for describing a product, architecture, requirements, and schedules to all members of the product (top managers, cross-teams, developers). As an engineer, you typically do not have to worry about financing or marketing and can have faith you are in good hands, since there is not much you can do about it.

- But even in large companies, projects get canceled. The good news is that if that is the case, they typically will work out how you can transfer to a new team or if layoffs are required you will typically get a good severance.

### **Current Silicon Valley Environment**

Let me discuss a little bit about the benefits in the current landscape of Silicon Valley. This is just a list of things, not in any order.

- The major software companies are in Silicon Valley. Google, Apple, Netflix, Salesforce, Facebook, Twitter, Oracle, Splunk, Intel, NVIDIA, just to mention a few. Even companies like Microsoft, which is in Seattle, have development projects in Silicon Valley. I ride my bicycle around the area and a simple ride will take me past most of these world-renowned companies and their headquarters. That is Silicon Valley. When I was at Apple, I walked to work. At Yahoo and Microsoft, I would bike to work. (If I worked at Google or Facebook, I could have biked to those companies)
- Companies of all sizes are in Silicon Valley. Search for companies on the web for this area and you will easily find 100s if not 1000s of companies varying in sizes and technology expertise. Small startups operating in stealth mode might be more difficult to find except through notes in LinkedIn, social connection, or a headhunter.
- Airports. The Bay Area (Silicon Valley) has 3 major airports. If you live in the area you are a short taxi ride away from an airport. Your job might require significant cross-continent travel; having airports close at hand makes travel more convenient.
- There are many colleges and universities in the area. The top universities include Stanford University, UC Berkeley, etc. Many of the technologies

and startups come from graduates from universities in the area. Some of the prolific producers of employees for Silicon Valley companies include San Jose State University. Guess what, some of the key sources of students to these universities are the local community colleges. 35% of the 3rd year UC Berkeley students are transfer students from local community colleges. And 50% of the 3rd year students at San Jose State, San Francisco State are community college transfer students like me who did that years ago.

- **Conferences.** Silicon Valley is the host of many technology conferences. As well as the conferences hosted by the local universities.
- **Work Connections.** The friends I made at companies; I have kept throughout my career. Typically, we still all live in the Silicon Valley and even though we have changed companies and career paths we still keep in touch if through nothing else than a decade interval happy hour for ex-Microsoft or ex-Borland employees.
- **Social Connections.** I like bike riding in Silicon Valley. The primary riding group I ride with is called ALC. People from all career paths bike with groups. I have met startup founders, CEOs, VPs, engineers, MDs, nurses, building architects — all walks of life and all sorts of companies. Biking is just an example of many of the social activities where you can meet connections to other companies. A friend of mine is frequently at the gym and the same occurs there as well. Social connections allow you to discuss various career paths more easily and how life at other companies compares to your current company.

Living in Silicon Valley comes with its share of challenges, and housing costs are certainly one of them. Even if you're just starting out and your salary seems impressive, the high cost of rent in the area may come as a shock making your salary seem less impressive. For many, owning a home in the region is out of reach until they establish themselves and acquire enough extra income, usually in the form of company stock. In the meantime, renting is the way to go. If possible, consider sharing the cost of rent with a friend. Alternatively, you may find more affordable housing options outside of the immediate area, but the commute can be a lengthy one, sometimes taking an hour or two each way. Fortunately, the Bay Area has a good train system that connects many of the outlying regions. Some trains provide Wi-Fi and if your train ride is lengthy, you can use the commute time as a second office, which is often preferable to sitting in a car in heavy traffic.

## And Finally, A Word of Encouragement for International Students

To all international students with dreams of studying in the U.S., I hope my story provides valuable insights into finding the right entry point for your degree. In my case, it was UTA (University Transfer Admission) through community colleges. Let me share why this path was pivotal for me as an American and surely just as important for you as an international student:

### 1. Community College Advantage:

- Like nearly half of my fellow Americans, I began my undergraduate journey at a community college.
- **Cost-effectiveness** was a significant factor, making UTA an attractive choice for international students as well.
- However, there's more to the story. Community college provided something invaluable: **intimate education guidance**.
- As a teenager, I needed personalized instruction and mentorship. Community college delivered precisely that.

### 2. Short but Decisive Years:

- Those two years in community college were transformative.
- They laid the foundation for my future career journey.
- Without that solid educational base, I wouldn't have risen to the top of my field and accomplished nearly as much in the companies you are intimately familiar with.

### 3. Exploring Entry Points:

- My message to all aspiring students, whether American or international, is this: **Explore all entry points**.
- U.S. education is not a one-size-fits-all journey.
- Consider community colleges, transfer programs, and alternative paths.
- Each route offers unique benefits but they all prepare you for success.

Well I am delighted knowing that my work products directly affect the lives of people, I was surprised to learn from speaking with international students that there is a scarcity of opportunities to interact, observe or hear from someone like me with years of working experience in Silicon Valley high tech companies. It is true that understanding the inner workings of high-tech companies can be quite elusive, especially without insights from insiders. I am glad our discussions on company sizes, American corporate culture, and effective task management have been helpful to you. Remember, knowledge is power, and learning from others' experiences can significantly impact your journey toward success.

### **Bio**

**Ralph Lemke**, the former Principal Software Architect at Apple, retired after a distinguished career. With chief software engineer roles at renowned companies like VisiCorp, Borland, Oracle, Yahoo, Microsoft, and Apple, he brings decades of experience in the software industry. Holding tech patents and contributing to software that drives essential functions for various companies, his expertise and interests span large-scale distributed systems, workflow services, programming languages, and AI. Email: ralph.lemke@gmail.com

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# Alumni Management for International Student Recruiting

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### **Abstract**

This chapter explores the vital role of alumni management in enhancing international student recruitment efforts within higher education institutions. Authors Gretchen Dobson and Ben Waxman shed light on the untapped potential of international alumni relationships and their significant impact on international student enrollment. The chapter highlights the reasons for justifying the effort to cultivate, engage, and empower international alumni, emphasizing the seven key themes that underpin this endeavor: brand awareness, reputation management, recruitment, employability, global connections, public diplomacy, and financial resources. Additionally, the authors outline best practices for international alumni volunteer management and a roadmap for effectively building a global alumni process/system, drawing insights from real-world examples, and addressing the readiness of institutions to embark on this journey. Ultimately, this chapter aims to underscore the profound benefits of leveraging international alumni as ambassadors and advocates for international student recruitment via any entry point.

**Keywords:** Alumni management, international student recruitment, global alumni, entry points

## **The Answer is Under Your Nose**

It is a remarkably familiar dynamic that we all know personally. Whether you are looking for a missing phone charger at home or a solution to a complicated organizational problem, often the answer is right under your nose. However, the process of finding a charger or solving complex challenges always involves a journey.

For example, campus leaders and advancement/alumni relations offices and organizations often overlook clear and present opportunities for the institution to build valuable connections with well-connected, and potentially generous international alumni. These missed opportunities could lead to success for all involved, enabling institutions to simultaneously increase awareness and engagement with prominent alumni while also increasing global interest abroad and international student enrollment.

One of the factors contributing to this disconnect is an imbalance in institutional priorities, with an overemphasis on domestic alumni relations and misperceptions about the value and opportunity that international alumni represent. In writing, *Global Alumni Management, The State of the Field* (Dobson & Intead, 2017), we surveyed 103 respondents working at 97 U.S. colleges, universities, or other postsecondary institutions involved in development, admissions, international affairs, or alumni management. While more than 50% of the respondents reported feeling that international alumni management was "very important" for increasing international student recruitment and brand awareness, nearly 30% of the respondents did not feel that they received sufficient internal leadership support.

The relative importance and financial value of international students vs. domestic students is often overlooked. In some cases, 7% of the total student population being international represents as much as 30% of total tuition revenue.

The value of international alumni relationships extends far beyond the sphere of financial contributions. In this chapter, we will shine light on the immense value of international alumni relations, particularly on their pivotal role in fostering international student recruitment regardless of any entry points with which they arrive on U.S. campuses. We present our own research and real-world examples to demonstrate the power of these connections while also illustrating exactly how to create increased connections and collaborations between alumni affairs and international departments.

Our collective mission is to elevate the importance of international alumni relations as an institutionally supported practice and, more importantly, to define the sustainable, reciprocally advantageous processes that will enrich the global educational landscape, both domestically and internationally. This chapter offers a blueprint of how this kind of collaboration can work for all involved individuals to yield real benefits for the full range of higher education institutions.

## Justifying the Effort

### 7 Reasons to Cultivate, Engage, and Empower Global Alumni

*What are the benefits of building and sustaining these relationships when, in most cases, the percentage of international alumni comprises less than 10% (many less than 5%) of an institution's entire alumni base? What value do these international networks bring to our institution?*

These common questions are asked more frequently today, as institutions experience stronger competition regionally, nationally, and internationally. Similar conversations occur during strategic planning processes and/or capital campaign planning as institutions endeavor to define a unique "global" mission and vision to build a case for engaging a wider audience in support of academic, diversity, and development goals.

When the calculations are performed, your chief financial officer (CFO) can tell you that the smaller percentage of international students on campus represents an outsized share of your institution's tuition revenue. We encourage you to do that math to help justify your requests for additional resources. The return on investment (ROI) is there.

In reality, alumni relations offices, which are often understaffed, assume a multitude of responsibilities—ranging from organizing events and maintaining databases to coordinating fundraising efforts and managing communications in locations around the world. Juggling these tasks and differing cultural expectations and time zones typically requires more thought (and time) than managing events in New York City and Los Angeles. It is precisely because of these complexities that a well-articulated strategy for engaging international alumni becomes beneficial. Specific motives for investing in a global alumni relations program vary; however, according to "Why Engage Global Alumni" by Gretchen Dobson (2018), in terms of increasing potential recruitment (beyond

fund-raising goals), most of these motives are grounded in the following seven themes:

1. **Brand Awareness:** International alumni networks and chapters are an extension of institutional and alumni branding. By “thinking globally, acting locally,” regional alumni groups can effectively communicate these core values through programs designed to fit the local context and engage and support existing alumni, families, students, and prospective students.
2. **Reputation Management:** Global student mobility is trending upward. Students and alumni, alike, contribute to the expansion of college and university internationalization efforts. Like in brand awareness, in job searches, individuals’ affinity for their institution is reinforced when shared through social media, added to a LinkedIn profile, and specifically when sought after.
3. **Recruitment:** Today’s competitive environment has prompted colleges and universities to adopt strategic enrollment management plans that include marketing programs focused on international students. Institutions turn to their most “satisfied customers,” aka successful former students, to become the foundation of their marketing campaigns. Locally organized global alumni chapters and families provide in-person testimonials, support prospective students in making significant life decisions, and additional channels for positive social media exposure and engagement.
4. **Employability:** Both domestic and international students are driven by the desire to expand their career options and take advantage of career opportunities in an international, or more diverse domestic setting. An institution with established international alumni relationships can call upon global alumni chapters to help the institution advise students and manage their expectations surrounding education and workplace experiences.
5. **Global Connections:** International alumni connections thrive on an institution’s ability to form international partnerships and build employment networks that generate career opportunities for current students, as well as alumni.
6. **Public Diplomacy:** Institutions supporting global alumni engagement

are champions of a wider, organizational, or national alumni agenda where the notion of “soft power” is central.

7. **Financial Resources:** International student recruitment is one of the strategies that institutions use to increase both enrollment and revenue, and international alumni are among the most valuable, credible recruiters for this important effort.

The myriad of benefits of a global alumni network provide reasons for institutions to invest in their understaffed alumni relations offices. A well-supported alumni office can amplify the institution’s brand, contribute to reputation management, bolster recruitment efforts, and open doors to global career opportunities for both current students and alumni. This investment not only diversifies the institution’s resources but also amplifies its reach, reputation, and impact on an international scale. All this work contributes to strengthened international student recruitment efforts.

## **The Role of Alumni as Ambassadors**

Many institutions often blur the lines between alumni and alumni ambassadors; however, while it is true that both groups share a common thread of loyalty and affinity toward their alma mater, their roles and contributions are distinct. Understanding this distinction is crucial to maximizing the impact that these individuals can have on an institution’s goals, particularly in terms of outreach and engagement.

### **Alumni vs. Alumni Ambassadors**

According to the “International Alumni Ambassador Program” by Gretchen Dobson (2021), the difference between alumni ambassadors and alumni, in general, is that institutions consistently engage with ambassadors as they promote the institution’s brand.

Alumni ambassador programs invest in deeper, long-term relationships with their members. These programs help build institutional reputations; recruit new students; and bridge relationships with other institutions, organizations, or donors both at home and abroad.

All institutions can tap their alumni community as ambassadors to help advance their vision and strategies, but many still need to recognize that their ambassador community extends to others. This segment includes students and internal and

external stakeholders who can support and advance the institution's priorities (e.g., internationalization), especially in times of uncertainty.

*What makes a graduate from the institution proud of attending and graduating from the institution? How do you provide a tangible way for potential alumni ambassadors to maintain and deepen their connection to the institution after they have moved on with their professional careers?*

Often, the best alumni ambassadors connect something within themselves to their institution. It might be the alignment with the university's mission that they have internalized, the positive experience they had on and off campus, or the sense of community they felt with their faculty, staff, and fellow classmates, as well as the relationships that continued after graduation. The secret behind a successful international ambassador program is to identify alumni who have both the personal characteristics and drive that will make them successful ambassadors for your institution. Here are a few key characteristics and traits sought by institutions in their alumni ambassadors:

## **The Path to Doing It Well**

- Positive experience with their time/education/experience at your institution
- Outgoing personality, extrovert who enjoys meeting new people
- Active social media presence
- BONUS (not required): well connected in the local business community and with fellow alumni in the area

What you can provide:

- Coordination and tracking of events and connections
- Database of relevant contacts
- Campus news and insights to foster ongoing connection

Let us start by reviewing the internal and external stakeholders that can support your effort to augment your international alumni network. The chart below provides examples of these stakeholders.

INTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS	EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS
Faculty, current and emeriti	Parents and family members
Deans and chancellor or president	Consulates, chambers of commerce, government agencies
International students and scholars, full-time or part-time, in special programs	International placed schools and campus units
Alumni and development staff	Foundations and other external sources of financing
Student affairs units that influence recruitment and retention of international students and scholars	Media-Education editors
Communications	Satellite office staff
Support units for research, data management	Consortia
	Professional associations
	Corporations

## The five “I’s”: A Roadmap to Build an Effective Global Alumni Process/System

*What sorts of commitment and resources are required from an institution to effectively organize and harness the potential of international alumni power?*

We know that international alumni volunteers do not just magically appear with hands raised to help with your efforts abroad. As you figure out the unique plan that will work for your institution, consider the “user experience” of the international alum, family member, and friend (e.g., the high school guidance counselor at one of the top “feeder” schools for your university or college).

According to the *International Travel Handbook: Engaging Constituents Abroad* by Gretchen Dobson (2014), the five “I’s” of international volunteer management sustain participation and support:

- Identify
- Invite
- Inform
- Invest
- Impact

## IDENTIFY

More than 85% of alumni offices working with international alumni found incomplete, insufficient, or old data and/or lacked international alumni databases. Internationalization efforts will fail very quickly if no one prioritizes the development of a solid, accurate contact database.

Higher education administrators often cite incomplete, insufficient, or aged international alumni databases—or even the complete lack of a database—as the most challenging obstacle to developing a successful international volunteer program. The outcome of a winning initiative is only as good as the information that the institution has or the data it can obtain. How are international alumni, families, donors, and friends tracked? Can your institution follow your international students in a better, more effective way? Where does this essential process start?

### Good data

This initial work is critical even if the first effort results in a very small number of alumni records. You are setting up the process to capture and maintain accurate data, which will improve your efforts and results over time.

*We offer seven tips for improving international data collection and management practices:*

**Know the depth of the current data and create records for “nontraditional” alumni. Research and track when the first international students attended your institution and how demographics have changed over time.**

- Understand the history of your international alumni and student records, where there may be gaps and where that data may reside rather than central advancement records (such as academic departments, graduate programs, the registrar, and summer language programs or admissions, or even LinkedIn).
- Utilize LinkedIn to find international alumni that may not be in your internal database.
- Consider non-traditional contact information for students and guests who have spent considerable time as part of their institution’s community (such as international honorary degree recipients, study

abroad students, visiting international faculty, and research fellows from government scholarship programs).

### **“Internationalize” current data records and systems.**

- The output is only as good as the input. The success of engaging your international alumni will rely heavily on how sophisticated and “user friendly” your systems are for fulfilling your objectives.
- Work with your registrar, institutional research office, information technology staff, and others who may control the structure of your institution’s databases to ensure that current systems can record international information such as postal codes, country codes for phone numbers, three or more spaces for first or surnames, languages spoken, and social media profiles that are regularly used in home countries.
- International alumni work often requires additional field(s) in customized forms.

### **Form an international data management working group.**

- The importance of sound international data management should be directly addressed by including a cross-section of staff who interface with international records daily.
- Invite staff from areas of research, alumni relations, development, and advancement operations.
- Expand the team by informing and inviting contributions every quarter from international student services, the registrar, and graduate and undergraduate admissions.
- A major objective of this committee is to provide an ongoing review of international student needs and build awareness of coordinated systems. For example, the group could access the academic support database and search for international records that may provide relevant demographic data that are valuable to other departments.

### **Conduct a faculty and staff travel survey.**

- A travel survey for faculty and staff can provide valuable insights into optimal locations for events, benefiting both the university and its alumni community. This tool can empower your group to maximize the

institutional faculty and staff as they travel throughout the world.

- Given that this survey is voluntary and stressful to the community, the alumni association will work to identify opportunities for faculty and staff to connect with alumni when traveling for professional and, at times, personal reasons.
- International chapter leaders appreciate knowing “who is traveling when,” so they can have opportunities to invite faculty to join their local community as guest speakers.
- Budgeting for an international speaker travel fund provides faculty and staff with reimbursement for a chapter member dinner or an extra night in a city after a conference.

**Early and often with international students, lifelong relationships should be promoted, and formal and publicly visible ways for international alumni to serve as resources and mentors to students admitted to your institution should be established.**

- Relationships between alumni relations and ethnic identity groups (on campus and in the community) should be developed to help students assimilate into their new campus culture. Building alumni relationships starts with setting early expectations for a long-term relationship while international students are engaged in their studies on campus.
- The international alumni network should be promoted before, during, and after study abroad.
- The focus should be on international students, especially during their final year, as they prepare for their next life decisions (career, future study, etc.). Re-entry and transition home after graduation can be a major shock. Student affairs, the international programs office, and alumni relations can all support this challenging transition.
- A focus group with international students should be hosted before the students graduate. Ask, “What is it that you think will be most valuable to you after you graduate?” and “Do you see additional opportunities for the institution to be helpful to you?” Find out where they intend to live after graduation. Connect them with your alumni chapter or individual alumni in that region.

- Invite graduating students to join founding members of new international chapters.

**The level of engagement with international alumni should be improved overall.**

- Ask your international alumni chapters to help communicate the importance of maintaining the most accurate records. For example:
  - Chapter leaders can include a footnote to their email addresses to promote the online community.
  - At events and programs, members of the leadership team are encouraged to collect updated information and business cards and even enter up-to-date information on a laptop or mobile device at the registration table.
- Develop a social media campaign targeting your international community. Invite alumni abroad to join the online community and provide incentives for validating and updating their contact information.
- Develop videos to engage and promote your international community and the importance of staying in touch. These include a chancellor or president's message and international chapter leaders' messages from home regions; always include the invitation to help alumni relations better identify "who's who." Post the videos on regional and international social media sites.

**Invest in the establishment of an international alumni network.**

- Prioritize the top international markets for alumni engagement.
- Develop the rationale for international alumni chapters to exist.
- Embrace international traditions and celebrate local holidays.
- Continue to include incentives.
- Establish and cultivate new partnerships in career services and alumni relations.

- Train your enrollment staff and the career success team on work visas and policies for international students to improve their ability to support this community and answer their questions.

## **INVITE**

Collectively, your institution has agreed upon the rationale for developing a global footprint of volunteers, but you and your colleagues are charged with communicating how the internationalization efforts for your institution include those volunteers. It is important to remember that our institutions are about people. For example:

- Website announcements are translated into different languages to demonstrate sensitivity to non-English speaking families and others with whom you want to engage.
- Personal letters and customized emails (and follow-up phone calls and meetings) with regional consulate and embassy officials who are responsible for education and cultural outreach in their communities abroad.
- Update email signatures with links to the international community and event announcements, current facts about the international student community, or a Save the Date about the Next Major International Trip.

These are all methods of inviting interest from influential constituents abroad.

It can be helpful to consider these questions as you evaluate your ability to recruit alumni volunteers:

- Is our organization involving our alumni and other stakeholders the most authentic way?
- Is our strategy shaped by their opinion or perceptions and beliefs about their affiliation?
- How are our competitors approaching recruitment in key markets?
- How will investments in global alumni maximize our efforts to maintain our fundraising priorities?
- Is our institution's international brand perceived by alumni the same way, or does culture make a difference?

- Is our engagement strategy with current students good enough to last a lifetime?
- Are we able to respond consistently and quickly enough to alumni ambassadors so that they feel connected and part of the process?

Before implementing an international recruitment program, college and university deans and recruiters need to establish the feasibility of launching a recruitment program that includes alumni volunteers. To do that, seek the following information from advancement colleagues:

- The number of active alumni in each recruitment country.
- The name, preferred phone and social media handles, current job title, and current location of alumni interested in recruiting future students (some younger alumni may be pursuing graduate degrees or not currently working but may still be tapped to volunteer).

Consider who lives and works in two or more countries on a regular basis. Think about domestic and international alumni who are working for multinational companies and organizations and who travel regularly overseas, or international alumni who have called the university city home for many years.

Before you launch the effort, we recommend learning as much as possible about whom you are inviting. Knowing how international alumni ambassadors perceive the benefits of their involvement helps alumni relations officers align opportunities with participants' personal and professional needs and wants. Surveying international alumni ambassadors on an annual basis will also create a useful set of data.

Undoubtedly, the assessment is a two-way street. While we do consider the positive impact an institution has on its alumni, it is equally crucial to gauge the influence that alumni wield on the recruitment of international students. This reflective evaluation allows institutions to better understand and appreciate the reciprocal nature of these relationships and how they contribute to the broader international education ecosystem. (See No. 5 below "Impact").

## **INFORM**

Develop an international constituent survey to convey to your key audiences that building international relations is an institutional priority. Furthermore, the survey will inform international alumni about the institution's goals for the

coming years. The survey is divided by the segments important to track, including region, institution, age range, and affinity groups. We highly recommend developing incentives for alumni ambassadors to participate in the survey, such as by randomly drawing a survey participant's name for a bookstore gift card or a box of deluxe university-branded business cards. Most importantly, set a deadline for replying.

After completing, processing, and analyzing the survey at a reasonable interval, an executive summary produces and distributes the feedback to all alumni ambassadors worldwide (e.g., "Our global community outside the United States has told us..."). When you share the executive summary, reiterate the benefits of the online community membership. This is an opportunity to drive more alumni to the site to update contact information, to search for other alumni, and to find other helpful links to the institution's globally minded pages (e.g., international student services, fact book information, recent international milestones, and statistics).

Alumni may respond best to messages supporting their own self-interests, which are traditionally focused on career and networking opportunities. Regional communities are also valuable to alumni who are moving to a new place for family or career reasons. They can access an instant affinity group as they acclimate to the new locale.

Informing your key audience also involves providing training support to your alumni volunteers. Offering virtual training sessions and written guidelines that clearly define the responsibilities and boundaries of the international alumni ambassador role will create transparency and collective understanding in the community. An online international alumni ambassador handbook or manual that provides an overview of policies and procedures, programming, and training resources may be appropriate when international alumni programs are requesting (or requiring) more formal approaches, such as those that focus on institutional marketing and student recruitment campaigns.

Handbooks are provided to help international alumni ambassadors stay fully informed about the university, so they are equipped to share their first-hand experiences as alumni while also educating prospective students about the university. The training manual may offer information on the following topics:

- **International alumni ambassador opportunities:** Information about each ambassador opportunity, including the purpose of the role, duties, responsibilities of the university, and ambassador dos and don'ts.

- **Frequently asked questions (FAQs):** Answers to questions that other ambassadors have had about their duties.
- **University directory:** Phone numbers, email addresses, and useful websites for student support staff and resources.
- **College planning timeline:** Steps and tips for prospective students before and during the application process and the timeline for completing each task.
- **Key data points and core messaging:** Facts and figures, student profiles, list of majors, benefits of attending the university, tuition and fees information, financial aid basics, admissions policies, and institutional brand messaging.

Given the intricacy of this role, a solitary training manual will not provide comprehensive support for alumni ambassadors. The success of this undertaking lies in maintaining consistent and persistent communication with each individual. What truly makes a difference is helping and enabling our alumni ambassadors to fully understand the lifecycle of the international student recruitment process. This continual dialogue is crucial for equipping them with the necessary knowledge and tools about the institution, which will make them more effective in their roles as alumni ambassadors, enhancing the overall success of the international recruitment process.

Current alumni leadership should be involved in all facets of international alumni ambassador training, including planning, creating, facilitating, evaluating, and publishing materials. Fully embracing the notion of training, trainers will help ensure that initial investments in international alumni ambassador training are sustained and strengthened (Dobson, 2014).

## INVEST

Of the five “I’s,” investing in the experience of alumni ambassadors is the most important. Develop a plan for volunteer support and retention. This plan comes from knowing how the volunteers were recruited and what happened in the “invite” and “inform” stages. Do they have the necessary resources to effectively represent the institution abroad?

Here are examples of such resources:

- **Customized business cards and email signatures for alumni**

**leaders** are low-cost tools for high-impact networking and representation, particularly in Asia.

- **An international alumni leader online manual** that provides an overview of policies, procedures, programming, and training resources that are appropriate for engaging with groups that request or require more formal approaches. A simple volunteer guide for starting or managing a regional alumni group will build confidence as your alumni take on these new roles and build out your network.
- **An annual international award or certificate for volunteerism** can provide public recognition of alumni and support their continued engagement. An award committee will also draw more alumni into the effort. An award ceremony may become the centerpiece of a regional event/gathering. Involve leadership at all levels in bestowing the award and create a sense of value, respect, and gratitude for commitment to your institution's global story. Additionally, a senior university leader (president, provost) can be included via video or Zoom in the event to express good wishes and thanks.

In addition to their volunteer efforts, some participant alumni also want to invest in the institution. Alumni are motivated to engage where there is an opportunity to make a difference and where the institution presents activities that connect with their values and personal capabilities. Cultural norms vary, and the ways in which international alumni ambassadors invest in their relationships with their alma mater may require careful management, but be mindful of the potential for these opportunities to present themselves.

Institutions can sustain international alumni ambassador programs and minimize conflicts by keeping in mind the following three tips:

- Understand the culture of countries of interest (e.g., Does new interest from an alum or family stem from true philanthropy, or is it motivated by outside business interests?)
- Advice is sought from trusted international liaisons before they decide to make major investments in international alumni ambassador programs in new or existing markets. Host key contacts on campus or in mutually convenient locations to ask for local introductions, gain a sense of how business is conducted in the country, and directly ask participants for tips for culturally sensitive business etiquette.

- Invest early in international alumni ambassador training. Create effortless ways for international graduates to become involved early in their alumni life cycle as recruitment partners, and create programs that leverage alumni volunteers as international ambassadors, locally informed fundraising agents, and advocates and allies for the institution.

## IMPACT

A good volunteer experience will be part of the message that alumni and other volunteers give to others when referring to potential participants in their network. A positive experience at one level of volunteering seeds the volunteer's interest in future roles and, possibly, an eventual leadership position, such as becoming a member of an international advisory board. A proven track record of successful and meaningful engagement can lead to support from alumni, families, and friends.

It is always an honor to entertain an offer from alumni, families, and friends to host a major reception at their home or club. Careful management and messaging of these events, such as reputation and relationships, are mutually reinforcing. Careful attention given to the relationships between volunteers and your institution will safeguard both parties.

Assess the effectiveness of your program on a quarterly basis and make necessary adjustments, including the following:

- A list of all accepted and enrolled students recruited by international alumni.
- The impact of alumni efforts in building interest and more applications should be communicated.
- Alumni volunteers should be recognized through the involvement of presidents, deans, and other alumni leaders, such as trustee chairs or council presidents.

Sharing impact statistics and creating friendly, healthy competition among regional groups (number of attendees, funds raised, number of events held, number of students from each region enrolled and other more playful data, e.g., high score at pub darts game) can engage your global alumni groups and foster more involvement and connection.

## Who Is Doing This Well? A Helpful Real-World Example

### Example 1: Michigan State University Alumni Relations

Michigan State University (MSU) has served as a compelling example in the realm of alumni relations, highlighting innovative practices that draw tangible benefits for the institution. The institution has developed a highly valuable international alumni network with sustained effort and investment. In 2018, this chapter's authors co-presented at the NACAC conference alongside Daniel Spadafore from Michigan State on the value of international alumni. The slides from that presentation are available at <https://info.intead.com/nacac-slides-18/download-0>

MSU stated goals for justifying the investment:

- Grow and diversify international recruitment.
- When more MSU alumni are engaged, their relationships with fundraising prospects deepen.
- The success of international students should be ensured.

In addition to their regular alumni activities, the university has implemented several unique initiatives to bolster these relationships:

- **MSU Executive Forums:** Although alumni relations primarily drive these events, they also extend their invitations to prospective students and their parents. MSU welcomes current students' parents to attend and participate in these forums. This inclusive approach provides an excellent networking opportunity, fostering connections even before students officially join the Spartan community.
- **Pre-Departure Orientations:** These sessions prepare incoming students and their parents for the MSU journey. They incorporate insights from alumni speakers and panelists, who not only provide first-hand experience to attendees but also position alumni as valuable resources and mentors.
- **Parents and Student Welcome Reception:** This event is sponsored by the advancement team and integrated into the international parent orientation. Its central theme revolves around "Joining the Spartan Family". It also reassures parents that they will be part of the

MSU community and future events and activities, reinforcing their connection with the university.

Each of these initiatives emphasizes continual engagement, seamlessly intertwining the experiences of prospective students, current students, and alumni. The MSU approach underscores the reality that the university experience does not end with graduation; rather, it marks the beginning of lifelong relationships and continued involvement as international ambassadors for the institution.

Today, a visit to MSU alumni homepage presents an awe-inspiring testament to the significant strides the institution has made in nurturing its alumni relations. From regional alumni associations led by dedicated leaders to a comprehensive directory facilitating connections among all alumni and even a resource center committed to advancing alumni careers, MSU's efforts are indeed commendable.

According to "Michigan State University Alumni Association" (2023), some compelling figures from MSU's alumni homepage provide ample evidence of their accomplishments:

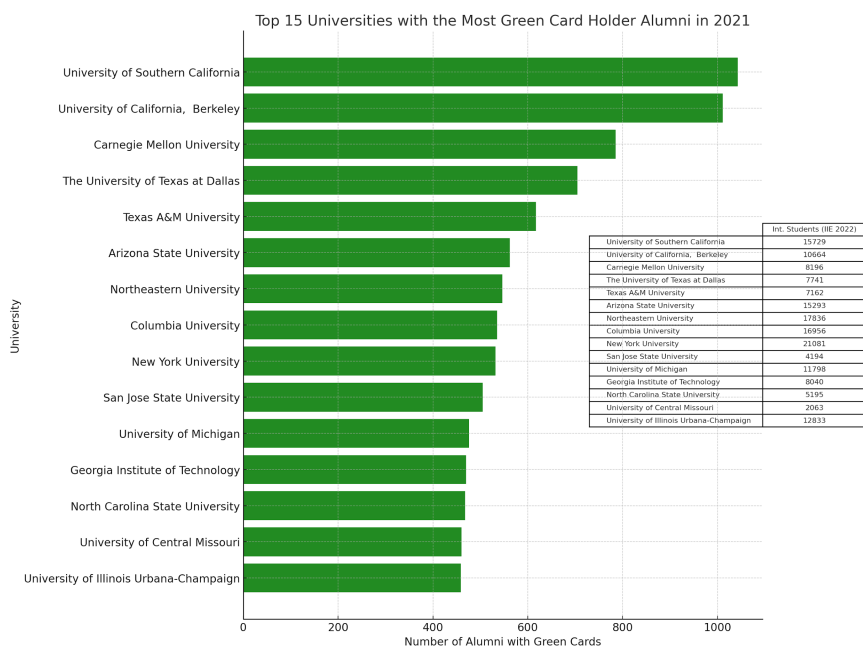
- MSU boasts an impressive total of 12,321 international alumni. Admittedly, there is a noticeable disparity when compared to the number of domestic alumni. However, an intriguing finding is that 2% of these international alumni have evolved into donors.
- Visualize this: For every one hundred international students who step onto your campus today, you can expect two to become future benefactors of your institution after graduation. These countries tirelessly champion MSU's recruitment efforts and brand visibility on a global scale.

In the same vein as in MSU's alumni contributions, it is important to consider other indicators that shed light on the impact of international students long after graduation. With this in mind, we turned our attention to a different set of data that offers additional perspectives on the value of nurturing international relationships.

We compiled the Top 15 Universities with the Most Green Card Holder Alumni in 2021 based on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). These data sets reflect the institutions' support for employment opportunities for their international

students. Importantly, the institutions on this list are also among the U.S. institutions hosting a significant population of international students.

Figure 1. Top 15 Universities with the Most Green Card Holder Alumni in 2021.



Source: (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2021) and (Institute of International Education, 2021-2022).

**Example 2: Green River Community College-Building Bonds that Last Longevity**

MacKenzie Hizon served as director of International Outreach for Green River Community College from 2008-2012 and has since held a variety of international student recruitment leadership positions at other institutions.

By 2010, Green River Community College already had experienced developing strong relationships with its international alumni. However, at that time, the institution had not developed a clear strategy around using alumni for new student recruitment. According to MacKenzie, this happened more organically.

In reflecting on the work done and results 14 years later, MacKenzie shared a summary of key processes that contributed to Green River’s success in recruiting international students and developing lasting relationships with these students.

Primarily, the institution put in place three things:

- **Dedicated international student advisors** who built strong relationships with international students on campus and helped them plan their courses in a way that supported their plans to transfer to a four-year institution, often the University of Washington.
- **A 24/7 housing hotline** is used to help current international students navigate the inevitable housing challenges that arise. This was a highly valued service that reduced student stress.
- **Support for international students' integration** into community activities gave them great experience while also bolstering their impending transfer applications.

These student services created powerful bonds with the international students while on campus, and those bonds lasted beyond their graduation from their four-year degree alma mater.

In terms of processes, the Green River was one of the first community colleges to implement Salesforce and set up three, six, and nine-month student check-in reminders for the international student support team to keep everyone on track.

This alumni relationship work, when performed well, becomes extremely meaningful for the individuals involved. The results justify building this business process for any institution.

## Is Your Institution Ready?

The following evaluation form (see appendix) can help you identify what to prioritize to prepare your institution to undertake the effort to access international alumni in a new way. The knowledge shared in this chapter can help you assess the strengths and areas of your institution, which require additional effort and attention.

## Conclusion

In the highly competitive and interconnected world of higher education, regardless of the entry points by which international students arrive on U.S. campuses, international alumni engagement has become imperative for institutions in the student life cycle. From the substantial tuition revenue generated to the invaluable role of international alumni in brand promotion,

recruitment, and career development, the benefits of building relationships with international alumni are manifold and far-reaching. However, unlocking this potential necessitates unwavering institutional commitment, particularly in bolstering understaffed alumni relations offices.

As the wealth of data and experiences demonstrated, investing in international relations, particularly through the establishment of well-structured alumni ambassador programs, is strategically valuable for any forward-thinking institution. This investment not only yields immediate benefits but also opens doors to long-term opportunities, ensuring the sustained growth and vitality of institutional enrollment. In this ever-evolving landscape, institutions that prioritize international engagement will undoubtedly thrive and leave a lasting impact on the international educational arena.

To help you evaluate your ability to deploy alumni ambassadors, we have provided an interactive questionnaire. This form will help you assess your institution's preparedness to engage your alumni in international student recruitment efforts. The interactive tool provides customized recommendations based on your responses.

## INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI AND RECRUITMENT PREPAREDNESS EVALUATION

How prepared is your institution to engage your international alumni in student recruitment efforts?				
	Unknown	Not Confident	Somewhat Confident	Very Confident
<b>Leadership Engagement</b>				
Leadership supports investing in international alumni engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alumni office has robust international alumni engagement support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Internal Support</b>				
Staff has time to engage your international alumni and support recruitment efforts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff has the communications support to collaborate with your international alumni	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International alumni and international recruitment teams collaborate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Technology</b>				
Your teams have the tech tools needed to facilitate strong project management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You have an easily accessible international alumni contact database	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Resources</b>				
Your international alumni engagement budget is sufficient for your needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The Intead team is available to consult if you would like to develop an effective alumni engagement plan focused on student recruitment.  
Info@intead.com

Access the interactive tool here:

<https://info.intead.com/international-alumni-evaluation-form>

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## Bios

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## Chapter 11

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# A Copilot Model of University Transfer Admission

Leilt Habte

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### **Abstract**

This chapter is based on my decades of successful experience counseling and guiding California community college students to transfer to the University of California, Berkeley and other institutions of choice. This chapter highlights the importance of counseling and advising in university transfer admission (UTA) success and discusses the roles played by community colleges and universities in eventually arriving at the model of copilotting among the student, the community college and the respective university partner.

**Keywords:** counseling, advising, guidance, transfer success, UTA, copilot model, serving students of color, underrepresented and international students, entry points.

### **Introduction**

Community college enrollment in the U.S. is a complex experience that requires empowering navigation for the outcome to be fruitful and successful for all stakeholders (Galizio & Boggs, 2022; Fishman & Cheche, 2023). In general, colleges themselves have resources and programs that are geared toward serving the communities that surround them. Thus, each college is uniquely positioned and organized to meet its specific goals. However, a student choosing to use UTA (University Transfer Admission) as an entry point by enrolling in a community college before transferring to a four-year university, needs more ingredients,

broader engagement with faculty and resources and close collaboration from partnering universities. (Fink, Tulloch, Steiger & Reddy, 2023).

All UTA students deserve to be well informed and clear as to the path to reach the university. While in this information age, there are an overwhelming amount of resources available to equip students, deconstructing the mass volume of requirements and policies is imperative to attain benefits. Students' prior knowledge and preparation to enroll in college are factors that influence the outcome of the transfer path. However, once a student enrolls, it is also the symbiotic and organic interactions between the student and the systems at large that can determine the success of the transfer mission. Especially for students who have limited access to relevant information about college, the journey becomes challenging and exposes the critical need for intervention and guidance. First generation, low income, traditionally excluded, and international students fall under this potentially blinding reality where navigating through the college system becomes daunting, frightening, and overwhelming without sound and supportive strategic guidance, advising, or coaching (Taylor, 2019; Reyes, 2011).

An effective guidance and supportive system that is rendered to students results in successful completion of the transfer curriculum, resulting in transfer to and retention at the university. For targeted populations that require extra attention, a college that is designed to have a multifaceted support system will have a great impact on the success of the student. With regard to the international student population, establishing very robust and mindful international student support services that are keenly aware of the unique needs of international students provides the foundation for providing relevant support. Beginning from recruitment to obtaining visa, orientation, travel, enrollment, accommodations, student life, counseling, and academic preparation, the department can address needs to ease the student's experience. Additionally, numerous campus-wide services, programs, departments, university representatives and faculty further fortify the potential success of students' experience and goals.

A key element in UTA success is counseling (Habte, Luan, & Williams, 2020). By providing appropriate and empowering counsel to potential transfer students, the counseling department must be equipped with college counselors who are properly trained and experienced and who are also experiencing compassion and who are willing to work with students in need of a great deal of support.

While the college counselor is able to provide information about the broader college experience, academic engagement and future academic aspirations, the presence and involvement of university representatives who provide transfer

advice provide further clarity of requirements, encouragement, and inspiration to expand students' confidence and ambitions. The highest and most influential academic counseling experience is one that is fully sourced and designed to be implemented individually with a student over a sustained period of time and system.

When a student engages in a counseling conversation, the academic background and goals of the student together become the primary focal point for determining what paths the student can consider. While on the surface these two topics seem simple and clear, the actual communication between the student and the academic adviser has the potential to trigger and bring forth many issues that impact the student's life and education. Discussing one's academic accomplishments and aspirations and the general value of higher education is multidimensional, as it incorporates socio-economical, familial, personal, emotional, and psychological factors that influence one's worldview, ambitions, motivation, self-esteem, and self-image. The conversations held in a comfortable and welcoming environment enable organic engagement between the adviser and student to explore the intricacies of the student's motivation, ambition, strengths, weaknesses, circumstances, barriers, privileges, and challenges that can impact the academic plan that is to be mapped and frequently evaluated until completion. These conversations build trust, encouraging self-driven motivation to heed the proper guidance provided to strategize a successful transfer pathway.

Pragmatic topics that should be covered in individual meetings include:

- Practical evaluation of academic records;
- examining academic strengths and weaknesses;
- discussing transfer requirements;
- scheduling of courses and other activities;
- major selection; and
- enrolling in supportive and academic enrichment programs.

Furthermore, international students who are unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system as well as with culture and lifestyle require appropriate cultural deconstruction and informative instructions. This effort would benefit international students tremendously in these individual sessions with an adviser, even if one can easily overlook it by treating them as regular domestic students.

The role of the counselor is far reaching, as it penetrates many aspects of the life of the student, aiming to provide needed support and counsel in order to advance the student's academic journey.

As these advising sessions become critical in enlightening students about their educational path, utilizing broader resources in college, such as other support services, faculty, student clubs and extracurricular activities, will aid in strengthening students' educational endeavors. With such rich resources, a student's systemic, committed dedication to learning and performing well academically as well as seeking personal development opportunities will lead to personal and academic success.

Highly successful academic advice and support yield great results in UTA success when the support continues until the completion of the transfer application, where individualized guidance on the application serves to secure proper completion and an increased rate of admission. Despite a student's high academic achievement, without proper completion of transfer application, the chances of admission could be compromised, especially regarding admission to selective institutions. Thus, students who receive deep and personal application completion support have a higher rate of admission because they are able to complete the application and write effective college admission essays. This type of available college transfer advice is individualized, sustained, strategic, and comprehensive through the academic journey until the transfer is priceless for students who absolutely need it.

Colleges and universities that partner to increase this collaborative advising are able to nurture intellectual talent that is diverse and superbly prepared to benefit the student, all the institutions and the communities at large. The following section describes a model community college and university transfer pathway program that is, in essence, a successful co-piloting experience among UTA students, community colleges and university partners.

### **Community College Contribution:**

When a student enrolls in a community college, initial academic counseling is pivotal for shaping the educational goals that need to be accomplished. In that counseling appointment, the students will discuss the intended educational goal of transferring to a university. The counselor will prepare an educational plan according to the student's interest and potential transfer institutions selected. This plan is one that can enable the student to begin the journey, and it is to be frequently revisited, altered, and amended per the experience and new situations

that may arise along the way. The most important factor is that the student becomes competent and fully informed of the plan and the details of the transfer requirements to be fulfilled for all intended transfer institutions.

A list of the most critical means a student can obtain clear and viable information to follow the educational plan includes the following:

- informative counseling exchange;
- UTA workshops;
- reliable university search sources;
- faculty and peer mentors;
- student service programs;
- engagement with other transfer-bound students;
- university visits; and
- communication with university representatives.

The freedom and responsibility of the prospective UTA student is to curate individual academic paths to many potential transfer intuitions that may present different admission requirements. Thus, as the student co-pilotes the transfer journey by balancing the relevant academic load with other responsibilities, the goal should be to become fully prepared and equipped for transfer. Consequently, selecting majors, preparing for them, and managing thriving educational experiences that incorporate self-development by engaging in meaningful extracurricular activities to become well-rounded individuals are a few of the objectives for students to attain transfer goals. These objectives can be clarified by obtaining accurate information and guidance as needed.

### **University Partners Contribution:**

Universities that partner with community colleges have the privilege and the influence to contribute to the successful UTA of community college students. University representatives assigned to develop working relationships with community college counselors, transfer centers, and student service programs to provide accurate information about admission and transfer requirements provide added clarity and guidance that can support the transfer goals of prospective students. Universities can also host student visits, workshops, webinars, and

individual advice with prospective transfer students to ensure that prospective transfers are welcoming to develop an interest and motivation to select the institution as a potential option.

At the core, students who are able to meet with university representatives to discuss their transfer goals and obtain clarity about the requirements and possibilities tend to be empowered to transfer to that institution and find the motivation to complete the preparation. Thus, providing the opportunity for students to meet with university representatives increases access to transfer and eases the transition and sustains supportive and collaborative relationships across institutions.

University representatives can also strengthen relationships with community college counselors by providing in-service training about transfer and admission requirements and keeping them informed so that they can support their students. Cross enrollment opportunities for community college students to take courses at partner universities while enrolled in community colleges have multifaceted benefits for community college students to remain inspired, informed about the university system, and ease the transition. Other academic enrichment programs such as university visits, support with transfer applications, workshops, internships and research opportunities for community college students, further solidify the partnership and continue to support the transfer goals of prospective students at many levels.

### **Copiloting UTA Success**

The practice of transfer education between community colleges and universities in America is unique in that it fundamentally powers the educational and social mobility of American society. This practice came with no history precedence anywhere in the world; therefore, it behooves all who are involved to be cathartic and humble in building programs and services while operating them at the same time. There is no question that gaps, issues, or deficiencies exist both within a community college campus and between them and universities.

UTA is a process of engagement between students and institutions. Specifically, this process is enriched by the students and enhanced by the counseling and advising support faculty and staff from both the community college and partnering universities. Serving international UTA students would take on an extra layer of complexity in which only those who are highly culturally aware would perform well.

For the sake of argument, below is a process flow and division of labor graph in hopes of helping practitioners who are intentional in their drive to make UTA more successful.

Table 1. Division of Labor for Copiloting UTA

Milestones	Community College	Partners	Activities
College Orientation	Student Services	University Reps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● practical evaluation of academic records,</li> <li>● examining academic strengths and weaknesses,</li> <li>● discussing transfer requirements,</li> <li>● scheduling of courses and other activities,</li> <li>● major selection, and</li> <li>● enrolling in supportive and academic enrichment programs</li> <li>● informative counseling exchange,</li> <li>● UTA workshops,</li> <li>● reliable university search sources,</li> <li>● faculty and peer mentors,</li> <li>● student service programs,</li> <li>● engagement with other transfer-bound students,</li> <li>● university visits, and</li> <li>● communication with university representatives</li> </ul>
Course Registration	Counselors		
Mid-term checkup	Faculty and Counselors		
2nd Semester registration	Faculty and Counselors		
2nd Semester UTA prep	Counselors	University Reps	
3rd Semester UTA Contract	Counselors	University Reps	
4th Semester Send-off	Counselors		
Follow up	Admissions, Alumni Office, Counselor		

With these robust resources at both institutions, prospective UTA students who take advantage of the entry point through community colleges tend to achieve their transfer goals and transition easily and go on to successfully achieve their academic and future professional goals. Gaining clarity, counseling, coaching, and implementing the advice in the comprehensive preparation plan enables prospective students to reliably and accurately execute their mission and excel.

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## Bio

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# Satisfying International Students' Palates

## Elevating Enrollment through Strategic Food Considerations

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### **Abstract**

This chapter explores the strategic incorporation of food and dining services in international student recruitment and enrollment. Recognizing the profound impact of food on international students' experiences, it emphasizes the importance of providing authentic and culturally diverse cuisine. The chapter discusses how creating a sense of nostalgia, building community, addressing mental health and wellness, promoting cultural integration, and highlighting support services related to food can attract and retain international students and smooth their onramp to entry points to U.S. education. Real-world examples from universities illustrate successful strategies. International enrollment specialists are encouraged to embrace a holistic approach that integrates culinary considerations into the recruitment and retention process, ultimately fostering a welcoming environment for international students.

**Keywords:** International Student Recruitment, Enrollment Enhancement, Culinary Cultural Integration, Nostalgia, Community Building, Mental Health, Cultural Identity, Support Services, Dining Services, Authentic Cuisine, Entry Points.

## **Introduction**

As international enrollment specialists, we can significantly affect the enrollment of international students by considering the provision of dining services more strategically. Food plays a large part in the experience of international students studying abroad. Emphasizing real meals as part of the recruitment process shows that you are aware of and respect the culture of the potential students. Meals demonstrate how a college cherishes diversity and is dedicated to fostering a comforting environment where students can maintain their ethnic identities. We believe that a greater number of international students can be recruited and enrolled through any entry points by understanding the significance of food for these students and implementing strategic food considerations in the recruitment and enrollment process. In addition to outlining particular strategies that international enrollment specialists might use, chapter this study considers how strategically approaching food can boost the enrollment and retention of international students.

## **Building a Nostalgic Bond and Sense of Home**

Feelings of familiarity and a connection to home are fostered by authentic cuisine. It serves to remind international students of their familial ties, cultural background and traditions. This can provide solace and mitigate feelings of homesickness for students who feel alienated and far from those who truly understand them. By knowing the impact of nostalgia, enrollment specialists can intentionally include food selections that bring comfort and a sense of familiarity in their recruitment efforts (Stahl, 2012).

In recognition of this, organizations can plan campus tours or recruitment activities that include food or snacks from different nations, highlighting the institution's dedication to cultural diversity. This gives potential international students a taste of home and helps them feel more at ease and connected to the school, boosting the possibility that they will enroll. In our advising experience, parents (Muslim parents for halal food, Hindu parents for vegetarian food) were more willing to send their children to college campuses where menus aligned with their religious and cultural requirements. Our observations suggest that food selection in recruitment materials could be helpful to satisfy parents, who are key decision-makers.

One of the authors of this chapter worked at Central Michigan University (CMU). She understands how crucial it is for international students to have access to authentic meals. She collaborated with many on-campus international student

organizations to organize various cultural events each semester. These gatherings honor the various culinary customs of international students and give CMU students and residents of the local community the chance to experience regional specialties. These occasions also give both domestic and international students a chance to meet one another and develop a strong community. The number of international students enrolled at CMU has increased, as has their satisfaction level (Bouman, 2022).

The other author of this article, who came to the U.S. as an international student from India, was able to build deeper friendships and community engagement because of the availability of and conversations about familiar foods both on and off campus. The food itself was a catalyst for engagement and richer experiences. The presence of Indian food at many events created conversations beyond food, leading to the exchange of ideas about culture, the economy, and history.

### **Building Community**

The development of a sense of community is essential for attracting international students. Making cross-cultural friendships and fostering a feeling of community via authentic food sharing are part of this bonding process, giving international students a chance to share with their classmates their culinary traditions, sparking conversation, camaraderie, and intercultural exchange. Initiatives involving food have a significant impact on creating a warm and inclusive workplace. Foreign students reported that participating in community-building activities had a positive impact on their experience (Aladegbaiye, De Jong & Beldad, 2022).

International enrollment specialists might highlight the institution's initiatives to construct communal dining areas, plan international potluck gatherings, or launch cultural clubs with a focus on food. These programs give potential international students the chance to interact with current international students and feel a sense of community. International enrollment specialists can showcase the institution's dedication to providing a social network and support system by exhibiting a vibrant and welcoming community, making it an appealing option for prospective international students.

Providing opportunities for international students to connect and exchange culinary customs helps promote a sense of community. Professionals in international enrollment management can advertise school activities such as multicultural potluck dinners, culinary workshops, and international food festivals. These gatherings can promote cross-cultural communication and give international students a chance to share their cultural heritage.

At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, international students cook and share food from their home countries during the annual "Taste of Urbana Champaign" event(n.d.). Similarly, Ohio University hosts the International Street Fair every spring, an event eagerly anticipated by the entire campus community as well as locals from outside the university. International students plan food and cultural activities for these popular events. These students often post videos and pictures from the events on social media, highlighting their joy and feeling of belonging on campus. Their messages are then seen by their networks and potentially influence prospective students.

### **Mental Health and Wellness**

Emotional well-being can benefit from eating comfort food. It can elevate mood, reduce tension, and increase general pleasure (Sarmiento, R, 2011). Particularly during trying times, comfort and fond memories of home can come from eating authentic food. Understanding how food affects mental health and enhancing student welfare first can have a favorable impact on the enrollment of international students. According to a study of international students in the UK, 36% of the respondents reported "poor mental health" (Qin, 2019). Enrollment specialists should emphasize an institution's emphasis on offering nutritious, well-balanced meal options as well as resources for stress management and sustaining mental health. This may entail expanding accessibility to support groups, counseling services, or wellness initiatives, especially those designed with international students in mind.

International enrollment professionals can draw in prospective international students who value their mental health and general well-being by exhibiting a complete commitment to student wellness. For instance, the International Student Centre partners with the Health and Wellness Centre at the University of Toronto to provide programs on stress reduction, mindful eating, and nutrition. Additionally, they offer private therapy services to international students who could be experiencing mental health problems. International Student Survey "found a 14% increase in the percentage of students who say a university's mental health services are very important". (Bennett, 2021)

International students frequently face particular mental health difficulties as a result of cultural adjustment and being removed from their support systems. International enrollment specialists can draw attention to the availability of mental health resources, such as multilingual therapy sessions or culturally aware support groups, that are designed especially for international students.

The University of Michigan provides support in the form of cooking classes, which blend culinary activities with conversations about mental health (“MHealthy Cooking Classes”, n.d.). To address both food and mental health issues, international students can get together to prepare traditional cuisines while conversing about their mental health with dietitians and chefs.

It is crucial for international enrollment specialists to modify and customize these tactics for the unique institutions and student populations they serve. International enrollment management professionals can improve their strategy for attracting and keeping international students by utilizing this extra information and sources.

It is essential for the physical and mental well-being of international students to encourage healthy eating practices and general wellness (“Healthy Eating Plate”, n.d.). We believe that the culinary alternatives available on campus should support the needs of international students in terms of their health and wellness. To create menus that offer culturally familiar and balanced meals, institutions can work with intercultural and nutritionist/wellness specialists.

Some international students come from cultures where children, especially male children, are not exposed to cooking and food preparation habits, which leads to dependence on ready-to-eat foods on foreign campuses (Murray, Mahadevan, Gatto, O’Connor, Fissinger, Bailey & Cassara, 2016). In these situations, students often do not find authentic familiar food, or such foods are expensive to purchase. It would benefit institutions to invest in workshops or culinary classes focusing on cooking familiar foods. These workshops could be mentioned during orientation and in recruitment materials and outreach.

### **Cultural Integration and Identity**

One’s cultural identity is inextricably linked to their diet. International students can proudly display their cultural background and encourage respect for their family’s customs among their classmates by making opportunities to taste and interact with authentic cuisine. Food may act as a bridge between many cultures and is an important component of being an international student. International enrollment specialists can improve cultural integration on campuses by providing meal options that reflect a variety of cultures and encouraging intercultural dialog.

To host cultural cuisine fairs or cooking classes, institutions might partner with international student organizations. International students can share their customary recipes, cooking methods, and eating habits with the larger campus

community at these gatherings. These programs promote cultural appreciation, respect, and understanding, fostering a welcoming environment for international students (Shorelight Software, 2019).

Every year, during "International Education Week" staff at the University of Texas at Austin organizes a variety of cultural activities, such as culinary festivals, to honor the many cultural backgrounds of international students ("A Night of East and Southeast Asia", 2022). These activities not only attract potential international students but also encourage cultural understanding and integration among the campus population.

### **Support Services**

Promoting support services and resources for food and dining is important for enhancing the success and well-being of international students. When international students feel at home on their campus, they are more likely to stay in their current program and consider other programs there upon graduation.

The institutions used might include details on the locations, operating times, and meal plan options of their campus dining halls in their recruitment materials. Emphasizing the accessibility and convenience of meal options can allay the worries of potential international students (and their parents), who frequently struggle to adjust to unfamiliar environments and timetables.

To better cater to international students' dietary requirements, cultural preferences, and food-related concerns, it may be helpful to communicate with college dining services and personnel, as well as food vendors, for this purpose. Such a communication channel could ensure that overseas students have a person to talk to about any problems or inquiries regarding their culinary experiences.

Institutions can also work with regional community groups or international student associations to produce directories of nearby international markets, grocery stores, and restaurants. This tool can help students from other nations find foods and ingredients they are acquainted with from other countries.

International enrollment specialists can demonstrate their dedication to cultural integration, health and fitness, and all-inclusive support services for international students by including these in their outreach materials and communications. This would not only draw upon potential international students but also help them succeed and feel satisfied in general when they are studying abroad.

## Conclusion

Since food gives international students a taste of home, fosters cultural identity, supports emotional health, builds community, and promotes intercultural understanding, attention and resource allocation for food are important in student life. Strategic meal choices could potentially increase the number of international students enrolled. By developing communities, enrollment specialists create an engaging and encouraging environment for international students by fostering a sense of nostalgia, honoring cultural expression, offering comfort and familiarity, and putting mental health first through food-related programs. It would be more effective to emphasize the significance of food in the experience of international students by including more detailed information (number of students from a particular country/culture, number of vendors offering international foods, list of international food items on dining services menu, etc.) in recruitment materials and campaigns.

International enrollment specialists can recruit and retain more international students through any entry points as described in other chapters of this book by understanding how food affects students' hearts, which will ultimately improve the institution's reputation, diversity, and success on a worldwide scale. Strategic food choices enhance the overall enrollment experience by demonstrating an institution's dedication to cultural diversity, inclusivity, and student well-being.

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## Bios

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## Chapter 13

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# Ethics in U.S. University International Admissions

## The Global Impact with a Focus on China

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### **Abstract**

While U.S. universities utilize an array of initiatives to increase accessibility, decrease inequity, and create a more “student centered process,” the reality is that some commonplace U.S.-style holistic admissions expectations used in their university freshman admission (UFA) for international applicants not only reward wealthy applicants, but also perpetuate unethical activities or even directly exacerbate ethical malpractice around the world. Naturally people tend to focus on China, which as a country sent the largest number of international students to the U.S. for over a decade. However, this is not a China-only problem – well-documented ethical issues exist worldwide. For the purpose of this chapter, the author uses findings that are easily observed in China, where sky-high family expectations for educational attainment, practically unrivaled per capita expenditures on educational services, an absence of government regulation, and a tradition of obsessing over quantitative metrics such as test scores and rankings create a hypercompetitive environment ripe for ethical malpractice. To introduce these issues, this chapter will describe the landscape of Chinese secondary schools and how it has been affected by U.S. university holistic admissions policies for international students. This will follow with an examination of certain commonplace practices used by Chinese secondary schools, students, parents, and third parties to adapt and prepare more competitive undergraduate applications to highly selective U.S. institutions. Discussed next will be a list of pertinent, prevalent, and persistent ethical issues. Finally, we will conclude

by highlighting the efforts of the school-based college advising community in China to identify and approach these ethical issues, as well as recommendations for various stakeholders, including international admission professionals at U.S. universities.

**Keywords:** China, Ethics, Agents, Standardized Testing, Secondary School, International Students, Enrollment Management, Higher Education, UFA, Entry Points

## Introduction

Ethics in international enrollment management is a difficult issue to discuss. However before addressing these issues, it is vitally important to establish that ethical issues naturally appear in every industry and are not restricted to any particular geographic region. These issues in China are not unique, and almost certainly appear in some shape or form in other parts of the world. It is important not to characterize them as “Chinese issues” or as it is sometimes known “the Chinese cheating problem,” which would be just as racist as it would be misleading. However, my personal experience is concentrated in China. What I believe makes ethical issues in China stand out is simply their visibility and the diligence of many school-based counselors confronting them. What has most concerned me, however, has been the general lack of awareness among university admissions staff about how their policies directly influence and sometimes even incentivize unethical behaviors.

A major obstacle to approaching these issues is the idea that Chinese schools are a monolithic group. While China consistently sends hundreds of thousands of Han Chinese students abroad each year to study in the U.S., the secondary school learning environments of these students vary considerably. One of the best English-language overviews of how this ecosystem has recently evolved is the white paper from Sunrise Education titled *Trends in Chinese International Education and Student Mobility: Facing the New Realities of the 2022-2023 Academic Year*. This report is still relevant. If you are not familiar with the geographic diversity of Chinese secondary schools, their relationship with standardized testing, trends in the wide range of curricula on offer, depth of teaching staff, or range of interest in study destinations, or the continued rise in the use of consultants and agents, then this is just one resource of many that can offer an introduction.

Many of these trends were easily visible at my own school. I served as a Director of College Counseling at Xi'an Tie Yi High School in Shaanxi Province for five

years. This school is representative of the largest contingent of schools in China that send Chinese students abroad: it is an international curriculum program for Chinese passport students that is partnered with (and happens to be physically sited on the campus of) a public school. Over my tenure from 2018-2023, the school opened a TOEFL testing center, introduced an A-Level curriculum option for students, saw a reduction in expatriate teaching staff by roughly half, and despite a slight drop in enrollment during the pandemic year saw its strongest enrollment ever in 2023.

While my five years at Tie Yi may seem short to many career educators and enrollment professionals, I not only witnessed several significant changes but also due to my administrative responsibilities and participation in Chinese staff meetings I was fortunate to be privy to the primary reasons behind many of the changes. Some of the most significant institutional changes at Tie Yi included the curriculum and testing changes mentioned above, the replacement of departed expatriate teachers with Chinese staff with degrees from overseas universities, and creation of a full-time school-based team of college counselors.

Almost all of these changes were motivated by a single driving factor: impact on college application competitiveness. Application results are the most important metric by which Chinese schools evaluate themselves and how they stack up against other local secondary schools. Most directly, they drive new student recruitment. In Xi'an, without exception, each prospective parent whom I met at new student recruitment events was eager to learn about how our students had been accepted by top-ranked U.S. universities. While Chinese students, parents, and schools are notorious for the emphasis they place on rankings, international students around the world primarily make decisions by taking rankings into account. According to data from Cialfo, a college counseling platform used by more than 2,000 schools across the world, ranking is overwhelmingly the number one factor that influences international students' decisions about where to enroll.

Each year, the effects of college acceptances ripple through Chinese schools like a rock tossed across the Pacific: they are announced at staff meetings where they affect staff morale. They are announced in homerooms where they affect student motivation and mood across all grade levels in a school. They can even affect staff bonuses at a school's annual faculty meeting. All these various impacts of such a fickle decision by overseas universities can sometimes drive school leadership into a ferocious frenzy. I remember waking up one winter weekend morning to more than a dozen missed calls from one of my principals and several forwarded WeChat posts. I hadn't overslept for work – I had simply slept through the middle-of-the-night release of acceptance letters from a top-ranked U.S.

institution. My principal was just eager to share our school's results (published shortly after midnight) and compare them with some of our local rival schools. She was only disappointed that I did not share her level of enthusiasm to analyze this critically important data on the weekend.

College acceptance is also a heavily weighted factor that determines the ranking of international secondary programs in China. Several such rankings exist, such as those by YiXiao or KingLead. The meticulousness with which data on Chinese student acceptance to top-ranked U.S. institutions is collected and analyzed is not by itself remarkable but rather that a community of connected college counselors can usually furnish a complete national data set in under 24 hours. The data collection was coordinated through WeChat groups. Relatedly, at Tie Yi, my college counseling team's highest priority was to improve the overall rankings of our students' college acceptance, especially that of our most academically competitive students. However, it is important to understand that this was also, in a way, the highest priority for all other staff at our school, whether they liked it or not. Our team constantly reminded everyone of the various ways to fight toward this goal and marshaled any necessary resources.

Decisions about our college counseling team's role at school were not made overnight; rather, over the course of several years, we learned from other schools, we innovated, and we gradually accumulated a number of new responsibilities. The first was a short, approximately 5-10 minute, weekly presentation at staff meetings. This included training faculty on various topics, such as understanding the application process for overseas universities, providing students with guidance about extracurricular activities, and improving the quality and credibility of letters of recommendation. Our team also created a college counseling curriculum with weekly content for each of our three grade levels. College counselors also hosted parent "salons", where parents had opportunities to learn more about their student's options to study overseas. Individually, I also facilitated a weekly seminar for motivated students to read English-language literature. Each of these tasks focused on improving the quality of our students or some part of their future application to university.

Another task included extensive analysis of the admissions policies of overseas universities. As I gradually proved myself to be a college counselor that could support Tie Yi's institutional goals (guiding students toward repeated acceptances at top-ranked overseas universities, especially in the U.S.), I was increasingly in demand by other school administrators to help understand, analyze and communicate these policies. This included investigating official policies and contacting admissions officers to try to ascertain the practices that

would directly affect how our students' applications were read or acceptance decisions were made. For example, during the pandemic, the increase in test-optional admissions proved to be the most confounding policy. In China, where a national domestic curriculum is laser-focused on testing, our teachers, parents, and students were incredulous: how could testing be optional? It turned out that it was not optional. While students in the U.S. could take this policy at face value, our students did not have this luxury. At the time, many institutions still expected international students to provide standardized test scores. Parents, teachers, and students were confused about this policy and ultimately were forced to make difficult calculations with incomplete information: Should they devote resources to preparing for a test with dubious added value to their college applications? Even if a student achieves a high score, will this benefit their application?

Ultimately, we advised our students to prepare for the standardized test on offer at our school, the ACT. This was partly because the school had a vested interest—we had a team of dedicated staff to teach ACT prep courses and a capital investment in our ACT test center. This was partly because some universities in other parts of the world, such as the U.K. or Singapore, still require a standardized test score from the ACT or SAT. However, ACT testing was never truly optional for our students applying to highly selective U.S. universities. This is because many universities, especially certain highly selective universities, have an official test optional policy but in practice disproportionately reject Chinese students who do not submit standardized test scores. When I shared insights from the data and questioned admission officers about this, I repeatedly heard admissions officers explain that they still found standardized test scores from international applicants to be helpful, especially for evaluating certain English language skills for comparing Chinese students within their pool. Many admissions professionals confided that they were stuck in a hard place: they had to say the official policy in information sessions, but they also had to make confident decisions in their admission committee. Our administration saw this as a reaffirmation of the importance of our ACT test center. At times, our teachers provided information to students that directly conflicted with “official” information from university admissions officers. A related problematic policy is simply English language testing requirements. Some universities' official policies include minimum scores for a student, for example, to achieve an 80 on a TOEFL iBT Test. However, universities do not say that they penalize students from competitive applicant pools if their TOEFL score is below a certain threshold, usually much higher than the minimum required score.

Many students do not need the same kind of school-wide or multi-region data on college acceptance to understand that standardized tests such as the ACT were not optional or that they needed to achieve a certain TOEFL or other English language test score to be competitive for admission to a highly selective school. In China, many upperclassmen share their own experiences and application data with underclassmen. When a student achieved a high score on the ACT or TOEFL, I often heard about it from a classmate I was talking to in a counseling meeting. If not there, then I could usually rely on my principal to share it in a staff meeting.

As a result of this pressure to perform on tests, it only makes sense that some students would look for shortcuts, especially with the rise of online testing. In the U.S., cheating on an online test would be punishable for the student and any facilitators. Abroad, including in China, there are rarely any meaningful consequences if a student is caught, and there are not necessarily any consequences for facilitators either. The business of providing such services has flourished in China. For some insight into the specific situation in China, the article "*Online testing is a joke: How Chinese students cheat on U.S. college entry examinations*" by Vivian Zhou can offer a depressing introduction. A casual search on Taobao reveals hundreds of service providers who will guarantee a score above a certain threshold in an online test. This includes not only TOEFL but also IELTS, PTE, GRE, DET, and LanguageCert's SELT. Students use these services because they work and because there are few if any consequences. But frankly, sometimes these services are more economical than paying for actual test preparation courses. To my knowledge, the most severe consequences are from Duolingo: if a student is found to have repeatedly maliciously cheated on the DET, Duolingo will flag the student's identifying information from their ID (for international students, usually their passport), lock out their account, and make them unable to create a new account with the same personal information. On the other hand, ETS, the organization that administers the TOEFL test, will simply cancel a student's scores. The student might be restricted from taking the test again in the next six months. Otherwise, the student will likely not experience any lasting consequences. ETS has even acknowledged in press releases that their online tests have contributed to increases in the prevalence of cheating. When asked, many university admissions professionals say that they have no control over this. Isn't it the testing company's responsibility to police the test takers? After all, students should know better, right? Isn't it the counselor's responsibility to make sure that they know better?

I thought that question was interesting because it presumes that I have a responsibility to impart values and moral guidance to my students. On a good

day, I could have even been somewhat successful. At Tie Yi, our counseling staff made sure that every student was aware of the risks and consequences of cheating behavior on standardized tests. This was something that our school administrators took extremely seriously. Our school leadership appreciated how a cheating incident could negatively affect our school's reputation. Test proctoring at Tie Yi was extremely strict, with severe financial penalties for staff proctors who failed to catch students who cheated. However, only the TOEFL test, ACT, and a handful of other admissions tests were administered at Tie Yi ; there are other tests that students took outside of school.

Moreover, we were also competing with a number of other players to impart our advice. This is because many families who are sending their students abroad retain an independent consultant, sometimes also called an "agent", to guide them through the application process. This is not an agent in the sense of a commissioned recruiter with a contractual relationship with an overseas university. Rather, this is a person who is either self-employed or employed by a company that signs a contract with a student or parent to support their college applications. In some cases, contracts include incentives for the rankings of university acceptance or even go so far as to guarantee certain outcomes. The value of such contracts can range from humble hourly rates to multi-year contracts worth more than \$100,000. China is a paying market for selective overseas universities, and most Chinese students who apply to selective universities abroad can and do pay for a consultant. According to multiple research reports, the prevalence and usage rates of consultants for assisting with university admissions are increasing in China and around the world. For an in-depth exploration of the various reasons why families in China may retain a consultant to help their child apply to universities abroad, the article *Outsourced concerted cultivation: international schooling and educational consulting in China* by Ma Ying and Evan Wright elaborate on educational anxieties as well as the services that agents provide. However, many students also hire a consultant because they either do not want to or feel that they are unable to complete the application process on their own. For example, Ying and Wright quote a student expressing a common sentiment: "My own first draft was a disaster compared to the final version by my consultant." Regardless of whether it was a tangible result or emotional ease, consultants were hired because they delivered value.

Consultants are also hired to help students prepare for the application process by selecting activities or guiding them to apply for prep programs that could make them more competitive. One variety that has attracted some attention recently is opportunities for students to conduct and oftentimes publish research. An article titled *The Newest College Admissions Ploy: Paying to Make Your Teen a*

*“Peer Reviewed” Author* outlines in detail not only how parents can pay for an organization to help their student facilitate research but also how they can pay publications to publish their child’s “article”. While the services exist all over the world, “international students abound even in U.S.-based programs.” In China, this is simply an add-on service that many consultants offer. As long as highly selective U.S. university admissions offices continue to encourage high school students to demonstrate research experience, applicants will find a way to deliver, even if it means paying for it. While admissions staff might be able to evaluate whether a journal or article exists, they are not necessarily qualified to evaluate the quality of the research conducted. A simple, albeit imperfect, solution could be to enlist academic staff at a university to evaluate applicants, similar to how some U.K. universities enlist tutors to evaluate prospective applicants. However, many consultants are also paid to help students prepare for interviews or to navigate other instances where they might have to demonstrate competency before an academic expert.

To learn more about this industry, its practices, and its effects on students, I would also strongly recommend Panetha Ott’s dissertation, *Agencies, Third Party Vendors, and the Grooming of the College Applicant in China*. According to Panetha, consultants in China vary considerably in the scope and range of services they offer, their professionalism and level of knowledge about the application processes, and, of course, their attention and adherence to ethics while providing their services. Students use them because they can: they have the resources, many students don’t have access to a college counselor, and there are virtually no meaningful consequences to using one.

Most highly selective and top-ranked universities have an official policy regarding consultants or agents. For the most part, the policies share certain commonalities: they do not cooperate with agents, they discourage or prohibit students from working with agents, or if an agent is found to have fabricated some part of an accepted students’ application, then they will rescind that student’s offer. It is curious to me that so many international applicants hire consultants, who, as Panetha puts it “groom” for their applicants, but that universities don’t meaningfully penalize students even close to the rate at which they use consultants, despite these policies that discourage or prohibit students from working with them.

As a counselor, should I disclose to a university that my student is using a consultant? I’m not required to do so. Moreover, that may directly oppose my school’s institutional priorities, especially if the university decides to penalize my student for using a consultant. Some students choose to disclose their use of a

consultant through their Common Application, which includes space to add an “advisor” by providing name and contact information. However, I assumed that this was but a small fraction of the applicants. I knew that most of the students at my and other local schools would hire a consultant. In my third year at school, I was able to acquire a list of all of the companies that each student’s family had hired. This was not a very diverse list; rather, the list included both local boutique education companies and national companies that had offices across China.

When admissions staff members discuss consultants, they usually lament how a consultant can “over edit” or outright fabricate a student’s application materials. This has always confused me because admissions officers set their own university admissions policy. If they don’t want to read ghostwritten materials, all they need to do is change their application requirements, right? One of the most troubling enrollment policies is that universities still require international students to complete what is largely the same application as domestic American students. Many parts of this application are not proctored but include information that can be used to significantly affect an admissions decision, without any way of verifying that this work was produced by the students themselves. For example, this includes self-written personal statements, reflective essays, lists and descriptions of activities and awards, and essays and responses to optional questions. All of these are un-proctored. With respect to their credit, some institutions, such as the University of California, make use of novel software and extensive databases to check for plagiarism or copied work. Several other institutions have implemented more advanced methods, including IP address analysis, to identify fraudulent submissions. At the end of the day, however, university representatives are not able to say with 100% certainty that a student is in fact the person who actually submits their own application.

A friend and I together ran, and later presented at International ACAC the results of, a survey of almost 3,000 Chinese secondary students in international programs across China (Miller, Ott, Weeks & Zhang, 2020). Students were asked to complete this survey at university recruitment events and college fairs at Chinese international departments, international programs, and other schools, specifically excluding 100% expatriate or public domestic curriculum schools. At my request, he included a question about application portal password sharing: “Have you shared your Common Application password or other application portal password with a third party?” Of those almost 3,000 secondary students who responded, more than 23% willingly disclosed that they had, in fact, shared their login credentials with a third party. Almost 23% declined to respond to the question. Just over 50% said no. Students have never, to my knowledge, been asked this kind of question before. The kind of data yielded obviously begs a

number of important questions. Who are these third parties: are they consultants, or could they also be parents or college counselors? Why would students share their login information? What do these third parties do to students' applications? Are the students responding "yes" even aware that they should not be sharing their passwords with third parties? If this sample size is taken to be even remotely representative of international students, then one may extrapolate from available data (Knox, 2024) to estimate that roughly a quarter of international applicants are potentially jeopardizing the integrity of their application materials or may have their applications submitted by someone else on their behalf.

I have discussed this with many university admissions officers, and all of them agree: 1% is too many, let alone 23%.

However, the agreement ceases when the conversation moves toward what should be done and by whom. The cheekiest ones reliably pointed out: the counselor has a responsibility to ensure that students understand the expectations of the online agreement they signed. Others might ask – well, why don't you know which of your students are using consultants? Still others shift blame to students: they are young adults signing agreements, and they should know better.

The problem is that many students are under extreme pressure to stretch for results that may otherwise be beyond their reach. International students are paying significantly more than their domestic peers in the U.S. and family members, who often serve as financial sponsors for these students, rightly view their relative's education as an investment. In other words, the stakes are high. Many families view hiring a consultant as a kind of insurance to ensure that they receive the best deal possible. It isn't always so easy to tell, though. While some students willingly disclose that they have a consultant, not all are comfortable or willing to do so. When a student firmly denies using a consultant, it can be difficult to ascertain the truth. For example, I had a student accepted to Brown University. I didn't think that the student had a consultant, and they and their parents had told me as much. However, after the student received their acceptance letter, four local consultancies in Xi'an released new WeChat posts suggesting that they had supported the student's application and that interested parents could learn more details at an upcoming event. To me, the extent to which the consultant had provided services would never be clear. It could have been as benign as letting the student sit in on a trial class for TOEFL test prep, or it could have been facilitating a stand-in test taker to guarantee a score on the TOEFL iBT Test. I may never know.

Another issue is policy regarding letters of recommendation. Most U.S. institutions require letters of recommendation to be in English and submitted by a school representative or the writer themselves. However, some policies require letters written in a language other than English to include a certified translation. In some cases, a notary is needed. In theory, the original letter should accompany the certified English language translation, but this is rare in practice. Due to the variety of costs involved, many international students and schools in China are unable or unwilling to complete all of these steps. When a Chinese teacher writes a letter of recommendation in Chinese, what usually happens is they give this letter to the student, who is left to their own devices to determine how to translate the letter. The letter might be translated by a consultant, or it could even be translated by the student himself. Often, the translated letter in English is the only letter that is submitted to the university. As a result, the content of the submitted English version of the letter may vary significantly from the content of the original letter.

This is not an exhaustive list. Many of these issues seem complicated, but it should be clear that they exist due to widespread demand for overseas study at top-ranked highly selective universities. Applicants can find a myriad of ways to engage in a variety of unethical behaviors to game the admissions process with few, if any, consequences. These issues are not unrecognized in the counseling community.

At international conferences such as International ACAC, at least several sessions per conference will usually be dedicated to enrollment ethics. At local conferences, such as those hosted by the China Institute of College Admission Counseling (ChinaICAC, an organization unrelated to the International ACAC), the issue is discussed repeatedly, and attendees share their best practices with each other. For example, while it might be onerous (and expensive) to obtain officially certified and notarized translations of letters of recommendation, simply telling students that counselors will include the original Chinese with a translated English letter can result in more faithful translations. Some schools may try to prohibit their students from using consultants, but others give students a choice and merely require them to disclose this information. For example, Tie Yi officially leaves this choice up to their students. I required my students to sign a statement of integrity. In this way, the students were required to disclose that they were using a consultant outside of school. The participants also acknowledged their responsibilities regarding their application materials. There was even a statement that if the student was found to have violated the agreement, I and the school could withdraw support for the students' college applications. I even went so far as to require some students to surrender copies of their submitted application materials so that I could compare what we had discussed prior to their

submission. This might seem extreme, but I didn't see any other way for me to verify students' submitted materials. Ultimately, the list of required materials and the method of submission are determined by universities.

One could argue that the professional organizations that govern college admissions professionals should take some responsibility. The International ACAC and even the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) have published reports about various issues in international student recruitment. In these reports, problems are highlighted, as are the producing committee's recommendations. However, what I always found curious was that while NACAC and its sister organization, International ACAC, may mandate that their members adopt certain policies or follow certain guidelines and have committees for ethical practice, the reality is that there is little accountability for members of these organizations as to whether or not they effect any changes or how closely they adhere to these guidelines. It is rare for members to be audited or to receive any kind of disciplinary action because they fail to adhere to such guidelines. In recent years, the ability of these organizations to regulate their members has decreased. The authority of NACAC to dictate practices was limited in the 2017 case in which the U.S. Department of Justice deemed parts of the then-named NACAC document *Statement of Principles of Good Practice* to violate the Sherman Antitrust Act (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019).

The International ACAC reacted to this ruling by adjusting its member expectations to avoid litigation. Most recently, a lawsuit brought against Harvard University by the Students for Fair Admissions, Inc., has provided legal clarity on the ways in which universities can use race in their admission processes. These are two major examples of rulings that have directly affected enrollment policies in the U.S. (Stanford Law School, 2023) However, there has never been such a high-profile ruling related to enrollment practices or policies for international students. The majority of oversight on admissions practices has in reality been left up to the institutions themselves (Reber, Goodman, & Nagashima, 2023).

Some U.S. universities have widely acknowledged the importance of the ethical use of agents for student recruitment. An "agent" can be best understood as an individual or organization that is contractually engaged by a university to assist it in meeting recruitment targets and is usually compensated on a per capita basis for any help in meeting those targets. To date, there are widely available guidelines and ample scholars on the topic of agent use in international enrollment. Government organizations such as EducationUSA and the British Council have issued guidelines for agent use. Many researchers and practitioners have published and spoken about agent-related issues. However, there is very

little written about the issues that may be created through the widespread use of independent consultants. In China, there is virtually no government oversight for education consultants. Similarly, there is no industry group that can create ethical standards or guidelines for best practices. In China, there is no significant presence of overseas professional industry groups such as the Higher Education Consultants Association (HECA) or Independent Education Consultants Association (IECA). The IECA has had global committees with representatives from members who are active in large cities in East Asia, but there is no local or international group that fills such a role at the national level. Moreover, according to Siyuan Feng and Hugo Horta, in their article *Brokers of International Student Mobility: the roles and processes of education agents in China*, there are incentives for universities to intentionally turn a blind eye to recruiting full-tuition-paying international students, even if their applications are fabricated. The authors insinuate that applications simply play a symbolic role—they are not actually used seriously to make an intentional admissions decision. It is understandable that many universities, especially those struggling in the post-pandemic era to meet enrollment targets, would turn a “blind eye” to the qualifications of full-pay international students.

This makes sense for universities with a financial hole to plug, but it is harder to understand why many high-ranking highly-selective universities would also turn a blind eye, despite most being well-endowed or well-funded. Whether public or private, these more privileged universities do not need international student tuition to subsidize their operating budgets, which are largely supported by research, endowment, or taxpayer funds. For example, the University of Virginia (UVA) 2022-2023 budget showed more than 10% of its revenue came from state appropriations, another 20% or more from endowment, and externally funded research funding sources amounted to over 20% (UVA, 2022). Observing these basic facts, one could conclude that the highest-ranked, most highly selective universities, which are also widely regarded as the most influential in setting admissions policy, are privileged and thus have a moral obligation to task their admissions staff to confront any difficult issues regarding international admissions. However, the reality is that these privileged universities have excused themselves from engaging with any of the problems associated with agents or education consultants. Moreover, very few admissions professionals at highly selective universities seriously consider the fact that a significant proportion of application materials might not be submitted by students themselves. Some universities do conduct random checks or audit students' submitted materials. This includes the 9 campuses of University of California, which will audit the self-reported grades of a percentage of accepted students as part of the coursework

section of the application. In my entire stint at Tie Yi, many highly selective, top-ranked universities followed up on missing application materials, but only one university representative ever contacted me with questions regarding the credibility of the contents of a student's application.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which seemingly necessitated swift changes to testing policies, seems more like a massive missed opportunity to genuinely reimagine the college application process and eliminate its most glaring problem: that almost anyone could be fabricating or submitting application materials on behalf of students. One low-hanging fruit is account security for application platforms. The Common Application has published a number of recommendations for users to increase their account security, but among the noticeably absent options is two-factor authentication (CommonApp.org, 2022). Two-factor authentication is an effective, commonplace method for double-checking that a user's identity is legitimate. The intention of two-factor authentication is to provide stronger protection against unauthorized access to user accounts. As of this writing, Common Application still has not implemented two-factor authentication.

Another option might be for American regulators, should such entities exist, to take cheating more seriously. College Board, ACT, ETS, and other owners and administrators of standardized college entrance examinations are generally not beholden to federal or state regulators. While California and New York have some laws regarding score disclosure and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) may govern the way these organizations share student data, there is no government oversight of how these tests are administered in practice. This is left up to the organizations themselves. For example, the College Board says that it is governed by its board, as well as its own national and regional assemblies. Given how central these and other standardized tests are not only for the recruitment of domestic and international students, but also the distribution of scholarships and financial aid including government, this represents a regulatory shortcoming. After all, fraudulent international applications to U.S. universities are sometimes more malicious; they enable visa fraud or any number of other crimes.

Relaxed security at standardized testing sites has long been an issue, perhaps given the fact that there is no serious legal consequence for students who cheat or the facilitators of cheating. Given the numerous reports of cheating over the past decade, including the scandal described as the "Varsity Blues" by Wikipedia, it is difficult to believe that when so many test organizations moved so quickly to provide online testing options, they were able to create and maintain rigorous security measures. In China, students face up to seven years of prison time for

cheating on the college entrance examination (Campbell, 2016). In India, the prison sentence maximum for cheating on a government exam is even harsher: 10 years. In the Varsity Blues case, none of the students involved were legally charged (Damani & Rao, 2023). Some of the parents, coaches, and consultants, Rick Singer, received fines or sentences, but the only ones still behind the bars were Singer and Gordon Ernst, former tennis coaches at Georgetown University, who were set to be released in January 2024. While many university coaches and admissions staff were reprimanded, little was changed in terms of admissions policy or legal consequences for those who cheat the system.

Unfortunately, the most realistic hope is for the rise of AI text generators to force university admissions offices to carefully rethink how they evaluate student voices. Rick Clark, Assistant Vice Provost and Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions at the Georgia Institute of Technology, is widely regarded as a leading thinker on the role of AI in college admissions (Clark, 2023). As quoted in a Higher Ed Dive article, he expects that “more colleges to either drop their admission essay altogether or expand the format through which students can convey their voice and demonstrate their ability to articulate their opinions and interest. This could take the form of proctored writing samples, graded essays from their high school, a rise in the use of unscripted interviews or various mediums and platforms for students and their supporters to submit information, i.e., voice recorded recommendations or video elevator pitches.” Even if only a prediction, this offers some hope for the possibility that U.S. universities may change the way they evaluate applicants.

Highly selective institutions have significant control over their admissions policies and hold resources, influence, and the ability to effect meaningful, systemic change. However, who should be responsible for such issues is itself a complex issue. Until all admissions professionals can not only agree that we have a problem but are also willing to confront the issues at hand genuinely, scant change can be expected in university freshman admission as a major entry point to U.S. education.

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## Bio

**Francis Miller** draws on his experience, including his leadership roles in the professional organizations International Association of College Admission Counselors (International ACAC) and China Institute of College Admission Counseling (ChinaCAC); data from Cialfo's college application management platform, more than 5 years of experience working as a director of college counseling and educator at Xi'an Tie Yi High School International Curriculum Center in the Northwestern Chinese province of Shaanxi, and more than 3 years of experience as a senior academic consultant at boutique education firm AIC Education in Beijing. He is currently a Dean and College Counselor at Avenues Shenzhen. E-mail: francis.t.miller@alumni.upenn.edu

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# The 6 Ps of Strategic International Enrollment Management

## A Vision-Driven Approach to Global Student Mobility

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### **Abstract**

This chapter delves into the essential principles of Strategic International Enrollment Management (SIEM) known as the "6 Ps." These principles, including Perspective, Planning, Platforms, Partners, Personalization, and Peers, are the foundation for developing a sustainable, long-term vision-driven strategy to enhance an institution's approach to global student mobility in general and the entry points discussed in this book in particular. By embracing these principles, institutions can transform their international student recruitment, enrollment, advising, orientation, services, and programming, ultimately focusing on the successful graduation of international students.

**Keywords:** Strategic International Enrollment Management, Global Student Mobility, Vision-Driven Approach, International Student Recruitment, Sustainable Strategy, Graduation Success, Higher Education, Entry Points.

## Introduction

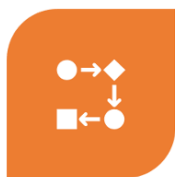
What makes a successful international student recruitment plan? The answers depend on various factors and whether the goal is short-term growth in numbers or sustainable, long-term, vision-driven, all-encompassing, campus-wide initiative designed to change an institution's approach to global student mobility. The latter requires a commitment to 6 principles: a global, national, and local perspective; proper *planning* to engage all points in the international student journey from prospect to alum; selecting *platforms* and *partners* to provide the mechanisms enabling the right connections; and maximizing *personalization* and *peers* to connect current and future students and with the institution.

In recent years, I developed the “6 Ps (Principles) of Strategic International Enrollment Management” as my philosophical approach to maximizing the international student experience. Initially, as a product of nearly 30 years of experience in the field, the 6 Ps were the foundation of how I approached working with client universities. This is because I believe that while the profession of “enrollment management” (EM) is generally referred to the initial recruitment and enrollment of students into institutions and may even include focus on undergraduate retention rates from the first year to the second year, very rarely is EM truly an end-to-end student lifecycle approach. International Enrollment Management (IEM) has increasingly become a focus of major international education professional organizations with NAFSA's Knowledge Community on International Enrollment Management (NAFSA, 2024), and the recent name change to AIRC: The Association of International Enrollment Management (AIRC, 2024). So, to extend this concept a step further to include a longer-term approach to IEM matters, strategic international enrollment management (SIEM) represents the natural evolution of our profession.

In a series of six articles for IDP Connect in 2021, I codified my thoughts on the needed criteria to consider when developing each “P.” Having the proper perspective (Bennett, 2021). The 6 Ps of Strategic International Enrollment Management - #1 Perspective), planning (Bennett, 2021). The 6 Ps of Strategic International Enrollment Management - #2 Planning), platforms (Bennett, 2021). The 6 Ps of Strategic International Enrollment Management - #3 Platforms), partners (Bennett, 2021). The 6 Ps of Strategic International Enrollment Management - #4 Partners), personalization (Bennett, 2021). The 6 Ps of Strategic International Enrollment Management - #5 Personalization}, and peers (Bennett, 2021). The 6 Ps of Strategic International Enrollment Management provide the path to progress in international student recruitment,

enrollment, advising, orientation, services, and programming for any entry points chosen by students.

## Strategic International Enrollment Management



PROCESS



PURPOSEFULLY  
PRIORITIZING  
PEOPLE



PERSPECTIVE + PLANNING  
PLATFORMS + PARTNERSHIPS  
PERSONALIZATION + PEERS

*Image courtesy of the author (Bennett, 2021)*

When we shift our focus from the numbers we enroll to the actual end goal, i.e., successful college graduates, we begin with the end goal in mind. When that positive outcome becomes the focus at each point in the international student journey within each campus unit, using these 6 principles to guide the decision-making process, it allows leaders to ask the right questions.

### Perspective

#### *Internal*

Before beginning any serious attempts at strategic planning, staff members working in international admissions offices and offices providing international student services (ISS) offices must have a proper perspective on their institution's values regarding internationalization. Understanding these values matters: In times of trouble or uncertainty, tying your departmental goals and plans back to institutional priorities provides a firm foundation for developing a longer-term, sustainable strategy.

Ask yourself how your college's commitment to international students, global education, cultural diversity, etc., manifests itself in mission and vision statements (The Center for Global Education, 2014). Research on Student Mobility and Internationalization) values, and institutional strategic planning. Are there specific references to what you do and the kinds of students you recruit for your institution? Is there a vice president, vice provost or dean for global education that oversees your area and has a seat on the president's council? Who are your fellow international education champions on campus? How can you work more

collaboratively across your institution to provide the support needed to care for your international students once they arrive?

Colleagues at NAFSA have recently shared these findings as documented by Toner (2020) in *Beyond the Numbers: Recruitment Strategies for a Changing World*. (NAFSA International Educator) that working with your on-campus partners during events such as a global pandemic can bear immediate fruit when everyone is pitching in toward caring for students. Living out your institutional mission as it applies to international students provides the right course for your strategic international enrollment management (SIEM) plans as you navigate uncharted territory in uncertain times.

### *External*

If there is one thing that international admissions representatives have realized more acutely in the past 4 years, and without question during the pandemic, it would be that international students have realistic options for pursuing higher education in countries other than the United States. The fact that international student mobility is a global enterprise with an increasingly crowded field of competitors, where students have multiple options from many countries, is rarely understood and applied by enrollment managers in recruitment planning. Survey after survey of students, parents, student recruitment agents, and other influencers continually share 1 eye-opening conclusion about global student mobility today: international students are applying to multiple destination countries (Bennett, 2018). This reality can and should inform your planning at every step during the student journey.

### *Application*

Aye, that's the rub. In this unique world in which we find ourselves today, will the duplicate tired emails touting our college's strengths alone convince students that we understand their hopes and dreams, can meet their expectations, and can deliver on our promises? Probably not. What, then, is the way forward? How can we apply this understanding of both our internal and external perspectives in our field to how we communicate with international students?

To truly move in a new direction, our messaging should focus, from the outset, on an awareness that students have several choices regarding destination countries for their studies. Moreover, they spent time articulating the U.S. competitive advantages (e.g., quality of academic programs, diversity, campus experiences and post-graduate employment opportunities). Finally, as you continue the

conversation with students, demonstrate how your institution can maximize their experience on campus to prepare them for the world after they graduate.

For most international enrollment professionals, this approach will require a change in perspective on how they view their future students. Ultimately, when we see the world through others' eyes, we grow closer to achieving what we claim our institutions do—bridge cultural divides and forge a path forward together on this changing planet.

## **Planning**

My most revealing conversations with colleagues and clients working in higher education are on their responses to one of my first prompts: tell me about your strategic plan for international student recruitment. For most, it starts with nervous laughter followed by an admission that there is none. For a few, they will say there is a planning meeting each year to decide where they will travel or what platforms they will try but no coordinated, long-term approach. Therefore, what are we talking about within SIEM when we emphasize *planning* in our 6 Ps that seems so difficult to realize?

Constructing an international strategic enrollment plan requires several different elements to align correctly to be truly impactful. Planning should not begin until all parties on campus understand the lay of the land externally (the current landscape of international student mobility), internally (how your college values international students), and how messaging to future students must change as a result. Institution-wide buy-in from the top down and across campus will make all the difference in moving the planning process forward.

*Take a multi-year view.*

Most U.S. higher education institutions typically develop 3 to 5-year strategic plans. In international offices, the best advice is to construct a plan along the exact timelines of the college and, ideally, tie it to benchmarks outlined by the institutional strategy. For example, international student enrollment could be increased to 5% of the total student population, the global student population could be diversified to reduce reliance on 1 or 2 countries, or that the number of international students on campus should increase.

Whether international institutional goals are explicit or not, the key, internally, is establishing goals for your plan that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (University of California Office of the President 2016). We have all heard of this method, but how often do we apply it?

Will it take time? Yes. Will it require buy-in to realize? Absolutely. Where do you start? With the beginning but with the end goal in mind. If you've got a 5-year goal to have 5% of the incoming class be international and you're at 1% now, break it down to realistic measures. If you plan to increase new international enrollments by 1% per year (to 2% by year 2, 3% in year 3, 4% in year 4, and 5% in year 5), you are setting realistic, measurable targets.

*Think of a multi-level approach.*

Of course, if you are responsible for only recruitment and admissions while staff of other offices at your institution support different pieces of the international student journey—think marketing, alumni affairs, and so on—you will need to look at your plan's impact at various levels. From prospective student recruitment to the current student experience, graduating student outcomes, and alumni success stories, all these elements should be represented in an informed SIEM plan.

The enrollment management industry in higher education began 45 years ago with the release of an article by Jack Maguire (Maguire, 1976) then dean of admissions at Boston College. His approach represented the first time an institution took a data-driven, scientific view of the student journey (Bennett, 2018). For many colleges today, however, only some have well-defined elements of an enrollment management strategy, specifically for international students.

Many challenges exist in implementing a multi-level international enrollment management strategy. The biggest roadblock to a coordinated approach often appears when different units on campus claim “international” responsibilities. Admissions may be under a different VP than ISSS, career services/professional development, or alums/advancement. These last 2 areas (career services and alumni) are almost always the least incorporated and least developed sections of SIEM planning. Successful SIEM efforts should involve a minimum of these 4 areas in coordinated planning or *at least* an increased awareness among the various offices impacting international student life and the services needed.

*Utilize country-level planning*

In regard to identifying specific recruitment initiatives and countries to target, consult multiple data sources institutionally, nationally, and globally. Beyond the nations of currently enrolled students and successful alumni, attention should be given to countries that have shown recent growth in sending students abroad. In these challenging times, some data are more relevant than others.

Having a list of countries is a great start, but do students in each nation want or value the same things in their searches for university study abroad? Most likely, not. Academic programs of interest, the need for native language information, and potential recruitment opportunities will vary from country to country. Doesn't it make sense to prioritize, at least for your top 5 target countries, and develop specific plans that address the needs of each market?

### *Conduct semi-annual reviews*

Life happens, and plans (must) change. As Mike Tyson famously said as reported by Anwasha Nag (Nag, 2021), "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." It is safe to say the terrorist attacks of September 11 in 2001, the 2008 Great Recession, governmental policy changes, and the COVID-19 global pandemic all qualify as significant punches in the face over the last quarter century. How well-equipped is your office to respond to change?

You have certainly had more than several occasions in recent months to address events that can negatively impact international student interest. Did your plans change? Were new messages crafted to respond appropriately? Do you have mechanisms to conduct semi-annual or quarterly reviews of how your strategies are shaping up? Can you make adjustments on the fly? Ultimately, the best-laid plans demand in approach, assessment, and implementation.

### **Platforms**

Geraldine Solon, the bestselling and award-winning author, remarked that a platform is what defines one's visibility with their audience. The primary audience (students) is relatively straightforward for international admissions professionals. In many ways, how we choose platforms to reach these students and other audiences tends to be a shotgun approach that may connect with 1 or more of those targets but rarely is comprehensively effective. Here, is where the rubber begins to meet the road with the choices you must make regarding which platforms you decide are the best way to define your visibility with your audience.

### *Live where your audiences live*

A fundamental principle: Having a presence where your target markets spend their time makes connecting much more straightforward. However, many universities need help with this principle on the international front. Social media is the place where the connected world lives most often. According to the team at We Are Social in *The Changing World of Digital in 2023*, nearly 60% of the world's 8 billion people are active on social media (Kemp, 2023).

Aside from social media, an institution's most valuable platform for informing critical audiences is its web content. Without question, institutional websites and third-party sites featuring college information expand an institution's reach. As technology advances, particularly for mobile users (which is how most prospective students operate online), institutional sites, college search engines, and other microsites that feature university content are essential for connecting with interested students and their parents. Ensure that your information is accurate and invites you wherever your content lives on third-party sites. In some markets, because of search engine restrictions, having locally hosted microsites is the best way to obtain institutional web-based content from interested users.

Without fail, searching online, whether shopping on a favorite site or researching potential schools for your kids, you will almost immediately see ads for that item or place in social feeds and favorite websites with ads. This tool that retargets users with a reminder of what interested them (like your college) is now ubiquitous, increasingly so in admissions circles. While that process is fraught with cultural challenges, social and search site ads can boost visibility significantly through manageable costs.

If the year 2020 taught us nothing else, it showed us the importance of having a robust virtual event schedule to connect with audiences worldwide. With this type of platform, there is no single, universally approved brand that students prefer. Therefore, whether you are running your events or joining 1 of the many virtual fair providers, don't be afraid to take chances and experiment as long as the events aren't cost-prohibitive. Ultimately, ensuring that the platforms chosen to reach key demographic data extend beyond the institutional site (Bennett, 2020).

### *Take a digital-first approach*

Currently, institutional sites must be mobile first. The pandemic has also taught us that being digital first with recruitment efforts is recommended and even required to reach key audiences. One of the compelling reasons for digital first is apparent in another statistic from the We Are Social report: the global average time people spend on devices is more than 6 and a half hours each day.

There is excellent long-term value in brand-building online and in various ways to do so well (Bennett, 2020). However, doing so requires agility in the approach to varying the content and delivery methods you use, depending on your target audience and platform selected. One size no longer fits all. Using targeted ads at the heart of interest-generating exercises, promotional events, and significant calls to action sets institutions up for success in bringing in a diverse international class.

*Utilize multi-channel communications*

As you identify tips and tricks to thrive in this brave new world we find ourselves in, the answers you need will differ depending on the platforms used and the audiences sought. Just as you must *live where your audience lives* online, it quickly becomes apparent that not everyone digests information the same way. Consequently, when attempting to increase the number of substantive touchpoints with students, parents, counselors/advisers/agents, alumni, and other partners throughout the process, your message and the media used to communicate will need to be varied. For example, when hosting virtual events, simulcast them beyond your delivery platform (i.e., to Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram). Additionally, video clips are embedded in emails and on websites, and this content is repurposed to provide different student segments with opportunities to digest content on the social platforms they prefer.

**Partnerships**

In international education, success does not come in a vacuum or isolation. Currently, for global education offices, a self-contained strategy for recruiting, admissions, and enrolling overseas students who do not rely on various internal and external partnerships will fail. While the world has become much smaller in terms of connectivity, it is still an enormous area with 8 billion people and 190+ countries and territories to comprehend. To reach this world in a focused, efficient way requires choosing not only the right platforms, as we discussed last month but also the right partnerships.

*Linking Your Purpose to Your Partnerships*

At the outset, the initial focus must be to identify the *purpose* behind the institution's strategic international enrollment management (SIEM) as embodied by internal and external perspectives on the global playing field and the willingness to engage in data-driven, long-term planning. These purposeful exercises lay the foundation for what should guide decision-making in picking partners who can best drive successful initiatives.

What should be clear is that no one partner or formula for choosing partnerships will universally apply to all institutions. In most cases, a healthy mix of providers on and off campus can make all the differences and spread the responsibilities among those committed to your shared cause. Recently, we have realized the need for impactful partners to move the needle toward your goals for international student enrollment. For example, the issue of how to recruit when travel is not

possible raises all sorts of challenges but highlights the need for having partners to facilitate connections.

### *Choosing External Partners Wisely*

In our personal lives, we can all relate to treasured friendships that produce much fruit and relationships that cause regrets. Partnerships in international education are no different. Even with the best of partners, there will be ups and downs. Some start strong but fade quickly, while others overpromise and underdeliver. Numerous factors, including a budget, internal bandwidth, and the need for balance (i.e., not putting all recruitment relationship eggs in one basket), ultimately impact selection. Of course, hearing from others who have worked with these external partners is necessary.

In choosing partners, consider governmental outlets such as the U.S. Department of State's EducationUSA network, the U.S. Commercial Service (Commerce Department), and embassies of countries with government scholarship programs. Educational agencies and service providers can provide you with a wide range of tools to obtain direct access to students at various stages in the recruitment process. Various secondary school counselor networks can help you develop relationships and nurture potential feeder schools. Current and future overseas university partners can be a source of exchange students. They can develop robust and diverse pipelines for prospective students and academic collaboration between institutions if appropriately developed. Finally, if there is a state international education consortium where you are, e.g., Study Texas, Study New York, or Study Michigan, take advantage of this opportunity, as there is strength in numbers regarding student recruitment.

### *Embracing On-Campus Allies*

Regardless of the external partner selected, none of these matters if the case for a complete life-cycle approach to the international student experience has not been made on campus, from prospect to alumni. I offer 3 tips for developing your relationships with on-campus partners:

- Make the case to the senior administration to keep them engaged.
- Collaborate among key offices that have high contact with international students.
- Coordinate communications with these offices during the student journey.

I cannot emphasize enough how critical support from senior administration officials is to the success of long-term SIEM efforts on campuses. Managing those relationships up the chain of command, keeping them engaged in key external factors impacting your work, and ensuring that they are aware of what issues international students face throughout their journey is no easy feat but must be done.

On most campuses, the initial relationships among international admissions, an IEP program, and the ISSS office in transitioning from admitted to enrolled students (initial I-20s, pre-departure, arrival, and orientation touchpoints) receive the most attention. The reality is that the international student journey is far more extensive than that. All of those (hopefully) positive, early interactions can be erased in an instant by bad experiences your students have with financial aid, student employment, or residence life/housing once they have settled on campus. Even for the institutions doing an excellent job on these initial and ongoing international student experiences, outcomes matter in the end. Survey data from several outlets (pre- and post-pandemic) have shown how significant career outcomes are for prospective international students (and their parents) while choosing their destination countries and institutions. Therefore, how well do campus career services or professional development offices cater to the specific needs of international students? Is data available on job placement rates or starting salaries for international students graduating with different academic degrees? Does your alumni office track what happens to international graduates?

There are ample opportunities to work together to improve your processes, communication, and cross-cultural training across campuses. This responsibility is not yours alone. With proper support from campus partners, you can start this process quickly.

### **Personalization**

Marissa Mayer, the former president and CEO of Yahoo, remarked that the future is personalization. Let's face it...the future is here. Have you searched the web or any shopping sites for a future purchase only to see seconds, minutes, or hours later, ads for those very same products pop in our social media feeds and elsewhere online? If so, you can attest that we see what we search for in various ways. For prospective international students and their parents, should it be any different? How can recruitment efforts be personalized to deepen the connection future students feel toward colleges and universities?

*Ask what you would want.*

If you were an international student looking to study outside your home country, what would you want to see/hear/read from colleges trying to recruit you? A “Dear Student” generic email that would seem to show no amount of effort on the college’s part to send or one that acknowledges how significant the student’s interest in your institution is to you? Remember what we said about having a global perspective?

While developing a personalized approach, there are various factors to consider when targeting messages to prospective student (and parent) audiences whom they may want to hear. In the years gone by, much of this work was entirely manual, as CRMs simply couldn’t do much beyond first name and maybe academic major if you were lucky. Today, with a robust CRM, institutions can message international prospects in ways that respond to their interests inside and outside the classroom, their countries of residence, and particular questions or concerns raised in emails, social media posts, chats, virtual meetings, etc.

In this increasingly competitive global race to attract internationally mobile students, college admissions officers who set themselves apart with the lengths to which they go to establish personal relationships and demonstrate their concern will more than likely see success. Personal relationships matter when recruiting international students. In the wake of a pandemic, these relationships are critical for re-establishing and maintaining authenticity. In addition, please, use humor if it is culturally appropriate and self-deprecating. We all need to be able to share a laugh now and then, even in the lofty towers of academia.

*Provide multilingual content*

Personalization can and should (given the international education industry) also means having content, messages, subtitles, etc., available in the critical languages of targeted primary and even secondary markets. Having a variety of digital formats for your content is vital. The ability to repurpose this content and deliver it to audiences in ways they prefer to receive it (e.g., email, pdfs, websites, microsites, social posts/video) is a crucial way to personalize messaging.

A significant question related to having multilingual content is whether to produce it in-house or outsource. Both have positives and potential negatives. I presented this topic at an NAFSA Conference in Washington, D.C. in 2019 (Bennett, Bauer, Whalen, 2019). *The Value of Translations in International Student Recruitment*, Slideshare). The slide deck also has essential data from

an IDP Connect student survey sharing the importance of having this content available.

### *Develop key student personae*

Adopting a student persona marketing approach can also offer a way to personalize, generally speaking, messaging by addressing issues or concerns common to certain types of students you might typically attract. There is undoubtedly value in responding to general needs, especially in light of the pandemic. A helpful piece from the ICEF Monitor shares successful examples of what institutions are leveraging recently (Anonymous. 2021).

If you have not read Dr. Rahul Choudaha's research on his 4 core student personas (explorers, highfliers, strugglers, and strivers) related to a student's financial resources and academic preparedness measured on a low to high scale, it is well worth your time (Choudaha, Orosz, & Chang, 2012): *Not All International Students Are The Same: Understanding Segments, Mapping Behavior*. When we better understand the motivations of different personas, our ability to respond appropriately improves immeasurably.

### *Leverage storytelling*

Recently, it has become clear that what works best in reaching prospective students is not flashy (virtual) brochures, staged diversity pictures, or highly polished marketing videos but rather stories that current students can tell. Why? They can paint the picture of what life might be like.

If you identify international students, faculty, staff, and alums who best represent the institutional values prospective audiences need to hear, let them tell their stories. Then leverage those gems across various platforms, languages, and formats to critical audiences.

## **Peers**

One of the first rules I learned in admissions in 1993 at my alma mater is that our current students are the best advocates for our college. That's why they give campus tours, right? Take advantage of their proximity to their experiences and the value their own stories can have on future students. However, using peers does not only mean getting current students on board for this initiative. Eventually, you would want to develop a group of students, alums, parents, and faculty into the peer recruitment program.

There is value at all points in the enrollment process to ensure that current students (and other peer groups) are involved in direct recruitment efforts. For example, you can utilize many of the following:

- AMA (Ask Me Anything) student chats
- Virtual Open Houses
- Host country-specific chats
- Admitted student events
- Parent-to-parent chats
- Pre-departure orientations

However, it is unclear whether, as international student ambassadors, overseas student guides, etc., peer recruitment can increase an institution's connectedness with future students to the next level.

### *Perspective on Peers*

As with your institutional perspective on the world, it is valuable to see how the major markets are utilizing (or not utilizing) online peer recruitment (i.e., readily identifiable on institutional websites). In a PIE News webinar on peer recruitment in North America, Nick Golding from TAP (The Ambassador Platform) shared some fascinating statistics on the usage of peer recruitment in the UK, Australia, and Canada/US (Golding, 2020).

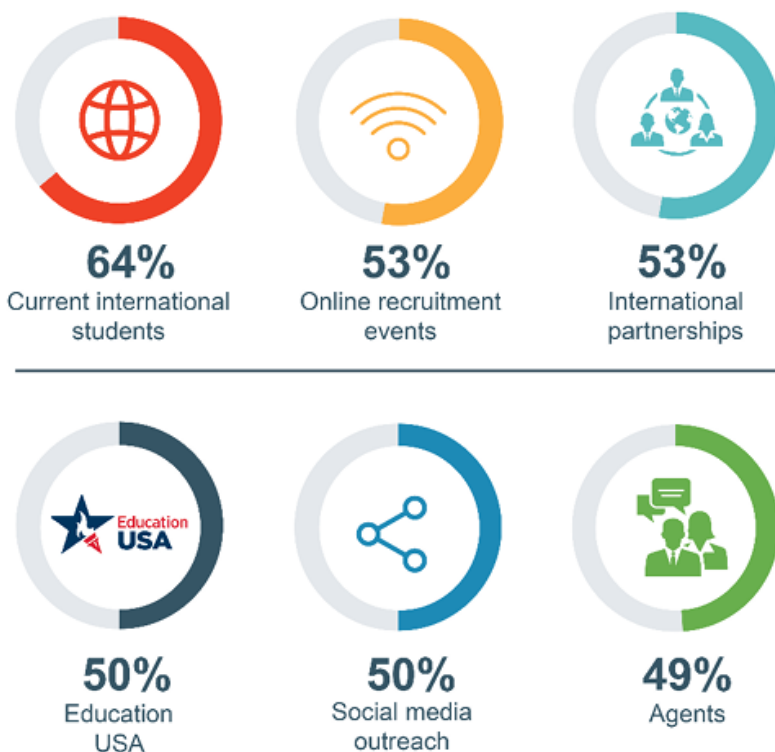
- UK – 100 of 150 universities - 66%
- Australia – 33 of 52 colleges/universities = 63%
- USA/Canada – only 150-200 (out of 4500) institutions = <5%

We like to see ourselves in the United States as on the cutting edge in international education. However, when utilizing peer recruitment with overseas prospects, we lag woefully behind 2 major competitors globally. We can and should always have our antenna out to learn successful strategies from other institutions, wherever they may be.

### *In-House or Outsource?*

The question of how you want to set up your program begins and ends with your ability to recruit that initial group of current students. In selecting those first volunteers (or student employees) to fill this vital role, you may need to rely on whoever you can get, but eventually, choose those who represent your target markets abroad. When training current students, set clear ground rules on what they can say on which topics and what questions to ask admissions staff. In an ideal scenario, peer recruiters share their experiences through social media channels, email conversations, live chats, and online events.

**Figure 10: Resources Leveraged for International Recruitment, Fall 2022**



*Image courtesy of the IIE Fall Snapshot Survey 2022*

To determine whether you establish an in-house student ambassador program or leverage an outside provider (2 main providers currently operating in the U.S.: The Ambassador Platform and Unibuddy), make an effort to include elements of peer recruitment in the overall recruitment strategy and beyond. In addition,

please do not forget the value of current students' parents connecting with prospective students' parents during the admissions process.

The good news, if there is any to find from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international education, is that many U.S. institutions are now including current students in their outreach to prospective students, according to IIE's Fall 2022 Snapshot Survey (Martel, Baer, 2022). Institute of International Education. While not all 64% of the surveyed individuals had an organized current student program, the seeds of success were beginning to bear fruit at many institutions.

### ***Putting the Pieces Together***

Ultimately, to perform strategic international enrollment management (SIEM) rights, we must realize that this ***process*** will not coalesce overnight. This process requires ***purposefully prioritizing people*** at every stage of development. The bottom line: "When we first inform our decision-making with the right perspective and commitment to planning, selection of platforms and partners that complement our mission, to a laser focus on personalization and peer recruitment in our messaging, the results can be transformational for your institution" (Bennett, 2021) The 6 Ps of Strategic International Enrollment Management - #6 Peers.

To truly make a long-term, visionary impact on your institution's strategic international enrollment management (SIEM) plan, it is crucial to understand that all offices interacting with international students - before their arrival, during their studies, and after their graduation - have a defined role. Some offices may not initially recognize their role, but each contributes significantly to the process, which spans the entire international student journey beyond their initial entry points. Be attentive, seek assistance, and actively involve individuals within and beyond your college to support your efforts. While the implementation may not always be perfect, a well-devised SIEM plan can transition an institution's focus from merely drawing more students to their entry points, to authentically fostering well-prepared, successful global graduates and alumni throughout the students' lifecycle.

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## Bio

**Marty Bennett** is an award-winning international educator with a career spanning more than thirty years. Originally coming to the U.S. as an international student on an L-2 (intra company transfer dependent visa in 1974), Marty found his calling by accident with his first professional job as an admissions counselor at his alma mater. Since graduating with bachelor's and master's degrees from

Marquette University, Marty has directed international admissions efforts at 6 different institutions in the United States and England and traveled to recruit prospective students and their parents in 70 different countries. Additionally, his significant time with EducationUSA (the U.S. Department of State's network of advising centers in 170 countries), British Council, and CollegeWeekLive provides a unique blend of experience with the complex world of international student mobility. Since 2014 he has run his own consulting firm, Social Media & International Education Consulting, and has worked with British Council IELTS, as well as numerous U.S. institutions on various projects. Since May 2022, Marty has served as the Director of Global Recruitment and Partnerships at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. E-mail: [marty.bennett@unlv.edu](mailto:marty.bennett@unlv.edu)

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# Regional Reforms, Cultural Biases, and Acceptance of the Cultural Currency of Others

## Navigating the Complex Landscape of Global Educational Reforms

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### Abstract

This chapter explores the intricate interplay of cultural values, regional educational reforms, and the recognition of foreign academic credentials, particularly for international students seeking an entry point to education in the U.S. It begins by examining the global impact of regional reforms like the Bologna Process and their cultural underpinnings. The chapter then delves into the challenges faced by U.S. admissions officers due to cultural biases affecting the recognition of foreign academic qualifications. Finally, it discusses the need for ethnorelative admissions policies that prioritize academic preparation over credential equivalency, drawing insights from diverse academic and professional perspectives.

**Keywords:** Regional Reforms, Cultural Values, Foreign Academic Credentials, International Students, Ethnorelative Admissions Policies, Global Educational Landscape, Entry Point.

## ***Introduction***

This chapter examines the impact of conflicting cultural values on the perceived validity of foreign academic credentials and the subsequent narrowing of avenues available to certain international students wishing to begin a program of study in the U.S. To establish context, this chapter begins with an overview of economic and political issues related to regional reforms of educational systems and their impact globally. Such reforms, such as the Bologna Process, are often based on cultural values and norms that significantly differ from those predominant within the U.S. Next, the chapter proceeds to practical matters facing U.S. admissions officers and the impact of cultural bias on the full recognition of foreign academic credentials. Finally, the diverse views found within the academic and professional literature are considered to form a recommendation for the adoption of ethnorelative admissions policies focused on academic preparation rather than the equivalency of credentials.

## ***The Rise of Regionalization and Cultural Homogenization***

At the turn of the century, Ahola and Mesikammen (2003) argued that global economic competition, after having divided the world economy into three distinct regions: Europe, Asia and America, was a major factor behind efforts to improve the quality and structure of higher education. Both then and now, competitiveness serves as the driving rationale for the internationalization of higher education (Zhang, 2021; Komljenovic, 2022). Additionally, economic globalization and increased competition are contributing to a shift in international politics, resulting in greater emphasis on world regions, as opposed to individual nations, being viewed as guarantors of economic development and stability (Papadakis and Tsakanika, 2006; Lazizaxon, 2022).

According to Charlier et al. (2007), a shift from national to regional education policies signifies “a global higher education area is taking shape, where qualifications and diplomas will soon be commensurate and compatible” (p. 5). Pechal (2007) contends that the regionalization of higher education in Europe began as an attempt to compete with the already existing, yet informal, higher education area in North America. He describes North American higher education as follows:

There is an impressive amount of academic mobility within Canada and the U.S. across national borders, but this mobility is achieved without any law on non-discrimination imposed on the

actors involved. This “higher education area” was not designed to be top-down, but it emerged bottom-up during the last century (p. 121).

The reasons why a regional policy turns global vary; for example, some countries adopt reform in an effort to achieve greater quality assurance and standardization of credits (Yavaprabhas, 2014; Hotta, 2020), while others adopt it out of fear that failure to do so may lead to a significant loss of domestic talent and international competitiveness (Zapesotskii, 2006; Wilhlborg, 2019). However, the expected benefits of adopting regional reforms in place of a nation’s historical practices are not always realized, as universities from less economically developed nations may be unable to reach international standards due to global economic disparity (Shawa, 2008). Even within the European Higher Education Area, Greece spent \$4,192 per university student in 2019, while Luxembourg (OECD, 2023a) spent \$51,978.

In the case of East Africa, Amutuhaire (2023) notes that the adoption of regional internationalization policies has mostly supported outbound mobility, benefiting students from privileged backgrounds while excluding adults, disabled and economically disadvantaged students. Thus, investments made toward aligning national higher education policies with those of a local or distant region may not prove as fruitful as eliminating within-country disparities in access to primary and secondary schooling (Lewin, 2015; Psacharopoulos et al., 2018).

Others (Edih et al., 2021) caution that the adoption of foreign cultural norms contributes to cultural homogenization and threatens “indigenous cultures, values, knowledge experiences of persons and national privacy” (p. 2094). Robinson (2001) argues that “the material circumstances that gave rise to the nation-state are now being superseded by globalization” (p. 164). In his view, such transformation is supported by elite institutions and individuals who benefit from a global capitalist network and “hold an objective class existence and identity spatially and politically in a global system, above any local territories and polities” (165).

### ***The Bologna Process: Aligning National Standards within Europe and Beyond***

On May 25, 1998, British, French, German and Italian ministers of education signed the Sorbonne Declaration, which set a course toward harmonization, later known as tuning, of European higher education systems in an effort to increase the region’s economic competitiveness (Allegre et al., 1998). One year later, 29

ministers of education met in Italy where they signed the Bologna Declaration, which formalized the regional reform referred to as the Bologna Process (Bischof, 2018).

According to the Belenux Bologna Secretariat (2007), “the overarching aim of the Bologna Process is to create a European Higher Education Area based on international cooperation and academic exchange that is attractive to European students and staff as well as to students and staff from other parts of the world.” To realize this vision, signatories agreed to implement six primary reforms by 2010, including the adoption of a two-cycle undergraduate and graduate degree system requiring a minimum of three years of undergraduate study.

The Bologna Process currently includes 48 signatory countries, a majority of which have adopted the three-year degree structure. It has been recognized as the most important European higher education reform in the past 30 years (Pechar, 2007; Ravinet, 2008; Palese et al., 2014). Others describe it as having evolved into a supranational phenomenon, as “the Bologna Process may force the entire world to redefine higher education” (Foley, 2007, p. 3) and “in terms of reaching across geography and languages, let alone in terms of turning ancient higher education systems on their heads, the Bologna Process is the most far reaching and ambitious reform of higher education ever undertaken” (Adelman, 2008, p. v).

Bologna’s core features of output-based education, greater accountability to society and inclusion have provided a global model for higher education (Adelman, 2008; Croche, 2008; Doh, 2008; Figueroa, 2008; Hugonnier, 2007; Kushnir, 2020; Sall and Ndjaye, 2007-8; Shawa, 2008; Veidemane et al., 2021; Zapesotskii, 2006). In fact, the influence of Bologna is evident, albeit to varying degrees, across higher education systems in Africa (Alemu, 2019; Madichie, 2022), Asia (Cabanda & Chou, 2019) and other world regions (King, 2019; Zahavi, 2019; Lodhi & Ilvassova-Schoenfeld, 2023).

However, controversy persists regarding the effects and outcomes of the Bologna Process (Wilhborg, 2019). For instance, the requirement for national systems to align with a common European standard most benefits the national interests of signatories to the Sorbonne Declaration (Ahola and Mesikammen, 2003; Ravinet, 2008). The Sorbonne ministers needed international support to push through national policies at home and utilized the Bologna Process to maintain control over the harmonization of higher education systems (de Wit, 2002). The Bologna Process is not legally binding but rather a voluntary process (Klemenčič, 2019). Its presentation as such was “used as a means to legitimize national policies” (Ravinet, 2008, p. 354).

Croche (2008) asserts that “the fight for power between national and European levels is a fight for legitimate authority in the higher education field” (p. 17). An analysis of the language used in Bologna-related documents reveals that the primary actors with regard to quality assurance are education ministers and that higher education institutions and their staff and students were largely excluded (Saarinen, 2008).

### *Academic Credentials as Cultural Currency*

In his 1979 classic text, *The Credential Society*, Randall Collins (2019), argues that educational credentialism contributes to occupational stratification and social inequality. In his view, educational credentials serve as a form of cultural currency that enables holders to access distinct and highly valued privileges within a given culture. Hurn (1980) observes that “people invest time, effort or money in a particular culture-producing organization with a view to obtaining summaries of cultural accomplishments” (p. 503). Thus, the societal value placed on specific cultural currencies, such as academic credentials, can lead to a devaluation and rejection of alternative credentials on the part of admissions officers and dissimilar educational systems on the part of would-be students.

In the U.S., where most undergraduates must complete a significant number of courses outside of their major in order to fulfill general education requirements, four or more years of study is the norm rather than the exception. The lengthening duration of undergraduate studies has even led to coinage of the term, *super senior*, among undergraduate students. On the other side of the Atlantic, where students typically complete general education at the secondary level, a bachelor’s degree is earned in three years, with a focus almost exclusively on the major.

Nonetheless, some U.S. academics are exploring the idea of a three-year bachelor’s degree. In fact, more than a dozen college leaders signed on to the College in 3 projects to pilot three-year bachelor’s degree programs on their campuses in an effort to address the rising costs of higher education and rethink the curriculum with an emphasis on skills rather than the traditional structure of a degree requiring 120 credits (Whitford, 2021). Additionally, it is important to note that standard processes exist allowing U.S. students to earn a four-year bachelor’s degree in three years. This is not due to any bending of the space-time continuum but rather to double-counting courses taken while in high school (Moody, 2020). Many states provide high school students with the opportunity to earn up to two years of college credit, and many more offer Advanced Placement and

International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, which can also be double-counted by a high school and a college (Olwell, 2021; Tynan-Wood, 2023).

Most international students interested in an entry point to pursuing an undergraduate degree from a U.S. institution do not have dual-enrollment options available to them. Moreover, even when students have completed an additional year of secondary schooling beyond what is required of U.S. students, as is the case in Norway, college transfer credits tend not to be awarded by U.S. institutions (Adams et al., 2017). This creates a double standard that inhibits access by many international students and increases the costs of pursuing a degree in the U.S. Ultimately, students impacted by these rigid policies look to other study destinations where avenues to employment and further education are more streamlined.

While the Bologna Process questions the purpose and structure of 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education, the three-year Bologna-compliant degree presents a clear example of how the educational systems in the U.S. and other nations can diverge, resulting in serious challenges for admissions officers and a narrowing of avenues for international students wishing to study in the U.S. On the one hand, there is a strong tradition and institutionalized bias toward preserving the integrity of the four-year degree in the U.S. On the other hand, higher education systems are evolving, and U.S. universities must adapt or suffer isolation.

### ***Three Major Implications for Global Student Mobility***

Regional reforms, such as the Bologna Process, pose serious challenges for U.S. educators aiming to recruit international students, and these problems are magnified as these reforms progress globally. Today, three-year bachelor's degree programs are not as common throughout the European Higher Education Area but also across all major Anglophone host countries for international students, with the exception of the U.S. While the debate over the value of three-year undergraduate degrees continues in the U.S., it is important to understand how a failure to recognize the academic credentials of other cultures restricts avenues for global student mobility.

#### *Program Affordability*

First, the cost of a three-year undergraduate degree in Europe is generally more affordable than that of a four-year undergraduate degree in the U.S. This is due to a shorter program duration, which results in fewer expenses and quicker entry into the workforce. Europeans also generally value education as a public good that mostly benefits society, which is evidenced by much higher rates of government

subsidization of higher education institutions than are found in the U.S., where education is viewed as a private good that mostly benefits the individual. These conflicting cultural perspectives on the primary beneficiaries of education affect program costs, financing and even post graduation employment and immigration policies.

As European programs tend to be more affordable, it is no surprise that the number of international students enrolled as a percentage of total student enrollment in the U.S. increased from 3.5% to 5.11% between 2005 and 2020, while during this same period, the percentage in Europe increased from 3.39% to 8.16% (OECD, 2023b). Furthermore, it is worth observing that the U.S. hosted just 20% of the world's internationally mobile students in 2020 compared to 28% in 2000 (IIE, 2020). To compete in the new global education market, U.S. colleges and universities must become demand-driven institutions. (Cerver Romero et al., 2021; Charlier et al., 2007). This requires offering academic programs that align with student expectations for overall return on investment.

### *Program Content*

Second, the Bologna Process questions the prevailing U.S. cultural belief that undergraduate education requires a strong liberal arts emphasis. This has resulted in pushback against possible Bologna-type reforms within the U.S. educational system. For example, Gaston (2008) argues that liberal education, and its associated benefits, is most effectively developed for students who have already completed secondary education. He cautions against U.S. institutions submitting to a Bologna structure and cites liberal education as a singular strength and internationally competitive asset of U.S. higher education. Schneider (2008) also argues in favor of liberal education and its relevance for competition in the global economy. She cites research conducted by American Colleges and Universities, which reveals that four out of five employers desire well-rounded graduates. However, she fails to acknowledge the possibility that respondents and researchers educated in the U.S. would naturally exhibit a cultural bias toward the U.S. cultural value of liberal education.

While liberal education has a place and value, it is important to realize that secondary schooling varies from country to country. Pechar (2007) argues:

“not only is secondary education in Europe more homogenous than in North America, it is also more academically demanding and advanced. Hence, European higher education institutions

have never felt the need to offer the kind of general education that is part of an undergraduate experience in Canada or the U.S.” (p. 122).

### *Program Duration*

Third, a bachelor's degree in the U.S. is synonymous with four years of study. Pechar (2007) asserts, “North America has learned to live with the ‘irregularity’ of a three-year bachelor's degree from the UK and Australia. However, now that this kind of degree is spread all over Europe, it seems to overtax the North American imagination” (p. 121-122). Australian educators openly appreciate the exceptions granted to graduates applying to U.S. master's programs with three-year Australian degrees but also recognize that failing to accept three-year European degrees U.S. graduate schools will inevitably increase Australia's share of European graduate students (Jaschik, 2006).

In 2017, a symposium hosted by AACRAO brought together professional credential evaluators, institutional representatives and employers to discuss views on three-year undergraduate degrees. While the field has developed since the first such symposium in 2006, perspectives within the U.S. continue to differ greatly across organizations, with some adamant about counting years and others taking a more holistic view of the candidate's suitability for employment or further education (AACRAO, 2017).

This philosophical divide between applicant admissibility and degree equivalency is relevant not only within the context of Bologna-style reforms but also as the UN High Commission on Refugees (2022) reports, “record numbers of refugees, asylum-seekers and other people in need of international protection forced to flee during 2022” (p. 7). As observed by IIE (2016), “many displaced people lack the papers required to provide legal residency to enable them to access public education; they also lack official transcripts and certified copies of degrees, regular requirements for matriculation” (p. 11). Thus, overly restrictive policies focused on equivalency can result in disparate impacts on the most vulnerable populations. This not only has implications for global student mobility but also for institutional values around diversity, equity and inclusion. Loo (2016) explains that flexibility and understanding are key to conducting alternative credential assessments methods necessary to reconstruct an applicant's academic background.

### **Conclusion**

The policies of U.S. colleges and universities to either recognize or dismiss the validity of foreign academic credentials solely due to cultural biases present serious challenges for institutions aiming to attract global talent. These policies limit the entry points and also affect the global flow of students by adding to or detracting from the attractiveness of the U.S. and its major international competitors, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and non-Anglophone countries, which offer academic programs with English as the language of instruction.

Regional reforms present a challenge for U.S. educators, but they are also an opportunity for reevaluating higher education at a time of increased globalization. While this chapter presented the Bologna Process as an example of a major regional reform, the global shift toward output education and the near standardization of three-year bachelor's degrees in Europe and elsewhere suggest that U.S. educators may need to abandon overly restrictive, Americentric policies. At a time when much higher education is focused on advancing the principles of access, equity and inclusion, the institutionalized biases held toward international students should also be examined by demonstrating two desired products of liberal education: global mindedness and adaptability.

U.S. admissions officers should regularly review the professional literature available on regional reforms to obtain a better understanding of how the world's educational systems are evolving. World Education Services, Educational Credential Evaluators and the NAFSA: Association of International Educators all offer excellent resources. Once familiar with the reform, officers should educate and consult campus constituents, including deans, faculty and admissions counselors. Foreign credentials should be evaluated based on their own merits within the cultural context in which they were issued. However, for admissions officers to equate degree equivalency with candidate admissibility represents a serious oversight. As observed by Frey (2007), "A candidate who holds a degree is not automatically admissible to an academic degree program. A candidate who is admissible to an academic degree program does not automatically possess a degree" (p. 1).

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## Bio

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# A Primer on Partnership Options for Institutions Seeking to Build and Nurture

## International Student Enrollment Pipelines

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### **Abstract**

This chapter delves into the critical role of partnerships in the domain of international enrollment management and institutional internationalization. With the combined expertise of seasoned professionals in international recruitment, the authors stress that the success or failure of institutional internationalization initiatives hinges on the strength of relationships forged in this dynamic field. In a global recruitment landscape characterized by heightened competition and fiscal constraints, institutions are challenged to not only maintain enrollment levels but also enhance the quality of international student experiences. The chapter explores a range of partnership models that not only economize costs but also elevate the caliber of international student engagement. It advocates for a creative and innovative approach to partnership development, emphasizing their potential for mutual benefit. By examining diverse partnership opportunities, institutions can tailor their internationalization strategies to align with their unique goals and priorities, ultimately optimizing their outreach

endeavors. This chapter offers invaluable insights for institutions seeking to thrive in the evolving landscape of international higher education.

**Keywords:** Partnerships, Mutual Benefit, International Enrollment, Strategic Collaborations, Higher Education, Global Recruitment, Internationalization Strategies, Entry Points.

## Introduction

As seasoned international enrollment management professionals with decades of international recruitment experience between us, one enduring lesson we have learned is that international recruitment is definitively a relationship business, and success or failure of institutional internationalization goals often thrive or fail based on the strength of relationships that are forged. For that reason, we posit that the best way to both reduce barriers for international students and attain institutional enrollment goals is to build sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships. Enrollment has been dropping every year since 2011, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, from more than 20 million to just under 17.5 million this year (Marcus, 2022). This clearly highlights the pressure to seek new student mobility pipelines to maintain (and hopefully grow) enrollments on our respective campuses. The international education service company IDP has been conducting studies about why students choose to study in the U.S. Students cited quality education, a unique curriculum, a multicultural environment, and abundant opportunities as some of their continued reasons (IDP, 2022).

While these positive attitudes about U.S. institutions help, we are operating in a highly competitive global recruitment environment while in many instances paradoxically being asked by our administrators to do more with less. Given this context, global partnerships are key if we hope to continue attracting new pipelines of international students to our institutions. They can both reduce expenditures and lighten the burden of growing enrollment across campuses. However, to ensure continued mutual benefit, we need to become creative both in how we think about partnerships and in how we implement them.

While the authors of the chapter have tried (and in some instances, failed) to develop and sustain many of the partnership models listed below, we know from experience that sustainable partnerships both positively impact students and help institutions maximize the effectiveness of their outreach efforts. The depth and scalability of these partnerships must, of course, vary by institutional priorities and bandwidth, but the basic principle of the importance of partnership building

in this relationship-driven business is essential.

To help those in the field envision how to incorporate new or expand existing partnerships as part of their institutional strategy, this chapter will outline some partnership opportunities that your campus can explore to build new international student pipelines and reach your campus internationalization goals. Consider this list of potential partnerships for your institution to consider. As you glance about these options, ask yourself, “Which partnerships has our institution already implemented?”, “Where can we strengthen ties to improve outcomes of these partnerships?”, “Does anyone involved in our internationalization process have access to networks that could help us jumpstart or reinvigorate one of these partnerships?”, and “Since we have limited bandwidth, which of these partnership models will get us closest to our current institutional goals?”. It is our sincere hope that this chapter will spark at least one conversation on your campus about implementing a new or strengthening an existing partnership model that could move the needle for your success.

### **International University Partnerships: Leveraging Joint Resources**

Strategic partnerships between higher education institutions (HEIs) located in different countries provide a wealth of opportunities for each involved campus to increase student pipelines, diversity, and enrollment revenue. There are several of the most common types of successful partnerships we see implemented between campuses.

#### **1) Dual and Joint Degree Programs**

Joint and dual degree programs are an excellent way to foster collaboration between institutions in different countries that serve to attract more international students. A 'dual' or 'double' degree requires students to complete two separate programs at two universities, whereas a joint degree program is for a single degree with one curriculum designed and offered collaboratively by two universities, Kling, J. (2018, May 25). These programs allow students to earn degrees from two institutions, often within a condensed time frame, and can be particularly effective when they are designed as cohort programs to reduce administrative burden. There are institutions that have regularly received 50 students each year over the past decade for these dual-degree programs. It should be noted that institutions pursuing these programs benefit from increased diversity and tuition revenue from students who otherwise would not have enrolled at all.

When designing a dual or joint degree, it is very important to have departmental and academic affairs buy-in, as these programs represent a partnership on each campus between global education offices and the department/faculty as well as with the partner institution. To design a successful program, there should be clear, measurable benefits for both students and faculty. There are, of course, many ways to design the length of these degree programs (i.e., 1+1+2, 2+2, 1+3, etc.), so institutions need to engage stakeholders on both campuses to decide what would work best to achieve mutual benefit for each respective institution. This often results in a heavy lift in the initial phases of establishing course articulations. Once these programs are established, while the workload is reduced, they must be maintained by both institutions and through continued recruitment efforts. One successful example of this type of program is a 1+1 dual degree established by Virginia Commonwealth University with Christ University in Bangalore, India. There have been more than 500 students who have gone through the program to obtain both an Indian MBA and a U.S. MS in Business. The program was so successful, the model was duplicated at other universities. The School of Engineering is also building out a similar program to emulate this model.

Some advice in establishing these programs:

Dual degrees can be easier to establish than new degree programs because institutions do not have to involve accreditation bodies like the Accrediting Commission for Schools Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Instead, they only have to follow university rules on how many credits are allowed to be applied to a degree from an outside institution. Additionally, in dual degree programs, each university is independently awarding a degree, so there is less coordination needed. These programs tend to be easier to establish on the graduate side, as many universities outside of the U.S. do not have the general education framework required at the undergraduate level.

## **2) Shared Classrooms: Dual Teaching**

Shared classrooms and dual teaching initiatives typically involve faculty members from two different institutions collaborating on course development and delivery. This approach allows students to benefit from the expertise of faculty from different educational backgrounds, exposing them to diverse perspectives and innovative approaches to teaching, which increases their satisfaction with the student experience. While dual teaching can provide benefits both for student engagement and future collaboration opportunities, they require additional bandwidth for faculty when they are first being developed. Campus

administrators may want to discuss ways to reduce the burden on faculty who want to pursue these types of programs.

### **3) Faculty-Led and Short-Term Programs**

Faculty-led and other short-term study abroad programs are often organized during semester breaks or summer vacations. By partnering with universities in other countries, HEIs can find support from their international peers to develop curricula and experiences that are location specific that will increase student engagement. Depending on the education level of the students enrolled in these short-term programs, they could also provide opportunities for building student pipelines (i.e., community colleges often host short-term summer programs for high school students whom they ultimately hope will enroll full-time upon graduation).

Some advice in establishing these programs: There are many stakeholders across campus that need to work together to ensure a successful program (i.e., faculty, facilities, housing). Establishing a vision of who needs to be engaged and meeting with them early on will reduce challenges. Incentivizing faculty participation can also lead to more successful programs.

### **4) Reciprocal Exchange and Visiting International Student Programs**

These programs promote cultural exchange, broaden students' perspectives, and foster lasting connections between students and their host institutions. They also create potential brand ambassadors for institutions long after exchange students have gone home. By developing these types of agreements, HEIs can offer students diverse educational experiences without requiring the financial commitment of a full-degree program, increasing accessibility, and generating revenue for the institution that they would not have received otherwise.

Reciprocal exchange programs enable students from partnering institutions to study at each other's campuses for a semester or academic year. One challenge HEIs often have in implementing these types of agreements is finding parity in the number of students they can recruit to ensure an equitable bi-directional flow. As an alternative, institutions can pursue visiting international student programs, where the student pays to attend a partner university without institutional pressure to send a reciprocal number of students. Pricing for these programs is especially important because student participants typically do not qualify for scholarships or financial aid and do not receive work opportunities following their studies, so institutions should consider offering special pricing for non-degree seeking students. Many countries, especially in Europe, are

increasingly seeking these types of programs because some of their degrees require study abroad experience to graduate. Additionally, some governments offer funding for these types of experiences (i.e., Norway and Erasmus). There is also currently demand for these types of programs from Japanese students looking to improve their English.

Some advice in establishing these programs:

Finding the right partners who have mutual goals can be challenging. Some things to consider when searching for partners include academic calendars that align, whether there are courses offered to teach the local language as a foreign language or class options offered in English, and whether they have courses on specific topics that interest your students (i.e., arts, sciences, etc.). That makes thorough discussions to understand each institution's unique needs and strategy especially important before moving forward.

## **5) Grants and Funding Opportunities**

Collaborative grants and funding opportunities can drive research and academic innovation between partnering institutions. By pooling resources and expertise, institutions can pursue groundbreaking projects, access funding from external sources, and build a reputation for international collaboration, which can drive more interest and enrollment from perspective international students. Joint grant initiatives also provide opportunities for faculty and students to engage in global research while reducing the financial barriers, which bodes well for student satisfaction and retention.

Some advice on applying for grants: There are many potential partners across the campus that could increase the chances of successfully being awarded. These collaborations often include stakeholders in the Office of Research, institutional grant writers, and international faculty that collaborate on research.

## **U.S. Government Partnerships: Accessible Options for U.S. Institutions**

In 2021, the U.S. Departments of State and Education released a Joint Statement of Principles for International Education (NAFSA, 2023) reaffirming the significance of international education to the U.S. economy and public diplomacy efforts. That commitment is demonstrated by several U.S. government entities offering accessible, high-quality resources for institutions hoping to expand their international reach. Unlike some partnerships that require finding the right connection, these options are usually accessible to any accredited institution that wants to participate, provided that they can afford the

participation fee and register on time (except in some instances where space is limited). While these options are only available only to U.S. institutions; other countries also offer similar services through their respective governments. Many government agencies work with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to administer their programs, including well-renowned programs such as Fulbright and Study of the U.S. Institutes Exchange Programs. HEIs may have the opportunity to host these programs on their campuses, sometimes at low or no cost. Common NGOs that administer these programs include Institute of International Education (IIE), International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), and American Councils. Two government organizations that play a key-role in the development of U.S. international education include:

### **1) EducationUSA**

EducationUSA is U.S. Department of State global network promoting U.S. higher education that a comprehensive and highly accessible resource for HEIs seeking to attract international student. As a network of over 400 student advising centers in more than 180 countries, EducationUSA assists U.S. universities in their outreach efforts by providing up-to-date information on international education trends, offering guidance on effective marketing strategies, and hosting events where institutional representatives can meet international students under the credible umbrella of the U.S. State Department. Partnering with EducationUSA can grant your campus access to a wealth of expertise and resources, including the following:

- Participation in international education fairs
- Hosting webinars and virtual events to engage with prospective students
- Hosting seminars in countries at EducationUSA advising centers worldwide
- Organizing campus visits for EducationUSA advisers that provide deeper insight into campus offerings

Attending conferences, such as the Forum, held annually in Washington DC, where advisers fly in from around the world, or Regional Forums to meet advisers from a particular region

## 2) U.S. Commercial Services

During the 2021/2022 academic year, the U.S. hosted nearly one million international students and reported \$37.68\* billion in education-related travel exports (ITA, 2023). The U.S. Commercial Services (USCS) is the trade promotion arm of the Department of Commerce and is committed to supporting the continued growth and competitiveness of U.S. international education, as one of the country's top exports. They offer a wide array of services and resources to help your institution reach its international enrollment and internationalization goals. This approach can be especially useful for HEIs looking to enter markets that are new for their campus.

USCS provides the following key services:

- Market research and analysis to identify potential markets for student recruitment
- Assistance in finding international partners
- Access to a network of trade specialists in more than 70 countries who provide on-the-ground expertise

The USCS have offices based throughout the U.S. and in many countries around the world. Some offices even have specialized expertise in the education sector and include opportunities such as the following:

- Gold key services that HEIs can pay to use to help establish institutional partnerships and identify reliable recruitment agents for their institution
- Host trade missions in different regions that focus on international education development
- Host virtual events focused on different aspects of promoting international education (i.e., community colleges, STEM degrees, etc.)

Some advice in establishing these partnerships: For EducationUSA, some events are quite popular and may have space limitations. If you plan to attend fairs in top sending countries, be aware of the registration date and set up your Fair Portal account in advance to avoid being waitlisted. For USCS, there is a commercial officer assigned to each region of the U.S., and this officer can help institutions connect to international opportunities. USCS manages a diverse portfolio, and their level of focus on the education sector may vary. For this reason, it is a good

practice to meet with them at conferences, such as NAFSA or AIRC, or while doing outreach overseas.

### **University Partnerships with Community Colleges: Building Student Pipelines Locally**

University partnerships with community colleges are another highly accessible option that offers campuses the opportunity to pursue new student pipelines and broader internationalization goals locally. These mutually beneficial partnerships can offer low-cost, high-return partnership options for institutions. After all, for community colleges that are recruiting international students, one of the biggest barriers is that students are not familiar with the university transfer system and feel more confident when they see partnerships marketed with universities with which they are more familiar. Universities, meanwhile, can spend less on marketing internationally to attract students if community colleges go to the expense of recruiting students from abroad who then create a natural pipeline to their institution, with an existing F-1 visa in hand and two years of U.S. studies ensuring that they are academically prepared.

There are some common components of partnerships between community colleges and universities to consider:

#### **1) Developing General Pathways for International Students to Transfer**

By working together, universities and community colleges can create transfer programs that outline the necessary coursework and requirements for students to seamlessly transition between institutions. These pathways ensure confidence to pursue a “2+2 University Pathway Degree” that students may be less familiar with than a traditional 4-year degree. This allows universities to students establish pipelines of students that they would not have received otherwise, such as students on a budget or those with additional need for academic preparation before matriculating.

#### **2) Transfer Admission Guarantees**

Transfer Admission Guarantees (TAGs) are agreements between universities and community colleges that can offer international students a sense of security as they apply for a “2+2 University Transfer” degree. Under a TAG, students who meet specific requirements at the community college level are guaranteed admission to a partner university. This education plan can also potentially help

a prospective student better explain his or her education plan to a visa consular officer.

### **3) Course Articulation**

In some instances, course articulation agreements can support successful partnerships between universities and community colleges. These agreements ensure that the courses taken at a community college are recognized for credit at the partner university. By establishing clear guidelines for course equivalencies, institutions can prevent students from wasting time and resources on redundant coursework. However, there are instances in which course articulations can be cumbersome for institutions, as they can slow down efforts toward establishing a general partnership or take considerable bandwidth to frequently review and maintain. For this reason, not every community college chooses to articulate courses with every partner and may do so selectively, where it is in the best interest of the students (i.e., some programs at private universities may be less likely to accept all credits from the public community college system).

### **4) Joint Recruitment Efforts**

Collaborative recruitment strategies can benefit both universities and community colleges. In addition to allowing prospective students, families, counselors, and agents to visualize a clear four-year path to degree attainment, joint recruitment can lend credibility to community colleges in markets where the system is not well understood.

Efforts may include the following:

- Coordinated marketing materials that emphasize the benefits of both institutions and the seamless transfer process
- Co-hosting events, such as webinars or information sessions, that target international audiences and promote the advantages of the 2+2 partnership
- Sharing success stories of international students who have successfully navigated the transfer process and gone on to thrive at the university level and during their OPT experience

University partnerships with community colleges are often seen as and truly can be “low-hanging fruit” for building partnerships at the undergraduate level. However, as the authors of this chapter are both veteran staff of one of the

top U.S. community colleges in the country for hosting international students, there are some considerations we would suggest for universities seeking to build partnerships with community colleges:

1) Remember that you still must put effort into recruiting from community college campuses, much as you would from international high schools. It is not uncommon to see the occasional university staff member cold-emailing a brochure to a community college international adviser, who says “please give this to all of your international students and make sure to send me students!” Unless there is an existing brand awareness about an institution or an established relationship, this method is unlikely to be successful. It is far more meaningful for the same recruiter to come to campus to share this information directly with students and staff so that they can build relationships and trust.

2) Consider what benefit a partnership might have for the various student populations at a particular community college. Because the ever-present context of ranking is still present in student transfer aspirations, some university partnerships may be popular with students because of their international brand recognition. Proximity can also be a factor in determining if a partnership makes sense because it allows the students to stay in a community in which they have already become comfortable. However, affordable tuition might be the most attractive pathway for students who have budget constraints. Highlighting scholarship opportunities or in-state tuition waivers could be another way to attract community college students.

For community colleges thinking about how they can also add value, consider the following:

- Featuring formal partners in your marketing materials to give them more brand visibility
- Giving them priority registration for any space-limited transfer fairs you host
- Inviting partners for joint recruitment opportunities

By focusing on how universities and community colleges can form mutually beneficial partnerships, both institutions and students can benefit.

Some advice in establishing these partnerships: When they are started, it may be easier to establish partnerships with local colleges and universities first. Even for

colleges that do not yet travel, there are some virtual events that specifically seek to highlight “2+2” options. It is also important to keep in mind that some of the largest community college hosts of international students may not be located nearby. Because international students are more mobile than domestic students, establishing relationships with them may still be a beneficial strategy.

### **State Consortiums: Mutual Benefits from Collaboration and Joint Branding**

In a highly competitive international recruitment environment, state consortiums can be a valuable tool for HEIs, as they hope to promote a unified brand for the state’s educational offerings. By working together, institutions can increase their institutional profile and leverage collective resources to increase outreach opportunities for international students. Below, we will discuss the advantages of and considerations for participating in state consortiums.

#### **1) Building a Statewide Brand**

A cohesive state-wide brand showcases the diversity of educational opportunities available within a state. By promoting a shared identity, institutions can attract international students on the strength of their location, in addition to the virtues of their individual institution. A strong state-wide brand also reinforces the reputation of individual institutions, ultimately benefiting all consortium members.

#### **2) Discounts for Joint Event Participation**

Participating in state consortiums can lead to cost savings for member institutions by negotiating discounted rates for events, such as ICEF, and fair circuits. By pooling resources and sharing expenses, consortium members can also participate in recruitment opportunities at a reduced cost, maximizing their outreach budget.

#### **3) Hosting Joint EducationUSA Advisor and High School Counselor Tours**

EducationUSA advisor and high school counselor tours often select where to visit based on the opportunity to visit multiple campuses, so State Consortia are well positioned to host them. By working together, institutions can offer a comprehensive overview of the state’s educational landscape, showcasing a diverse range of academic programs and campus experiences. Joint tours also

enable institutions to share best practices and learn from each other, ultimately strengthening their individual recruitment strategies.

Some advice in establishing these partnerships: It is important to keep in mind that state consortia are run by volunteers and may vary in how active they are and whether they continue to thrive amidst job turnover. Getting buy-in from key institutions in your state may help. Often, USCS can be a great partner in establishing these consortia.

### **Cross-Campus Partners: Leveraging Internal Resources**

By tapping into the wealth of knowledge and connections already present on campus, HEIs can better support international students and create more opportunities to meet internationalization goals. For that reason, there are several opportunities to explore the strengths of faculty, staff and departments on campuses to use as a starting point.

#### **1) Inventory of International Connections of Faculty and Staff**

Faculty and staff members often have extensive international connections, which can be leveraged to promote an institution's global engagement. By intentionally cataloging these connections (perhaps with an all-campus survey, or coffee chats with faculty and departments), institutions can identify potential partnership opportunities, guest speakers, research collaborations, and opportunities to better establish partnerships and build new international student pipelines.

#### **2) ESL/ELS Programs**

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are an essential component to build student pipelines among non-native English-speaking students. Faculty who teach in and help run these programs often have their finger on the pulse of what some of the most vulnerable new international students may need and about the cultural nuances and patterns they see emerging in their classrooms. Having international administrators on campus partner with these faculty to work toward meeting the needs of student success and retention can provide tangible benefits for all those involved. Due to the international nature of teaching ESL, these faculty are often also a great source of international connections.

### **3) Departments and Faculty**

Collaborating with academic departments and faculty members can lead to the development of specialized programs and services for international students. Engaging with faculty about opportunities could open the door for creative programming collaborations such as lecture series or short-term programs on current events, which promote student engagement, retention, and success.

### **4) Research and Extension Offices**

The Office of Research can provide valuable resources for institutions seeking to attract more international students, such as institutional enrollment trends, which can help identify areas to nurture new student pipelines. Extension offices can offer international students access to a wide range of resources, from professional development programs to community engagement initiatives, that the main campus is unable to support.

### **5) Alumni Offices**

Alumni offices can connect international students with successful graduates who can provide mentorship, networking opportunities, and insights into various industries, which is an attractive reason for students to enroll. These offices can also help track and engage with successful alumni on behalf of the institution, which helps with marketing efforts and sustaining meaningful relationships long after a student's time on campus.

Cross-campus partnerships are essential for enhancing internationalization efforts at an institution. However, as with all partnerships, staff should keep in mind that faculty and departments may have a deep list of priorities (i.e., research and publication expectations), which may affect their bandwidth and enthusiasm for participation. Again, in this instance, it is key to approach conversations through the lens of mutual benefit. Perhaps campus stakeholders have something to offer that does not exactly match what administrators are envisioning and/or may have process requests that would make participation more attractive (i.e., release time from teaching a class to working on developing a study abroad program). Being open to these types of conversations might make all the difference.

Some advice in establishing these partnerships: Look at establishing these partnerships with a long-term lens. Showing up on campus to events where you can network and generally be open to possibilities opens the door for opportunities, even though initiatives may not come to fruition right away.

## **Agents and Service Providers**

Compared to other countries, the United States was slightly late to widespread adoption and acceptance of agents as recruitment partners, and while these types of partnerships may not be a good fit for every institution, they can be a powerful tool for many. “A 2016 survey of U.S. colleges and universities found that about four in ten (37%) were working with commission-based education agencies at the time. A similar survey from 2021 revealed that the proportion was just under half (49%). Now, slightly more than a year later, a new survey of U.S. colleges finds that 62% of respondents are actively engaged with agents. Of those who are not already working with agents, nearly all (98%) say they are considering partnering with agents in the future.” (Editor, 2023) Although still not entirely without controversy, it is no secret that agents and third-party providers are a significant pipeline for international students and play a large role in campus internationalization for many campuses. As such, the question for most is not *whether* they should partner with agents and third-party providers but *how* they should.

It should be noted that, as with most partnerships, signing a contract with an agency or service provider is only the beginning of the journey; showing up and investing time and resources will be the best predictor of mutually successful outcomes. Given the time expenditure, institutions should carefully vet their goals and a service provider’s options as they decide which make the most sense.

There is a plethora of options in this realm and other fantastic chapters that have already been written on this topic; therefore, the following information is a mere surface skim of categories that institutions may want to consider. Some companies offer a comprehensive menu of services that may span more than one or all of these categories:

### **1) Agents - Traditional Commission Structure**

Perhaps one of the best understood options is where an institution directly contracts with an agency to refer students to their institution. This direct partnership can be highly effective when executed well with reliable partners. In a highly competitive market, it is essential that schools nurture their relationships with agency partners and provide ongoing training to ensure that agents keep them at the top of their mind and are up to date about trends at their institution. There are also several large agencies, such as the IDP, that have multiple branches. That adds additional onus to HEIs to ensure adequate training with all branches they hope will yield students to their institution. In emerging markets or those

that in markets that have traditionally referred students to other countries, institutions may also need to invest significant time into training agents on specifics of referring students to the U.S. (i.e., the visa interview process). It is also helpful to consider that some schools with lower tuition may not be able to compete directly with the amount of commission offered by schools at a higher price but, in turn, can offer more accessible options for budget-conscious students. To that effect, discussion about the mutual benefits of a partnership can help clarify whether there is a good fit between institutions and agents. High-quality references from others in the field and/or from vetting from organizations such as ICEF and AIRC may also help HEIs in the vetting stages of a new agency partnership.

## **2) Agent Aggregators (aka “Master Agents”)**

For HEIs looking to further broaden their reach, several providers act as agent aggregators that essentially sub-contract representing an institution to a network of agencies. Unlike agencies such as the IDP, which have multiple branches, these are separate agencies that agree to sub-contract with a better-known agency for the benefit of having more options for their students without the legwork required to establish direct partnerships. Several well-known players in this field include M-Square Media, which has a large presence in India, and GSM, which has a large presence in Vietnam. These partnerships can be quite effective, but it is important to keep in mind that a wider group of agents, some of whom may be unknown to the institution, will be representing them. In this case, establishing effective training and policies for the agent aggregator is paramount (i.e., some institutions require vetting of any printed materials or presentations to ensure that brand quality is maintained). Whenever possible, visiting agent aggregators and networks of sub-agents is also a great way to build relationships and maximize the effectiveness of institutional training. In these partnerships, the agent aggregator may take a cut of standard commission *or* request an additional amount above an institution’s standard commission structure so that the sub-agent can retain the full amount of commission typically paid to direct partners. For that reason, HEIs should also be prepared for contract negotiation when establishing partnerships with aggregators.

## **3) Tour and Fair Providers**

A very popular option in the field, for tour and fair providers, such as USEG (most known for tours in the Middle East) or BMI (best known for tours in Brazil), typically offer easy entry points into new markets for recruiters who may be new to recruiting in a region or for those with limited time to plan

customized travel in a particular part of the world. Tours often plan to stop at some of the most affluent international schools at each stop, ensuring that participants connect with students who can likely afford to study at a wide variety of institutions, but who may also be brand conscious about where they envision themselves studying. Fair stops on a tour may draw from said affluent institutions or be marketed more broadly. For that reason, HEIs may want to ask questions about which student populations are the focus of a particular event and evaluate whether short-term participation to familiarize themselves with a new area or long-term participation with a provider makes the most sense for their institutional goals. Unlike with agency partnerships, HEIs need to create a strategy to engage leads they meet on tours or at fairs, as tour providers do not typically include options to do yield work on behalf of participants. This can be an ideal option for institutions that are prohibited from partnering with agents.

#### **4) In-Country Representation**

Increasingly, some HEIs are hiring companies to directly represent their institution in particular cities and regions around the world. This often means training a representative and perhaps providing capital for office space and/or travel budget to allow them to represent your institution directly and exclusively. Some companies that provide this service include M-Square Media in India and Nigeria and Capstone Vietnam. This can be an effective way to deepen an institution's reach in a particular region by maintaining a constant presence there. However, institutions may have to navigate institutional politics around this type of hire (i.e., are there union rules about outsourcing institutional work?) and will typically need to budget a much greater amount than they would in a traditional agency partnership to bring this to fruition. HEIs should also consider whether they will budget for periodic "fam trips" to their campus for representatives who are hired and who do not have existing ties to their institution. This approach can help to combat employee retention issues.

#### **5) Outsourced International Recruitment**

Some institutions have decided to outsource the management of their international recruitment entirely by partnering with for-profit companies such as INTO or Shorelight. These companies have an extensive network of employees worldwide that represent multiple campuses and are expected to meet aggressive enrollment targets. This can be a partnership strategy for campuses looking to expand student pipelines quickly, although it often comes with a hefty price tag. Institutions must also be comfortable ceding some control over their admissions process when partnering in this way.

## Reasons to Partner with Agents and Service Providers:

- Access to students who may speak languages your staff does not
- To fill in the gap in connecting with students from schools without a counselor
- Expertise in local markets, ensuring that culturally responsive outreach activities
- Comprehensive support services, such as application assistance and visa guidance
- Collaboration on marketing and promotional efforts (i.e., seminars/webinars)
- Expanded network
- Easier travel planning, either in scheduling with agency partners or attending tours and fairs that are planned on behalf of a group

Some advice in establishing these partnerships: Thoughtfully partnering with agents and third-party providers can significantly enhance an institution's international student pipelines and institutional branding efforts. However, it is imperative that institutions choose reputable partners and be willing to offer ongoing training and continuous support. There is a common mistake made among administrators who sometimes treat agency partners as a “set it and forget it” model, assuming that signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or contract will automatically guarantee a pipeline of students. Like anything in this relationship business, that is certainly not the case. Cost is also a factor in determining which services can meet institutional needs, as there is a wide range of costs associated with each service. Choosing carefully can set the stage for sustainable partnerships. Checking references and asking questions to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship are also paramount in setting the stage for success.

### **Engaging Community Groups for International Student Outreach and Retention**

If there is an established international or diaspora community, international applicants are more likely to be familiar with the area (perhaps how they found their way to your campus in the first place) and have informal access to culturally

responsive support and comforts from home, such as religious communities or food options. By collaborating with local organizations, institutions can create a more welcoming environment for international students and better facilitate their adjustment and integration into the local community, which of course, supports student retention and success. Collaborations may also generate more awareness of program offerings and positive word-of-mouth, which could result in increased enrollment. To get started, HEIs may consider advertising in local newspapers or church newsletters about programs at their institution or even asking current students to share their student experience in their local community (i.e., the authors have had international students give talks at their church about opportunities on campus). They can also consider partnering with local groups to establish scholarships for groups of international students that the community is interested in investing in.

In recognition of the important role community organizations can play, some campuses are creating new roles that task leaders with intentional global engagement at the local level. This can be a winning strategy, as bandwidth limitations can be one of the biggest challenges to developing meaningful community-based partnerships.

### **Summary**

We have covered the basics of some of the commonly implemented international partnership models for consideration here, but this is certainly not a nuanced or exhaustive list. There are brilliant people on every campus who bring their creativity, unique life experiences, and network to support institutional partnership planning and implementation; thus, we trust that amazing things are happening on campuses that we perhaps haven't even heard about and could not fully capture here. Additionally, because we are genuinely interested in the successes colleagues are having and truly believe everyone in the field has something to contribute to this conversation, we would love to hear from institutions if they have thoughts or questions about what we've written here or want to discuss the many nuances we simply did not have space to discuss. Consider this an open invitation to reach out and add your voice to our understanding of this conversation. We would love to partner with you in that way.

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## Bios

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# Impact of Tuition Fees on International Student Mobility in Sweden

## A Decade of Reflection

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### **Abstract**

In 2009, the Swedish parliament introduced tuition for students outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland. In 2011, the first fee-paying students arrived. Before the decision was made, industrial leaders, students, and representatives of higher education institutions had debated and questioned the decision. In this chapter, we reflect on the intervention of the introduction of tuition for postsecondary education in Sweden within a European context. What were the experiences, impacts and development of student mobility 10 years after tuition was introduced? Did tuition turn out to be a serious mistake, or are the objectives fulfilled with the reform? A direct consequence was a decrease of 80% in the number of students in Sweden from outside the EEA and Switzerland. However, today, the number of students from outside Europe has increased, but the mix of students from different countries has changed. The analytical research of the chapter holds significance for policy making that affects entry points to education.

**Keywords:** Tuition Fees, Fee-Paying Students, Sweden, Student Mobility, Post-Secondary Education, International Students, Higher Education Institutions, European Context, Entry Points

## Introduction

In 2011, Sweden introduced tuition for some non-European students in postsecondary education. Students from the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland were exempted, as were inbound exchange students. In the Swedish Parliament, the decision was made with a reassuring majority. Until then, Swedish policy had been that tuition should not be charged for international or domestic students (Börjesson, Ahola, Helland & Thomsen, 2014). Admission to a Swedish higher education institution (HEI) was based on the principle that the best-qualified student was admitted, regardless of nationality or economic background. Since higher education in Sweden is mainly publicly funded, the taxpayer collective represents a greater share of the direct costs of postsecondary education than a system that is totally or partly based on tuition. With tuition, the taxpayer share will decline, while the increased cost of studies taken by the student, at least in the short term and *ceteris paribus*, will reduce the number of international students. Not surprisingly, after the decision was implemented, the long-term trend of an increasing number of inbound students was reversed (UKÄ, 2017).

In the bill, the parliament emphasized that the growing number of international students and the costs for their education justified a review of the exemption of tuition, especially as in other EU countries, students from outside the EEA and Switzerland were offered tuition-free education only in exceptional cases (Prop 2009/10:65). The government did not find sufficient reasons to continue with a tax-financed postsecondary education for all foreign students. Furthermore, it was observed that the no-tuition policy only sometimes resulted in a competitive advantage for Swedish HEIs.

The long ambition in Sweden to offer an open educational system for international students was in line with, first, the strong egalitarian and meritocratic tradition of viewing students, independent of their parents' economic situation, as important potential pillars of human capital in the building of the Swedish welfare system. Second, internationalization has also been motivated by a foreign aid perspective where intercultural understanding improves collaboration and, in that way, solves global problems (UKÄ, 1974). However, a shift was noticeable in the late 1990s and early 2000s when internationalization and international students were more emphasized as tools for improving the quality of Swedish higher education. The international students would add a multitude of perspectives and experiences to Swedish HEIs.

With tuition, Swedish higher education has continued to become less national and more internationally oriented (Börjesson & Dalberg, 2021).

During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Sweden attracted an increasing number of inbound students. This should be mirrored in relation to development outside Sweden. Globally, the number of international students has increased. Before tuition was introduced, Sweden's relative attractiveness was obviously strengthened when other countries introduced or raised existing tuition. Naturally, when Sweden introduced tuition, this attractiveness was reduced. When the price of studying in Sweden was raised from its previous zero level, questions regarding the average and marginal costs of a student at different education levels came into focus. The public communication of the price tag and eventual incomes were also given the HEIs to handle. By this, the costs and benefits of postsecondary education became explicit before the introduction of tuition, and the cost was somewhat blurred and treated in the national context of international relations. This also started discussions at most levels of decision-making within the HEIs. Hence, in addition to its impact on student numbers, nonzero tuition also impacts the management of HEIs.

Bryntesson and Börjesson (2019) noted the large decrease in the number of international students after the introduction of tuition, as Swedish HEIs cannot compete on equal terms with universities from the most advanced countries on the market for international student education. According to this common way of reasoning, the Swedish language was one obstacle. English-speaking countries have a major advantage in competition for international students. It was concluded that the internationalization of higher education is a policy area where policy has direct and tangible consequences for the 'business of higher education' at large. Tuition clearly affected the number and, as we will come back to, the composition of international students in Sweden as well as the management of HEIs. There is no doubt that economic instruments are powerful in higher education.

The total impact of Swedish tuition on the "business of education" is complex. In this chapter, we focus on the results and insights, but we also want to deepen the knowledge regarding the motives behind government reform, given the internationalization of postsecondary education in Sweden. Hence, our aim is to recapitulate the discussions in Sweden around the introduction and to reflect on those in retrospect. In a previous paper (Nilsson & Westin, 2022), we focused on the outcome. We find our topic important and consider it surprising that the available knowledge about tuition and its effects on student flows is limited. This is especially true when one considers the increased competition for

and commercialization of education in response to globalization and the overall increased number of international students.

### **Tuition fees in a global, European, and Swedish context**

Mobility among international students, as well as researchers such as post-doctoral students or visiting professors, has a long tradition. For decades, the internationalization of research and higher education with international academic exchange has been self-evident. Sweden, a small open economy with intense international trade, foreign investments, and international relations at large, has long encouraged international exchange. Today, an increasing number of students worldwide are participating in international student mobility. Tuition is used for co-finance postsecondary education in many countries, and it seems that the importance of tuition has increased for the financing of HEIs (Thomsen & von Haaren-Giebel, 2016). This has opened up the market for education even more and made admission to studies an increasingly tradable commodity. Examples of successful countries with higher education exports are English-speaking countries such as Australia, the U.S., and the UK (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Choudaha, 2017). Early on, this was observed in the UK in the 1980s when HEIs were encouraged to seek funding outside government funding. This decision was instrumental in developing postsecondary education into an export industry (Williams, 1997).

The cost of postsecondary education and the best way to support students in paying tuition are among the most hotly debated public policy topics. This has to do with the issue that tuition fees can restrict access to postsecondary education for students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, as well as countries. For instance, in Norway, universities have rejected the proposal to introduce tuition for students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland (Myklebust, 2022). Nonetheless, Norway will probably follow the same path as the rest of the Nordic countries. Denmark introduced tuition for non-European students in 2006, Sweden in 2011 and Finland in 2016, i.e., to become more in line with the vast majority of HEIs in the world and to be able to compete with tuition-based postsecondary education. Globally, most students must pay tuition (OECD, 2014), as universities are not publicly funded to the same extent as has been the case in the past. This increased competition among HEIs has made education a global commodity where the power of students and their demand are strengthened in regard to their local and domestic HEIs.

Tuition for international students and domestic students is treated differently in different countries around the world. Some have the same tuition for both

international and domestic students, while in other countries, international students pay more for tuition than domestic students do. Some countries charge no tuition (OECD, 2014). Overall, the rationales of students, and sometimes their parents, are crucial when trying to understand international student mobility and their choice of study destination and HEI (e.g., Osborne, 2015).

Germany is a federal country with 16 autonomous states (Bundesländer) responsible for education, higher education, and cultural affairs. Many factors influence the decision on whether to impose tuition and how much to charge students. In Germany, tuition has been debated and scrutinized as a public policy topic for decades. Germany introduced tuition in 2006 and 2007. A few years later, the politician changed her stance and removed tuition for all the students (including international students). However, students must pay an enrollment fee each semester (Kehm, 2014; Thomsen & von Haaren-Giebel, 2016).

In Sweden, with a growth in the number of students in postsecondary education from 1960 onward, the internationalization of education has become an increasingly explicit policy issue. However, lofty ambitions at the policy level do not always materialize as real changes; there are still significant gaps to be addressed (Alexiadou et al., 2021). A sign of the gap between policy and action is that the statistical sources available to gain an understanding of numbers, reasons, and the character of international student mobility to and from Sweden, as well as the impact on HEIs and the Swedish economy at large, are quite recent.

In this case, Sweden is not alone: There have been political ambitions in many countries in favor of international student mobility. Policies have been developed with the aim of supporting inbound mobility; simplifying regulations for migration, visas, student loans, and recognition of foreign degrees. In other words, various national regulations related to international exchange generally and to accessing national institutions, welfare services and sources of knowledge have a direct influence on the size and structure of international student mobility. Such policies became part of the 'broad policy' for the internationalization of higher education. The impact, however, may be complex. For some students, tuition may be an indicator of quality (UKÄ, 2017). Hence, up to a certain level, a fee may both reduce and increase demand depending on the student category. At some level, the discouraging force will dominate. However, if the quality of education is competitive, there are still categories of students who may be willing to pay a large amount of tuition to access studies. For many other markets, the 'price' may be an indicator of the quality of a product when the quality is difficult to determine a priori (Karpik, 2010). Based on developments in Denmark, Sweden, and New Zealand in connection with changes in tuition

levels, a study concluded that there was a clear negative relation between increased tuition and student flows (OECD, 2017). In this respect, one may, as for all forms of studies of demand, add that other variables besides tuition play a role in choice, such as the cost of living in the city or country, opportunities in the labor market after completing an education and, as we have mentioned, the 'value' of learning the national language.

Given this, it is worth mentioning that only a few peer-reviewed articles have been published about the introduction of tuition in Sweden and other Nordic countries. For example, the assumption that the Nordic countries are cohesive regions has been challenged. In a critical exploration, it has been argued that justifications for international student mobility include important national translations. It is argued that in Sweden and Norway, the framing is predominantly educational; in Denmark and Finland, the economic frame has become prominent (Elken, Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2022).

The metaphors of students described as consumers and commodities are also challenging (Nordensvärd and Ketola, 2019). Sweden is considered a hybrid, a mix of neoliberal images of students, where the image of the student is composed of a merger between a social democratic welfare service model, academic capitalism, new public management, and welfare nationalism. The introduction of fees for non-EU students in Sweden through the merger of universal tax financing with a more individualized fee-paying solution should thus create variegated and complex metaphors of students and higher education. A similar discussion can be found in a Finnish paper (Plamper, Siivonen & Haltia, 2022). The study shows how students position themselves in relation to the student-as-customer discourse in Finnish higher education. It is concluded that tuition liability creates unequal positions for some international students and thus challenges the equality principles embedded in Finnish postsecondary education. This is a somewhat similar experience as for Sweden. Another study aimed to shed light on some of the challenges that internationalization raises for policymakers regarding public funding of higher education in a welfare state by examining policy logics for introducing tuition for international students in Sweden (Lundin & Geschwind, 2021).

The discourse regarding the commodification of postsecondary education and the ambition to recruit qualified labor from the global labor market to strengthen the global position of Swedish HEIs continued into the new millennium. In this way, Sweden would obtain "access to international expertise, compensate for inadequate domestic education capacity, support innovation and economic growth through an inflow of new methods, perspectives, and technologies. This

also mitigates the effects of an aging population” (SOU, 2018a, English summary of the report, p 9). To conclude, two economy-related arguments were added to the Swedish context. First, postsecondary education became an important product to offer in the international education market. Second, the recruitment of international students was important not only for HEIs but also for the demand from the domestic labor market (Åkerlund, 2020).

This policy change, in combination with the rapid increase in the number of foreign students, initiated discussions about the introduction of tuition for students from countries outside the EEA and Switzerland. It seemed that the offer Sweden had for postsecondary education in the global market had become too successful in relation to offers and various restrictions introduced by other countries. In 2009, the Swedish parliament decided to introduce tuition by a convincing majority. In the autumn of 2011, the first group of fee-paying students began their studies in Sweden.

## **The outcome of the reform ten years later**

The follow-up of the Swedish tuition reform is rather complex. One challenge is to isolate the reform from other events and ongoing processes occurring nationally and internationally. For example, stricter rules for student visas, COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine hamper the world of international student mobility. Another challenge is the timeline, as the long-term effects on Swedish HEIs need another 10-20 years to be fully evaluated. Thus, a ten-year follow-up period is rather short. After ten years, we can reflect on some of the obvious outcomes in comparison to what was discussed and explored during the period around the introduction of fees in Sweden.

Figure 1 shows the number of enrolled inbound degree students (i.e., a group that consists of both fee-paying students and students from a European country) from the 1997/78 academic year until 2020/21. As shown in Figure 1, the number of enrolled inbound students has grown rapidly since the 1990s. The figure also illustrates that female students now dominate male students. This was also the case at the beginning of the period. However, in the years before tuitions were introduced in Sweden, the number of male students grew much faster than that of female students. The general pattern, at least in a Western/European context, that women today are more focused on postsecondary education than men is thus not confirmed for those years; instead, the sharp increase in inbound male students during the period 2004-2011 might indicate that male students were not driven solely by a desire to attain postsecondary education at that time.

One explanation could be the origin of the country. Findlay (2011) found that students from Asia are male-dominated; moreover, regions such as the Middle East send twice as many men as women due to the constraints in some Islamic societies on women traveling, studying, and living abroad. Another explanation could be that students who enter Sweden also enter the Schengen Area (SOU, 2018a). The Schengen Area signifies a zone in which people can easily move freely within the area without border controls. The free and unrestricted movement of people means that students arriving in Sweden and the Schengen Area (which Sweden became a member in 2001) also have access to other countries to work and live in. After tuition was introduced, the cost of entering Sweden and the Schengen Area, which included studies as a motive, increased. Figure 1 clearly illustrates the rapid growth in inbound students until tuition was introduced in 2011 and the even faster drop in male students thereafter. This could be interpreted as the motives for mobility changing and a focus on studies once again becoming more pertinent. Moreover, prior to the introduction of fees and when COVID-19 hit global outreach and mobility for students, Sweden once again had the same number of inbound degree students. The number of fee-paying students increased from 1,469 in 2011 to 8,820 in 2021 (from information in the UKÄ database).

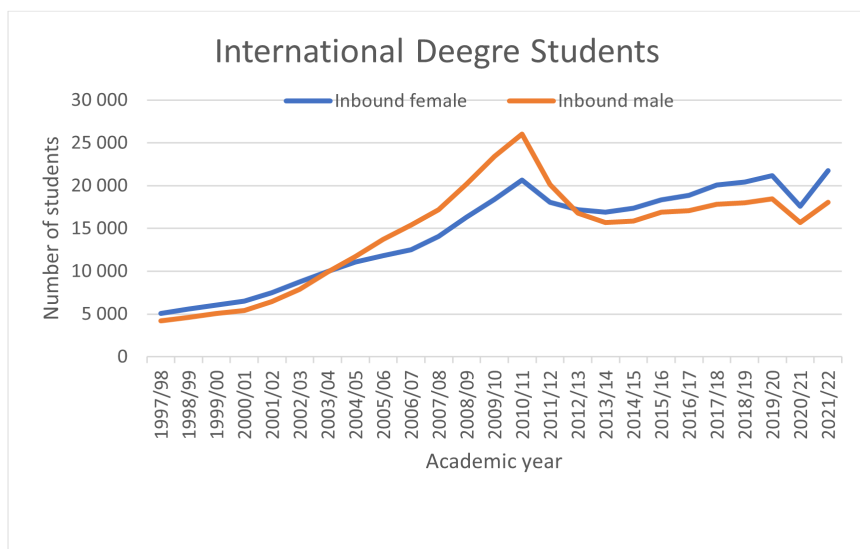


Figure 1. Number of enrolled inbound degree students by gender for academic year 1997/98–2021/22. Source: Statistics Sweden 2022.

We will briefly recapitulate the domestic discussion in Sweden before and immediately after the introduction of tuition. Thus, we selected opinions from the perspectives of business leaders, students, and HEI management.

Business leaders had economic arguments about the cost and benefits of receiving international students prior to tuition reform (Ekholm & Bennet, 2011). In a study about the economic effect of international students published by the Swedish Institute (SI, 2022), it was claimed that international students contribute between 333 and 380 million US dollars annually, depending on the scenario, to the Swedish economy. The report also examines the economic impact of international students who stay and establish themselves in the Swedish labor market after graduation. In addition to the pure financial effect, there are several other advantages that international students who establish themselves in the Swedish labor market, for example, supplying skills in the private and public sectors, have. This in turn contributes to increasing Sweden's competitiveness. The study further showed that only among the international students who graduated in the last decade has the contribution to the Swedish economy through an educated labor supply, income tax revenue and potential consumption support significant (SI, 2022).

Another argument shared by students, HEI management and business leaders was the ambition to compete with quality (Malmström Jonsson, Weibull & Åkesson, 2009; Ekholm & Bennet, 2011; Stenkvist & Alvfors, 2014). In their articles, they urged them to invest in quality. There is some evidence of increasing quality for international students. This was also one of the main issues addressed in the years before tuition was introduced and was also mentioned in the government bill (Prop 2009/10:65) titled "*Compete with Quality – tuition fees for Foreign Students*". The low achievement rate among international students was considered to be a problem in Sweden in the first decade of the 21st century. This resulted in an aggravation of the requirements for study results by the Swedish Migration Agency to receive a study permit for postsecondary education (see the Migration Court of Appeal MIG 2009:5, UM4691-08). Moreover, after the introduction of tuition, students who paid fees also became more critical of any shortcomings and lack of quality in their education. The Swedish Supreme Court ruled that an HEI had to repay part of the tuition fee to a student due to lack of quality in education (Court Case no 2018 T 2196-17). Tuition clearly makes students more interested in the quality of their education and what a university delivers compared to what it promises to deliver. Data for the 2020/21 academic year show that the achievement rate is high for fee-paying students—88 percent—compared to 84 percent for those who did not pay tuition (UKÄ, 2021a).

Some of the arguments were in regard to the language used at Swedish HEIs. The industrial leaders claimed that the Swedish language put universities at a hopeless disadvantage compared to their competitors in English-speaking countries (DN, 2011). Nonetheless, Sweden has seen an increase in courses taught in English at Swedish HEIs. Malmström and Pecorari (2022) showed that the use of English as a language of instruction has increased at virtually all HEIs in Sweden. On average, 66 percent of teaching at an advanced level was conducted in English in 2020, which corresponds to an average increase of 15.7 percentage units over the last ten-year period. Moreover, 24 percent of the courses taught in Swedish do not have compulsory course literature in the Swedish language; instead, all the literature is in English. This is another sign of the increased globalization of HEIs and, furthermore, is an adaptation to the 2011 introduction of fees in Sweden. However, this is also a challenge. Even more courses offered in English, as well as information, teaching, and counseling in English, will be needed. With students and staff from many countries, HEI campuses have become increasingly international. This approach offers an asset in terms of a variety of multicultural and multi-linguistic skills but may also entail a challenge and a cost for HEIs.

The issue of being able to offer a generous scholarship program has been pertinent for those debating cons and pros with the introduction of tuition. This is difficult to fully evaluate. We know that the Swedish Institute was able to introduce a scholarship program that many claimed to be too small and contained little money. Moreover, some have asked for more grants and scholarships directed at international students lacking resources, thus enabling directed support for excellent students with a drive to become successful. In 2020, approximately one-fourth of fee-paying students were reported to depend on a scholarship for their studies in Sweden. These scholarships are reported to the HEI, and there might be other scholarships as well from the students' home country (UKÄ, 2021b). A report from the Swedish Institute (SI, 2022) showed that 12 percent of fee-paying students in 2020/21 had a grant from Sweden that covered their entire tuition, while 20 percent had a grant covering the tuition partially.

The introduction of tuition has clearly affected the selection and composition of inbound students to Sweden. One objective of the bill passed by the Swedish parliament in 2009 was that students from outside the EEA and Switzerland should not be free riders of Swedish taxpayers. This objective has clearly been fulfilled. However, it seems that students from low-income countries had difficulties entering Sweden after the reform. In that sense, Sweden has become more homogeneous and has lost some of its diversity. Students and their parents cannot afford studying in a country such as Sweden, which is considered to be due to the relatively high cost of living. For decades, Sweden has developed bilateral

relationships with many countries, mainly in Africa, regulating the exchange of students and researchers. It was also apparent that differing possibilities for students from different countries to obtain scholarships affected their ability to recruit students. Bryntesson and Börjesson (2019), however, found that the composition of tuition-paying students had changed regarding field of study as well as country of origin; their analysis showed that students had become more homogeneous as a group. This can be illustrated just by looking at student numbers. In the 2010/11 academic year, 15,959 students (42%) were from within the EU/EEA, and 17,984 (47%) were non-European students. Ten years later, 12,154 students (37%) originated from outside the EU/EEA (UKÄ database).

### **Reflection, discussion, and concluding remarks**

Moving to a tuition-paying system has been a challenge for Swedish HEIs. It involved changes to formalities, such as rules, regulations, and policies, as well as a more mental and perhaps ideological adaptation to a system with tuition and full acceptance among staff at HEIs of the incitements that accompany this system. However, the reform was more successful than was expected by many in the public debate.

One can observe that the culture within Swedish HEIs in regard to fully accepting the incitements of a tuition system seems to have varied. Thus, a lack of full acceptance of the incentives created by tuition can also explain differences in student recruitment. Some HEIs work hard to recruit fee-paying students, for example, launching programs attractive to non-European students, such as master's programs taught in English, while others do not target fee-paying students at all, ignoring this group. Nevertheless, the share of fee-paying students amounts to only approximately 2 percent of all enrolled students in postsecondary education in Sweden (UKÄ, 2021a).

An obvious result is that long-term development cooperation with many low-income countries can now be maintained only for students with various scholarship programs. Another impact is that HEIs have tried to develop a more internationally competitive supply of courses. Furthermore, a shift from Swedish public postsecondary education to that of other Swedish and international funders is evident. International student mobility is an international arena or market where governments, HEIs, students, and various 'market agents' are active. In this respect, even if education has always been an investment, the value, cost and content of a specific course or program have become more explicit, easier to evaluate, and easier to compare with those of other HEIs in different countries.

On the supply side, some countries and HEIs have developed the business aspect of international education in response to decreases in public HEI funding (Knight, 2012). Others may see it as an option to strengthen the management and quality of their offer. On the demand side, students adjust their internationalization strategies to the growing global supply of education offered by HEIs and changing regulations from governments. This may have added to the increasing demand for quality and efficient management in postsecondary education. The global flow of students who receive postsecondary education is, as in most markets, not free from government intervention. The market for postsecondary education has failed, and it is not always clear how the allocation of resources can be improved. However, as Rickmann (2021) concludes, marketization as an application of business practices can provide universities with a toolbox within a partially marketized global higher education landscape. Moreover, with tuition for postsecondary education, the Swedish system became more like most countries in the world. From this narrow point of view, it seems that Sweden has been strengthened as a study destination for international students since 2011. At any rate, the number of inbound students shows that Sweden continues to make a place for itself in the global educational market; this will bring about challenges but also possibilities.

According to the government bill in 2009, the objectives were to share the cost of increased internationalization with actors in students' home countries, increase control over the inflow of students, increase the quality of education, and strengthen Sweden's brand as a study destination. Some of these objectives have been fulfilled. Students from outside the EEA and Switzerland pay full-cost coverage for postsecondary education in Sweden. After a significant decrease in the number of students was introduced during the reform, the number gradually increased to approximately the same level as before the reform was introduced. Some HEIs now also have revenues amounting to more than 10 percent of their total income from teaching. The achievement rate among fee-paying students has also increased since the fees were introduced. Hence, HEIs seem to have become more efficient, and the costs seem to be directed at those who reap the benefits of education.

When looking at Swedish development in retrospect, it becomes clear that national policy during the last 10 years has prioritized a long-term and sustainable migration policy reflecting the possibility that Sweden has been thought to have integrated migrants. On the political agenda, this has materialized in an ambition to restrict citizens from outside the EEA and Switzerland from entering Sweden. A new migration act has been implemented. This was a parallel political initiative during the last 10 years to the introduction of tuition. HEIs in Sweden

are now concerned that stricter requirements for student visas, working visas and permanent residence permits can increase the difficulty of retaining foreign students and researchers.

An aim of this article is to reflect on the motives behind tuition reform in Sweden and its outcomes. One question that should be examined more in depth in future studies is how tuition has affected university management views regarding postsecondary education and how education is viewed as both a national and an international – as well as a public and private – good.

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# Design Thinking to Support International Students' Planning

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## **Abstract**

This chapter presents a novel strategy to navigate the evolving job market, which has ceased to be linear and predictable. Originating from Stanford d.school and Tulane University, Design Thinking is a flexible, iterative problem-solving method that emphasizes empathy, creativity, and collaboration. Applying Design Thinking can enable international students to broaden their perspective from a single entry point to multiple ones, thereby preventing disappointment from failure to gain admission to a preferred institution. Post entry point (after enrollment), counseling staff can employ Design Thinking to assist students with career and life planning. The authors illustrate the practical application of Design Thinking through examples such as the EducationUSA Competitive College Clubs (CCC) in Nepal and the 'Designing Your Life for Women' course in the UAE.

**Keywords:** Design Thinking, entry points, holistic approach, career and life planning, empathy, creativity, collaboration, EducationUSA, Competitive College Clubs, Designing Your Life for Women, entry points,

## **Introduction**

A changing job market where traditional career pathways are no longer linear and predictable has led to a redesign of career centers on campuses around the U. S. (Buford, 2023). In response to this shifting work landscape, college career centers have expanded their focus beyond college counseling and job placement to encompass a more holistic approach to career and life planning. Post entry points, these service offerings now aim to assist students in exploring their goals, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and equipping them with the necessary skills to thrive in evolving school and work environments.

One practical approach that has gained traction in this domain is design thinking. Design thinking is a flexible, iterative problem-solving approach emphasizing empathy, creativity, and collaboration. According to the latest definition from the Interactive Design Foundation in 2024, “[...] a process that teams use to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test”. It involves understanding the needs and perspectives of users, generating a wide range of ideas, prototyping and testing solutions, and refining them based on feedback. The process of design thinking has 5 steps: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test (Stanford d.school, 2024).

Therefore, design thinking encourages a human-centered mindset, fostering innovative and user-centric solutions to complex problems in various domains such as product, service, or user-experience design. For example, a design thinking approach could be used to design a new product that fits a specific gap in the market, redesign the customer experience at a business like a restaurant, or develop or improve the shopping experience for a customer in an online store. Design thinking approaches are particularly well suited for ‘wicked problems’, problems that are complex, interconnected, and lack clarity, and could potentially have many different solutions.

While design thinking skills are often taught directly as a framework by Stanford d.school - one of the first such school in the nation and IDEO - a global design and innovation firm, colleges and universities, including Tulane Taylor Made, Texas A&M, and Stanford University’s Life Design lab have implemented programs

that integrate design thinking principles into their college and career counseling services.

These design thinking-based programs provide students a framework to approach their future learning goals and career plans as ‘wicked problems’. By learning to apply mindsets like embracing ambiguity, iteration, and empathy, students develop the skills and flexibility necessary to navigate the uncertain and complex landscape of their futures. These approaches also encourage students to view challenges from multiple perspectives, think creatively, and iterate on solutions that benefit students’ future careers and support their success in university and beyond. Further, learning to use design thinking equips students with highly valued problem-solving skills and fosters mindsets essential for adapting to constantly changing and evolving workplaces.

The ability to learn and apply design thinking skills is highly relevant to international admission and recruitment, as it aligns with the needs and expectations of universities and colleges in the United States. Many educational institutions value students with a solid problem-solving mindset, creativity, and the ability to collaborate effectively. However, it is often challenging for international students to demonstrate these sought-after qualities, given the traditional learning environments many have experienced in their home countries. As such, it is a key potential new service area for international recruitment to support students to develop and showcase design thinking skills, making them more attractive candidates during admission.

Suppose international students are supported to showcase design thinking abilities through their application essays, portfolios, or interviews. In that case, it can set them apart from other applicants and highlight their potential to contribute to campus life and academic pursuits. Further, supporting these students’ development of self-awareness so they can articulate their educational and career aspirations more effectively allows them to seek out universities that align well with their interests and values. They can research and target institutions that offer programs and resources relevant to their chosen field of study, leading to a better fit between their educational aspirations and the offerings of the universities to which they apply.

### **Applying Design Thinking to Career Planning**

Design Your Life is an approach (outlined in Burnett & Evans, 2018) using design thinking to plan a meaningful life that aligns with the individual’s values, interests, and aspirations. Following a design thinking framework, early activities

involve considering what is truly of value and interest to each individual and building empathy for what is working well (and not well) in their lives. The approach includes activities like writing short statements about what is personally and professionally important and journaling daily activities to notice what activities they find engaging. Next, participants engage in an ideation process to brainstorm three disparate life plans. Following that are activities to help prototype the most exciting ideas from the life plans, and finally, activities to gather data about the success of the ideas to then feed back into the planning process. Rather than producing a “finalized” plan, participants learn a method to continually reconsider their plans based on how successfully any ideas are implemented.

Through two case studies below, we will discuss and reflect on how we have designed programs to support students in learning and using design thinking and Design Your Life strategies and how this might help them consider applying to universities outside their home country. The programs were contextualized and delivered in differing formats and aimed to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the career planning and admission process effectively and make informed decisions about their educational journey.

### **Case 1: Nepal**

#### *Background:*

One of the authors, Karen Bauer, is a Regional Director (REAC) for EducationUSA, a U.S. State Department program that helps international students learn how to apply to colleges and universities in the United States. Based in Dubai, she supports advisers who work with students in the Middle East, Central Asia and Eurasia. After taking a personal interest in Design Your Life through reading the book (Burnett & Evans, 2018) and attending another class, she enrolled in the Life Design Studio for University Educators in December 2023 (Design Your Life, n.d.) because she could see the potential to incorporate design thinking into EducationUSA Cohort groups. The class was made up of a group of 100 educators hailing from the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, Canada, Scotland, Germany, and Hong Kong. It was a testament that this approach to student success and career counseling is going global.

#### *Context:*

The EducationUSA Competitive College Clubs (CCC) program offers comprehensive support to high-achieving students aiming to apply to competitive U.S. colleges and universities. CCC advisers provide intensive

guidance, organizing activities such as study groups, SAT/ACT preparation, readings, lectures, and community service projects. While acceptance to a U.S. institution is not guaranteed, CCC offers additional support. Some CCC students may also qualify for the Opportunity Funds program, which covers upfront application costs for financially disadvantaged students. EducationUSA advisers work with CCC students to explore alternative education plans if studying in the United States is not feasible for them. The program operates in 50+ countries, with participating countries varying annually. The author selected a CCC in Kathmandu, Nepal, to utilize as a prototype for a Designing Your Life supplemental program, offered to Opportunity Fund participating members that volunteered to attend, 15 of which chose to attend.

### *Program Design:*

The Designing Your Life supplemental program began with an in-person meeting in December 2023 at the Fulbright Commission in Kathmandu, where participants gathered for a two-hour session to get to know each other. Later that month, the online portion of the course was launched. The course covered topics such as ideation, prototyping, education in the USA, networking, and personal and community development. Participants completed nine online sessions and nine mini-assignments (including creating a LinkedIn profile) between sessions. The author hosted most sessions, but there were also two guest speakers from university career centers in the U.S. The online sessions were conducted on Zoom, and materials and assignments were hosted on Google Classroom.

Julia Lang, from Tulane University, developed an undergraduate life design course named Taylor Your Life and has made the complete lesson plans, slides, and resources for both the online and in-person versions of the course freely available to educators worldwide (Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking, 2023). The author utilized the Taylor Your Life Educator Materials almost exclusively when developing the course. These resources were invaluable in launching the program quickly with a minimal budget.

### *Reflection:*

Overall, the materials, activities and discussions helped students make informed decisions, understand themselves, and consider a broader perspective in planning for their future. Some students mentioned that the course encouraged them to look beyond the immediate year ahead and consider their future five years later. In one case, this shift allowed them to view a gap year as a unique opportunity rather than a burden. They realized the potential for gaining valuable experiences,

exploring different paths, and making more informed decisions about their education and future goals.

The course also offered participants a place to discuss their future plans, and through exploring different options together, they were able to be more flexible in their plans. For example, reconsidering that their chosen majors may or may not reflect their interests or where they might be able to add the most value to their own communities. Many participants expressed gratitude for the course's impact on their approach to their situation (most were awaiting admission outcomes to their applications), and the support was precious.

In looking to rerun the course in the future, the online format worked well. While the author was unsure that they would all attend or stay on top of the assignments, they were pleasantly surprised that almost all took the work seriously and wanted to continue beyond the course. The guest speakers added valuable variety. The ability to meet face-to-face before starting the work may not be feasible, so some low stakes getting-to-know-each other activities would be needed early in the course when it is offered again.

## **Case 2: UAE**

### *Background:*

The other author, Christina “C.J.” Davison, is an Assistant Professor at a federal university in the United Arab Emirates, teaching in an interdisciplinary general education program. With expertise in teaching approaches and curriculum design, she has been leading teams of faculty to design courses in several new interdisciplinary programs. She took the Designing Your Life for Women course (Design Your Life, n.d.) out of personal interest during the pandemic, and believed that the ideas could have been even more helpful if she'd learned about them earlier in life, so has been looking for places to implement them.

### *Context:*

The general education program at the university has recently been redesigned as a part of several blended interdisciplinary programs. A required course on innovation and entrepreneurship had a course learning outcome relating to career planning. However, the impression from previous instructors was that the outcome needed to be more effectively met. As such the decision was made to redesign the career planning unit.

*Program Design:*

The career planning unit was the final unit in a semester-long course and was completed over the last two and half weeks of the semester. The course has a blended delivery, so six hours (3 x 2 hours) were in-person and five hours (5 x 1 hour) were delivered online through a synchronous system used at the institution. Earlier units of the course had students undertake a significant project applying design thinking principles, and so the final unit and assignment was divided into three phases that aligned with this approach: inspiration, ideation and implementation. Students were expected to complete pre-class work that included videos and readings on the topics and some comprehension and reflection questions. In-class activities included discussions, small-group work and individual writing time. The final assignment required the completion of a logbook that contained evidence of completion and engagement with the pre-class and in-class activities, as well as a flexible-format entrepreneurial plan (e.g.: podcast, poster, report, graphic novel) which was a summary of what was learned in each phase. Activities were inspired by the following resources that other designers may find useful:

- Design Your Life (Burnett & Evans, 2018)
- Taylor Your Life Educator Materials from Tulane University (Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking., n.d.)
- Quarterlife: The Search for Self in Early Adulthood (Byock, 2022)
- What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20 (Seelig, 2010)
- Al Ghurair Young Thinkers Program me3 Career Exploration Game (Al Ghurair Young Thinkers Program, n.d.)

*Reflection:*

Given that this was a required course that is part of a general education program, some students were very interested in the topics and engaged deeply with the material and reflections, while others approached the assignments just attempting to meet the minimum requirements. The unit was also the last one of the semester, which was problematic given the competing priorities of final projects and assignments in other classes. However, based on general instructor feedback, there was a primarily high engagement in the in-class activities, although it did seem rushed. While the amount of class time was manageable, a recommendation to others is to consider ways to break up the material and activities over a broader

semester period to allow for more reflection time. Instructors were also differently prepared for the unit. In the future, it may be helpful for all of them to complete the logbook activities before teaching them to understand how challenging and time-consuming the reflective activities can be. The activities that had students create varied versions of future life plans uncovered several students considering studying abroad after finishing their undergraduate programs in the UAE, so there is potential for prototype activities to be an extension of this unit in the future.

### **Conclusion**

As expected, levels of engagement in this type of programming varied depending on whether participation was voluntary or required, although reasonably high levels of interest were seen in both cases. A key theme is that using design thinking approaches with international students helped them to expand their perspectives beyond a singular entry point that could easily be thwarted by a life event like a failure to get an acceptance at a chosen institution. As such, there is a potential programming gap that could be utilized for international student recruitment for all entry points concerned.

If an institution is looking to start a program, the authors have a few recommendations for starting points:

- Burnett & Evans (2018) is an excellent introductory reading to understand the application of design thinking to career planning.
- The Taylor Your Life Educator Materials from Tulane University (Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking., n.d.) are very helpful in translating the general ideas of life design for an undergraduate audience.
- The Designing Your Life website also has resources and many different paid workshops that helped both authors envision how to use the concepts in their teaching. They also list their ongoing workshops for Higher Education professionals looking to implement programs on their campuses.

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## Bios

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**Karen Bauer** is a design enthusiast. She is currently serving with great honor as the Regional Educational Advising Coordinator (REAC) for the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, representing the Middle East and Central Asia. Throughout her career, she has worked with an array of countries, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia,

Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Syria, Jordan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Her journey with the EducationUSA network began in 2005, affording her the opportunity to develop a unique expertise in International Education in the MENA and Central Asia regions. Over the years, she has served as a teacher, coordinator, trainer, and director, contributing to the growth and enrichment of the international education landscape in these areas. E-mail: kbauer@educationusa.org

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# Strategic Digital Marketing for International Student Recruitment

## A Bottom-Up Approach

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### **Abstract**

The realm of academic recruitment is undergoing a profound transformation, with admission professionals facing unprecedented challenges as global pressures in different regions influence student and family decisions. This essay advocates for a shift from traditional, top-down enrollment management to a pragmatic, bottom-up approach. It explores the importance of well-conceived planning and audience understanding to produce successful recruitment marketing outcomes, e.g., diverse and engaged enrolled students. From market research and technology utilization to messaging, creativity, improvement, and retention, this chapter delves into each facet of the international student enrollment journey for all studying abroad entry points. It calls upon institutions to embrace a fresh perspective that balances aspirations with realities, ultimately fostering enrollment growth grounded in sound market research, marketing approaches, and enrollment management practices.

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, International Student Recruitment, Enrollment Growth, Strategic Planning, Market Research, Student Personas, Audience

Understanding, Recruitment Funnel, Messaging, Retention, Academic Marketing, Talent Acquisition, Entry Points.

## **Introduction**

In the ever-evolving landscape of academic recruitment, the journey toward successful student enrollment becomes an intricate dance between meticulous strategy and genuine connection. As highlighted by a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, "I have worked in Admissions for 40 years; it's more stressful than ever" (Boeckenstedt, 2023), admissions professionals are increasingly feeling the strain. The mounting pressure and weight of often unrealistic recruitment targets highlight the need for re-evaluation of the enrollment management approach to international student recruitment.

This chapter offers a different perspective, one that is grounded in realistic strategy development and actionable tactics. It advocates for a shift from top-down planning, with its grand but often unattainable goals, toward a bottom-up approach. This approach is built on pragmatic and achievable targets that alleviate pressure on admissions teams while simultaneously providing an improved enrollment experience for potential students regardless of the entry points they access. While each institution has a unique blend of academic and administrative opportunities and challenges, the results of recruitment planning and execution should include sustainable enrollment growth built on solid enrollment management and marketing.

Whether your audience is domestic or international, traditional, or non-traditional, high school, undergraduate, or graduate, the keys to successful recruitment marketing are a well-conceived plan based on a keen understanding of your audience. This chapter makes a compelling case for why enrollment leaders should embrace a bottom-up approach to strategic student recruitment.

We will delve into each aspect of the enrollment journey -- from market research and creative development on through retention -- shaping a comprehensive and viable plan for recruitment success.

## **Big Picture**

Creative thought and perseverance are needed to identify and move prospective students and their families through the recruitment funnel. Irrespective of the student entry point (high school, undergraduate, graduate, non-traditional,

transfer, vocational, ESL, etc.), there are basic elements to which any thoughtful recruitment process should adhere.

**Market Research:** The process of identifying the best-fit prospects and their reasons to believe in your offer.

Considerations: regions, economic indicators, employability

**Audience Segmentation:** The process of truly understanding your target audiences.

Considerations: motivations, aspirations, cultural nuances, media consumption habits (message distribution channels)

**Creative Development:** The process of identifying your narrative and key messages for recruitment efforts at different points in the student journey.

Considerations: digital platforms, messaging, visuals, relatability

**Lead Attraction and Nurturing:** The process of taking your target audience from prospect to enrolled student.

Considerations: CRM platforms, audience segmentation, lead magnets, message timing (cadence), follow up

**Tracking:** The process of learning what's working and what's not.

Considerations: tech tools, digital dashboards, analytics skills

**Retention:** The process of retaining students through graduation, even beyond.

Considerations: Student experience, campus services, student support

The combination of skills available to you is critical throughout the entire process. The talent you put in place to manage and implement your digital recruitment campaigns has everything to do with your success. Getting the right talent can be difficult for international student recruitment offices due to chronic understaffing and under-resourcing. Nevertheless, talent is key. Often institutions seek the support of outside vendors or agencies as a way of adding expertise and bandwidth.

## Market Research

The root of successful international student recruitment lies in finding the right target markets, understanding them, connecting with them, and effectively managing them over time. It has to do with the macro- and micro-economics of what drives student mobility.

It's well understood that higher education has a long sales cycle. From point of contact to point of conversion can easily be 18 months or more for a prospective student to become an enrolled one. In rare cases, it can be as short as three to four months. Prospective international students need to take time to plan as they research, consider, analyze, figure out the financing and visa issues, and more.

That long sales cycle means that when you invest in a recruitment initiative that does not pan out, you have lost a year, or more, learning that one method works better than another. It takes time to build relationships with in-country resources. Market research up front will help you avoid wasted time by producing the learnings (consumer insights) you need to get on the right path faster. It will bring you the micro- and macro-level analysis you need to be effective.

When entering a new global market, three baseline questions to ask:

- Is there a rising youth population?
- Is there a strong middle class?
- Are there employment opportunities for returning graduates?

### **Audience Segmentation**

When we talk about audience segmentation – the customization of content by region or country or academic interest AND country/region – what we're talking about is the language and metaphors, images, and offers that resonate. We're talking about deep consumer insight research that enables marketing efforts to move the needle in a competitive marketplace. Without these insights, colorful examples, imagery, phrases, and language can only take a campaign so far.

As you develop approaches to attract and recruit students to your institution, carefully consider what they will find relatable and help them make wise decisions. What will capture their attention among the many ads and posts they see online? What phrases will resonate with them as they consider their options – at each point in the decision process (the marketing funnel)?

Essentially, you are trying to figure out what will pause their scroll and prompt the smart click.

Prospects can only follow up with so many offers. In the end, they will apply to somewhere between 5 and 20 institutions. Most will receive 3 to 7 acceptance letters, sometimes more. What will help them make a wise decision for their situation? Will the content influence them to apply and then enroll?

Too many institutions believe their own marketing and put out generic messaging because they think the great pool of prospective students will simply find them and connect with them. Some faculty and administrative leaders still believe that "marketing" is unnecessary (or worse) because their institutions are clearly so excellent, students will simply find and select them. Not so for most institutions.

The truth is that effective marketing is communication with integrity. Effective marketing helps prospective students make wise decisions.

The key to getting your message to click, so to speak, with your target audience is as simple as knowing your audience. And for this, persona development is your way in.

### **Personas are helpful guides for marketing strategies.**

A persona is a profile of an imaginary individual that encapsulates the demographic and psychographic characteristics of a distinct segment of your target audience. Institutions typically have a number of personas that represent different audiences, often segmented by country, degree level, degree type, and other demographics. There are personas of existing students and alumni, as well as personas of prospective students. All are meaningful. And all are useful tools for helping provide clarity and focus to marketing communications.

Personas help you tailor your content. Everything from website copy and social media messages to webinar and lead magnet topics can take their lead from well-crafted personas to speak more directly to the motivations and concerns of the group you're trying to inform and influence. This level of customization makes the content more relevant and engaging, increasing the likelihood of your audience to take the desired action. A persona will identify the social and chat-based platforms used by your various audiences.

An example: Your persona research shows the ideal prospect in your target country of Brazil speaks English as a second language, is independent, about to graduate from high school, is entrepreneurial, adventurous, prefers Instagram and WhatsApp, and is interested in business. You use this information to inform every decision, from image, download offers, webinars, and chat groups to engage and build rapport.

It will be important to distribute your personas to every touchpoint in the student journey at your institution. Done right, your target audience experience will be consistent and not just meet student expectations; you will delight them.

Another important point: you can go deep into the weeds of your personas, which can be time consuming and eat into much-needed resources. You don't have to do that to improve your own marketing. Our basic steps outlined below will move you forward effectively. If you are able to go deeper on your own or with the help of some outside marketing expertise, all the better.

### **What Should a Persona Include?**

Your personas should begin with essential demographic characteristics. You can probably find these in the averages from your existing enrollment data if you are already targeting this audience (or extrapolate about the students you are trying to reach). LinkedIn profiles can be helpful here as well.

- Age
- Location
- Career track
- Industry
- Education level
- Financial situation

Don't stop there. It is also important to examine the psychographic characteristics of your target audience. This may be harder to examine and require additional qualitative research with your current students and, importantly, your alumni. Your faculty also represents front-line experience interacting with your target audience. Ask for their input as well.

Key characteristics to explore:

- Motivations – What is driving them to make this major life decision?
- Fears – What are they trying to avoid?
- Goals – What do they want to achieve?
- Influencers – Whose input do they value?
- Cultural Factors – What habits or desires are influenced by culture?

Do not worry if you cannot find every single answer. It is just important to start somewhere. Your personas will become more complex and data rich over time. As you recruit more students, talk to them, and learn more about the audiences you are trying to reach.

### **Where Should I Begin?**

**Option 1:** Start with who you know.

Every day on campus, you probably walk by students who represent the type of prospective students you would like to attract – confident, successful, and most of all, *happy*. These are your best-fit students.

Ask them how they got here. Why did they choose your institution? Who influenced their decision-making process? Get detailed. Ask them to describe the scene when they reviewed the acceptance letter(s) and made the decision. Who was with them? What were their other options? Did they use an agent or apply directly? Who did they call to share the news? Did they post anything on social media? All of these questions will help you dig a little deeper into the minds of your prospective students. Important: use open-ended questions that will not lead your interviewee to the answers you expect or want.

Simple example of what NOT to do: “Did you find our website helpful in making your decision?”

Better alternatives: Start with, “What resources did you use when considering your options?” Follow with, “Did you use our website?”

### **Option 2: Build something new**

If you are seeking to build a new audience that you’ve never attracted before, return to your original research that pointed your enrollment team to this market in the first place. Find out: who are they? where are they? why would they find your institution interesting?

Gathering all this information is a bit more challenging since they are not already involved with your institution. You know what you need to know about them, and now you need to find a representative sample and answer your market research questions. Many institutions seek outside help to be sure they have the data to support their plans and develop an actionable marketing plan...complete with personas.

## Creative Development

Digital creative development often involves a digital audit, and always design, content, and digital analytics. Each of these activities works in tandem to ensure you're marketing resonates by reaching the right audience, on the right platform, in the right way.

**Digital Audit:** This gives you an opportunity to review your website from your international audience's perspective, understand how your current social media and email strategies are performing in relation to your target audiences, and review international web traffic to gain insight into which of your web pages are working and which are not. An audit does not have to be done before every campaign or recruitment initiative; however, it's a good idea to conduct this kind of audit every year or two.

**Design:** Every visual should tie back to the cultural nuances revealed through your work on personas and should mirror, to a degree, the prospective students who will see the ads, landing pages, digital brochures, etc.

**Content:** We advocate for local language ads and content in many regions around the world. There are a variety of well documented reasons why, such as making content accessible to parents who often do not have English language skills. And, just as with the visuals, create copy that speaks directly to the specific motivations and aspirations of your target audience.

**Digital Analytics:** Measure and refine the success of your marketing campaigns with analytics to support sustainable growth. Analytics, considered regularly, support continuous improvement efforts.

### Find your voice and present it consistently

Branding is how your institution is perceived by others. You want it to reflect your values and overall "voice." We're willing to bet your institution's brand is already well established. However, is it being presented consistently across all channels?

With the growing list of platforms upon which your brand plays and the number of people tasked with promoting your institution, it is easy for your brand's voice to get lost or diluted.

Consistent branding across platforms is vital for ensuring you effectively communicate what your institution stands for and what type of student will succeed there.

This is where a digital audit can be helpful. This task may be delegated to a student intern or better, a small team of student interns with different cultural backgrounds. If you trust them to have good judgment and can give them a clear audit process, their view will be invaluable and instructive to you and your team.

### **Leverage your social media audience (beyond organic posts)**

Students use so many different channels to investigate the institutions they are interested in. A basic Google search, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok (growing), Snapchat, and even Facebook (fading) are currently in use today (2024). You'll want to take your brand to those channels you have the capacity to leverage and maintain. If you cannot maintain your presence on a channel, it is not worth your time.

Yes, keep your brand current and active using organic (free) posts. However, that will only take you so far. If your goal is to build up your audience using organic initiatives, then you are at the mercy of your existing followers liking, sharing, commenting, or otherwise interacting with your posts. Most efforts will not go much further than your existing network. You'll want a broader reach.

Paid campaigns expand your audience. Paid advertising gives you more control and better opportunities to gain the kind of audience you truly want, allowing you to target age, geography, interests, and more, depending on the platform.

### **Search and they will find you**

Another powerful way to build your audience online is through search engine marketing. Like social platforms, you will want to consider the free and pay-to-play options. Most marketers employ both. This practice has changed over the years with search marketing being critical to your success, then waning in its power, and then growing powerful again in different ways. As artificial intelligence (AI) grows in popularity and efficiency, search marketing is going to change again as we move forward.

Currently, the free option is through search engine optimization, which are the rules most marketers follow to improve their rankings in search results. SEO can involve a range of strategies that include reducing the time needed to load a website to regularly publishing keyword-optimized blog posts and other content. It goes deeper than this, but that is the basic starting point.

Significant effort is required to create/publish highly specific content and build backlinks to that content. You'll put effort into organizing your online content

into a few key topic areas (often called pillars) that are relevant to your audience. Building an online audience via SEO does not happen overnight, but it is a sustainable way to help grow a loyal audience over time.

Be aware, the old days (a decade or more ago) of simply inserting your keywords throughout your website content will not cut it today. Search algorithms are far more sophisticated, and your approach to developing, organizing, presenting, and linking content will need to be more sophisticated as well. In addition, artificial intelligence methods customize search results based on each individual's search habits. While many academic leaders with limited experience in SEO think of those keyword efforts of a decade ago, marketers understand that SEO is an increasingly challenging proposition that requires specialized skills.

The paid counterpart to SEO is paid search advertising or pay per click (PPC). Tools such as Google Ads allow you to run ads based on search queries such as “top-ranking universities” or “undergraduate environmental science programs” and help you capture visibility and clicks. If you don’t have an expert in-house, you will want to hire one for your team or find outsourced support.

### **Do not discount user-generated content. Use it! Promote it!**

User-generated content (UGC) refers to photos, videos, or text that your students post about your institution. Because it is created by someone already at your institution (or associated with it, such as your faculty, alumni, or parents), user-generated content is one of the best ways to show an authentic side of your university to your audience.

Research done by prominent tech investor Mary Meeker in 2017 revealed that UGC featuring a brand generated 6.9X greater engagement (read views and sharing) than brand-generated content (that is the stuff coming out of your marketing department). Your take-away from this research: create opportunities for your fan base (students, etc.) to share your brand. This is a marketing technique that is low cost but requires time investment from someone who understands marketing, your student culture, and the channels to be used. Find someone able to keep the marketing goal front and center as work with students to develop the online vibe. The brand awareness you can build through this effort makes it highly valuable work.

Hashtags are a great way to encourage students to post their own content that you can then easily find and repost (and track! Always track!). It’s a bit of a slow churn in terms of audience building, but it’s an easy and free way to capture followers who may not yet be fully in your social media circle. Caveat: Always ask

for permission to re-publish user-generated content in your university's digital channels. #smartidea #soeasy #free

You can also optimize your social media management platforms (e.g., Hootsuite) to alert you when any faculty or staff names or topics related to your institution are shared organically. Commenting and engaging with those posts will help us attract attention to your channels and your institution. Students appreciate authentic engagement in their posts, especially when supported by the institution itself.

### **Know which platforms provide the most play for you**

Be strategic with where you spend your time by understanding which campaigns work and which do not. There's no point spinning your wheels on multiple platforms when your audience has clearly demonstrated they'd rather see you on Snapchat, Tik Tok, or YouTube. Figuring this out has to do with tracking your institution's engagement levels and conversion.

As you consider your institutional and departmental goals, know that some channels work best for long-term engagement and awareness (TikTok) and require regular content management. Others may be better at building student pipelines and quality web traffic (Facebook, Google). Therefore, yes, think about your audience but also consider your goals and resources so you get the most out of your channels. Nontraditional students? You'll want to evaluate LinkedIn.

Keep this in mind, high engagement with no conversion increases brand awareness without meeting revenue goals. That's okay, as long as you have other initiatives that are targeting leads further down the funnel and you are nurturing leads and pushing conversions in other ways. Your leadership likely does not understand the nuances of what you are tracking. You'll want to simplify all of this and take time to explain the pros and cons of the plan you are putting in place (and the results when you have them). Your ability to tell the marketing story to leadership is an important skill.

## **Technology**

There are so many tech tools designed to support student recruitment and admissions. Slate, Recruiter, Dynamics, Jenzabar, Hubspot, Marketo, Salesforce, Mailchimp, Constant Contact, Hootsuite, and of course, Google Analytics. These are only a few of the tech tools student enrollment management professionals are leaning into to perform their jobs. The list goes on much further.

In student recruitment, CRMs are crucial for keeping prospective students engaged. Knowing when and where prospective students enter your system (by download, email, social, search, etc.) can inform your team about what types of information you will want to continue to disseminate.

In addition, you want to nurture your leads all the way through to enrollment. A good CRM, set up well, is going to help you stay connected beyond graduation. Tied to your Student Information System (SIS), the goal is a full customer journey experience that helps with recruitment, retention and, subsequently, all important alumni engagement.

Technology is one thing. The people who use it are another. Even more important than the features built into your CRM is whether or not your team uses them. When we talk about technology, we must talk about user adoption.

### **7 Steps to Successful CRM Implementation in an academic setting**

1. **Define who leads and who implements:** Who is in charge of your system setup and maintenance? Who are your end users?
2. **Define success:** What problems are you hoping to solve? What outcomes are you shooting to achieve?
3. **Define most useful analytics:** What data are you collecting? How will you use it? Will it inform important future decisions?
4. **Define connections to systems:** How will your CRM connect with your MAP (marketing automation platform)? Financial aid system? Student information platform?
5. **Define who has access to what:** Who can set up templates? Enter data? Export data? Delete data?
6. **Clean the existing data:** How will you enter existing data—and what data needs to be there? How will you ensure that the data are usable?
7. **Get users on board:** Change is hard. Is your team ready for this new system and motivated to make it work? Which features are a priority for them to use so that you are successful?

Clearly, we cannot use every tool or explain how to optimize each tool. For each institution, with different departmental and staffing structures and different talents on hand, the best options will be different in each case. While there are

always consultants teaching “best practices,” we know that there is, in every institution, “actual practice.”

Strong and knowledgeable leaders will navigate the twists and turns (many unexpected) as you develop your technology selection and implementation. Typically, implementation is far slower than anyone intends at the outset. Our advice: pay attention to the human factor at least as much (if not more) than the technology itself.

### **Lead Nurturing**

Once your creative team has translated market research insights into effective messaging tailored to your student personas, these messages work their way into the content distributed and tracked through your CRM. The process you build will nurture your leads from the point of initial awareness to deeper engagement and ultimately the decision to apply and then enroll.

#### **Getting Started: Content First**

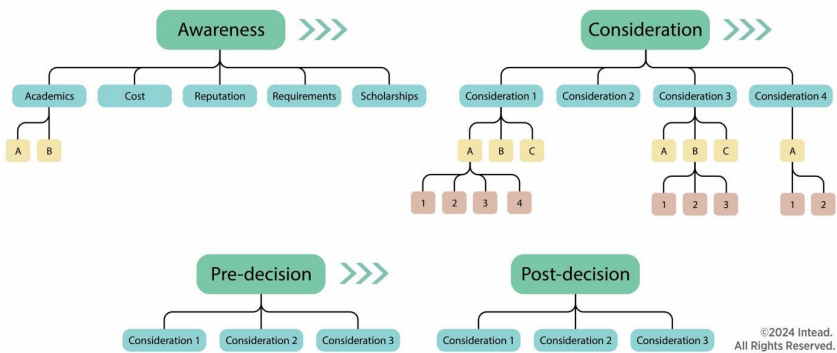
At the basic level, your lead nurturing campaign will provide prospects with the right information at the right time. As you connect with your students in person and collect data through your website traffic, lead forms and CTAs, use these data to map your student journey for each of your defined audience segments.

As you evaluate student journeys, consider the many ways you might reach students to inform their decision-making:

- Website (site & landing pages)
- Recruiting agents/counselors
- Email communications
- Social communications (paid & organic)
- Admissions staff
- Recruitment staff
- Faculty
- Current students

- Alumni
- Parents of students
- Parents of prospective students
- Guidance counselors
- Student fairs
- Recruitment platforms
- University webinars

## Student Journey Re-imagined



Waxman, B. (2020, May). *The Student Journey Re-Imagined*. Intead.

Your website and digital user experience (UX) designers and writers anticipate an audience's desire for information as users make their decisions. At what point in the process does a user wonder about cost vs. academic programs? How do you present that information so that user questions are answered as they arise? Keep in mind, the message is about what they truly want to know, not about what you truly want to tell them. An important distinction.

Alumni profiles, current student testimonials, campus events, and messages from faculty and administrators will *show* rather than *tell* your prospective students how great you are. Think video (Some of you think VR).

This creative work translates into digital ads, web page designs, inquiry forms, downloadable content, webinars, email campaigns, etc.

## Structuring Your Messaging: Multi-Segment Flows

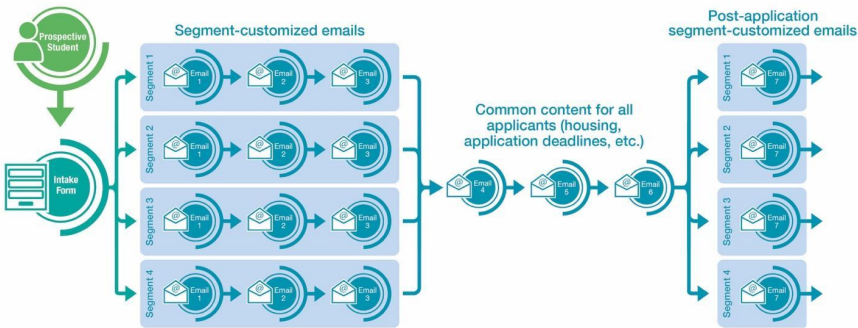
While audience segmenting can mean a scramble of disparate teams and departments requesting oversight and final approval of your messaging, you can quickly and easily build out focused student nurturing flows by establishing set topics. Think templates and efficiency across all of your audience segments to streamline information gathering and approval.

Let us focus on email campaigns with a simplified example: Consider each email in the diagram below as a topic grouping. You might deliver your messages via different messengers to engage your audience segments.

**Email 1** — Dean’s message

**Email 2** — Current student testimonial

**Email 3** — Alumni career story, etc.



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Waxman, B. (2020, March). *Go with the Flow: The How of Nurturing Leads*. Intead.

While the exact *content* of each email topic might differ for each of your audience segments (e.g., a profile of a superstar Computer Engineering alumna making waves as a Product Manager at Instagram vs. an Architecture graduate involved in designing Amazon’s new headquarters), the general subject area can remain the same, according to your templates.

Choosing to incorporate on-campus events or news highlights into your email flow for each segment (e.g., a CEO panel discussion for potential business students, an upcoming science expo for your STEM leads) can also help to establish a natural rapport with your leads and provide a closer look at the campus life experience.

Just because your email flows are segmented doesn't mean they have to stay *separated*. Throughout the student journey, these segmented email flows can converge and diverge, as there are some topics, such as student housing (Email 4), the application process (Email 5), or financial aid (Email 6), that will likely remain the same (or largely the same) across all of your audience segments. Clearly, graduate programs will have different application processes than undergraduate programs, but you get the idea.

For those readers concerned that students do not read email, data tells us that once you have captured and engaged a student lead, those interested in your brand and your offer will read your emails. That said, it is true that other channels, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter, are powerful connecting points for you. A range of channels must be employed. The audience segmentation approach discussed here can be applied to other dissemination channels beyond email communications.

### **A Lead is Just a Lead (Unless You Nurture It)**

At the end of the day, all of those great student leads you are capturing at events, fairs, and through your digital marketing efforts are of no use without a plan to engage and nurture them through to enrollment. With your thoughtful lead segmentation in place and highly relevant content tailored to each segment and stage of the student journey, you will be on your way to an effective email nurturing campaign that engages students throughout the funnel.

With our messaging strategy laid out for the various stages of interaction with our target audience, we are ready to move forward by testing which messages are working—engaging leads and converting them to the next step in the process.

### **A/B Testing**

Email A/B testing, also known as split testing, is the process of sending two slightly varied versions (version A and version B) of an email to two different sample groups of your email list. The email version that receives the most open and, importantly, valuable clicks (conversions) is deemed the “winner” and is sent to the remainder of your list. The same approach can be applied to any digital marketing initiative (ads, downloadable content, etc.).

This approach is the best (and simplest) way to optimize email marketing campaigns and quickly pinpoint what is working and what is not. With email marketing, it is the subject line that has the most power. Another test involves

evaluating whether prospective students click more on buttons or link text. Test which color button works best. Consider whether parents respond to subject lines with emojis...or should you leave that to your student segments?

Given that you have so many important student segments to consider (domestic regional, domestic distant, international by country, non-traditional, first-year, undergraduate, graduate, transfer, program of interest, financial capacity, ethnicity, first generation, ESL, and more), testing can become complicated. It's important to have this done with a bit of rigor and careful tracking. Take it one step and one audience segment at a time and build your audience insights with care.

First, focus on one or two student segments that have the highest value to your institution. Develop a clear, documented process and apply it to each audience segment as you move through your list.

We offer 3 simplified steps to get you started:

1. **Define what you want to optimize:** Perhaps your last open house email campaign had fewer registration clicks than anticipated. Or maybe your newsletter open rates are lagging in your international student list. Perhaps your applicant-focused webinars are seeing a decline in attendance (a common challenge). Decide which metrics you want to optimize, such as the open rate and number of clicks. Decide which specific data points you want to measure during your test. Then, consider which specific audience segment you want to test, e.g., students within 25 miles of campus, or you may want to test one specific approach across all of your lists. We recommend performing segment-specific A/B tests because you may see varying results when working across lists. For instance, prospective students may respond better to urgency-based subject lines than current students.
2. **Develop a hypothesis:** Having a clear hypothesis before starting your email experiment can help you stay focused on what you're testing. Some examples: a) We believe that a hero image at the top of the email will result in higher click rates than an email that starts with text. b) We believe that a subject line personalized with the student's first name will have a higher open rate. At the conclusion of your A/B test, your hypothesis may be proven, disproved, or inconclusive. Important: Test only one variable at a time.
3. **Choose your sample size:** How many subscribers should you send your

test emails to? We recommend using the 80/20 rule: Send email A to 10% of your list, email B to 10%, and then the winning version goes to the remaining 80% of your list. It is important to ensure that the samples are split randomly to produce an unbiased result.

## Tracking and Optimization

Perseverance is key to your marketing success.

Optimization leaders consistently ask: how can we move our team toward best practice? The realists know we will achieve our relative version of “best practice” known as “actual practice.”

In our experience, success has everything to do with your team (the human element) and their ability to use academic marketing technology. Your team’s success hinges on internal communication and information sharing. There is so much talk of dashboards and KPIs (key performance indicators). Done well, dashboards will improve your full team’s understanding of which factors are important to success and where you stand with each of those factors.

This information sharing helps your team understand how their work contributes to the larger institutional success. It helps them make adjustments to their work, their effort, and then witness the results in the shared dashboards that demonstrate progress to everyone.

Your goal: Capture the status of your success factors (KPIs) on a simple-to-read infographic/dashboard produced and shared weekly or monthly with your full team. Keep everyone focused on what is working and where to devote energy to improvement efforts.

### Two Levers to Improve Results

Two simple actions you can take to help improve your campaign’s performance.

1. **Communicate and Explain** – Simplify and contextualize your dashboards so that everyone understands what is going on. Share easy-to-read reports that the team can grasp and use to connect the dots between their role and activities to your institution’s enrollment success. KPIs that everyone understands (presented with contextual explanation) will empower your team to contribute ideas and take actions leading to efficiency and growth.

2. **Lead scoring** – Use your data (KPIs) to identify those prospect activities that are more likely to convert (not just giving points for website visits) and score them in a way that allows your student recruitment team to focus their personal outreach to the most valuable leads.
- There are those prospects that are going to apply with no encouragement – they already love you. Assign them a certain score.
  - There are those that are kicking the tires a bit and are never going to convert – a waste of your time. Assign them a certain score.
  - And there are those trying to figure out what is best, and your institution represents a viable option. Is your lead scoring helping your recruitment team focus where they can do the most to boost enrollment results? Assign them a certain score.

### **Other Marketing Levers**

There are other levers you may be able to pull to make a difference in your outcomes.

**Spend more money.** Money will buy you more creative assets (digital ads videos, media buy, reach, and conversions), more recruitment travel, more sponsored recruitment events, more recruiting agent/counselor training and management.

**Streamline your admissions process.** Reduce barriers to the information students truly want. Get them the information they want faster. Some of this will be identified through your digital audit and an admissions process mapping exercise.

**Hire more staff.** Or outsource marketing support to increase lead acquisition and management.

**Invest in better tech.** Put marketing tech tools in place that will help you better manage the sprawling lead nurturing process.

### **Digital Marketing Case Studies**

To put the marketing principles discussed here into context, we offer two real-world case studies. These practical examples provide a clearer understanding

and tangible application of the topics we have covered.

**Case #1: US mid-tier public institution with roughly 10,000 students (Intead, 2022)**

In the case of a mid-tier public institution in the U.S., with a student population of roughly 10,000, there was a specific goal in mind: diversify the undergraduate population.

Intead conducted international market research, leveraging quantitative data analysis on internal metrics such as enrollment data and website traffic as well as external economic and other relevant audience data. Through our analysis, we pinpointed countries that offered significant value and promising return rates for the institution.

To further inform the marketing strategy, we conducted qualitative studies, including targeted student, alumni, and stakeholder interviews. These efforts helped define the student personas, providing insight into their unique journeys, influencers, and key decision-making moments.

With the institution's CRM tracking capabilities confirmed, Intead designed an ad campaign that encapsulated the institution's unique qualities. The creative elements ran in an eight-week digital campaign in Kenya and Ecuador, generating 27 million impressions and attracting 680 high-quality leads for the institution. As benchmarks for your digital marketing team, the media buy for this two-country campaign was \$15,000 and the average cost per lead was \$22.06.

The Intead team complemented the digital campaign with a lead nurture email strategy. The institution successfully achieved the goal of diversifying their undergraduate population while enhancing the institution's brand awareness in two new markets. The institution's enrollment marketing team can now build on the market insights developed, concrete data collected, and the growing in-country brand awareness.

**Case #2: US Community College with roughly 19,000 students (Intead, 2022)**

Consider the case of a community college boasting a population of 19,000 students. The enrollment marketing team had used travel recruitment approaches in the past, but never ventured into digital marketing. Their project goals included testing this approach and learning the digital campaign

processes. The Intead team performed market research and identified potential opportunities in two new markets for three specific academic programs.

We created a range of customized ads per market and launched a 14-week digital campaign in Colombia and South Africa, catering to both English- and Spanish-speaking audiences, with an exceedingly limited ad budget of just \$10,000.

The result? The campaign generated more than 10 million impressions and attracted 2,365 high-quality leads. As a benchmark for your marketing team, the average cost per lead for this campaign was \$5. We found that English ads performed better in Colombia than Spanish ads for this particular institution's offerings. That may not be the case for other institutions with different audience demographics and different academic offerings.

This case illustrates the value of market research, strategic messaging, and targeted digital campaigns that tap into new markets to attract a diverse student population. These strategies can be tailored and applied to meet specific recruitment goals for students' entry points to either community college or a 4-year institution.

For more information, Intead's online resource center provides a searchable database of case studies, marketing counsel, marketing training webinars, and downloadable worksheets: [www.intead.com/resource-center](http://www.intead.com/resource-center)

## Resources

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## Bios

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# Data Visualization for International Recruitment

## Enhancing Decision-Making in International Enrollment Management

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*University of North Texas, United States*

### **Abstract**

This chapter delves into the significance of data visualization in international student recruitment, shedding light on how it aids in informed decision-making and stakeholder engagement ranging from selecting entry points to student lifecycle. The author explores various data visualization formats, including bar graphs, maps, and tables, to convey complex information in a clear and accessible manner. Drawing from authoritative sources such as the U.S. Department of State's SEVIS and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the chapter presents real-world examples to illustrate the power of visualizing data in the context of international enrollment management.

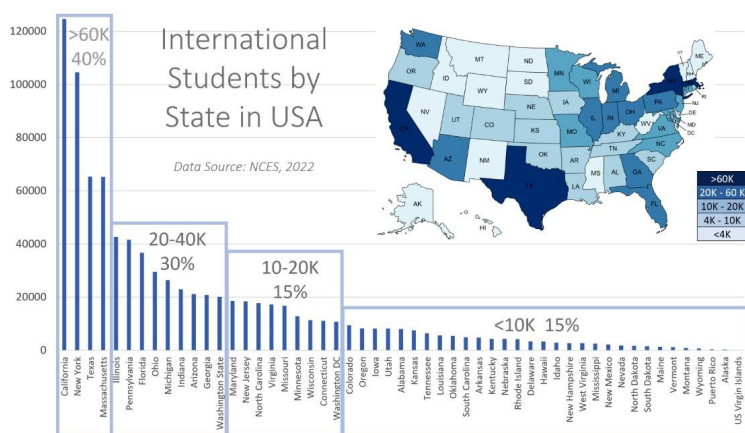
**Keywords:** Data Visualization, International Recruitment, Informed Decision-Making, Enrollment Management, SEVIS, NCES, Higher Education, OpenDoors, Admissions Requirements, Entry Points

### **Why Visualize Data?**

Over the past decade, international student enrollment has become an increasingly important source of talent and a growing revenue stream for

many U.S. higher education institutions. With that, there has been a greater need to conduct international recruitment in a deliberate, well-managed way. International recruitment professionals increasingly face the challenge of justifying their investment in time and treasure and need to obtain buy-in from multiple stakeholders on campus and beyond. That is where the data come in. However, just providing data does not mean that one’s audience is well informed and that the information involved does not provide equal insight. Hence, visualization involves the transformation of data into formats that facilitate its interpretation. In essence, visualization aims to help one ‘get the picture’. This chapter explores a variety of formats to facilitate the interpretation of rich data sources relevant to International Enrollment Management (IEM) in general and International Student Recruitment (IR) in particular.

Figure 1. International Students by State in the U.S.A.



Source: NCES, 2022

Notice in Figure 1 that only 4 states (California, New York, Texas and Massachusetts) enroll more than 60,000 international students each, amounting to 40% of all international students in the U.S., and that an additional 9 states enroll between 20 and 40,000 students each, amounting to an additional 30% of international students in the U.S. Color coding maps and ‘circling’ sections of bar charts aid the rapid visual interpretation of the data.

**International Enrollment**

The most authoritative source of information about international students in the U.S. is derived from data obtained through the U.S. Department of State’s Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). The Institute for International Education (IIE) publishes these data in the form of an annual report called *The OpenDoors Report on International Educational Exchange*. These data are publicly available online at <https://opendoorsdata.org>.

Figure 1 shows the SNAPSHOT (picture at one point in time) of international students by state in the U.S.A. using a bar graph and map. Table 2 provides insight into the segmentation of our industry. The figure presents 5 years of data on the number and percentage of U.S. Institutions by level of international enrollment.

**Number & Percentage of U.S. Institutions by International Enrollment**

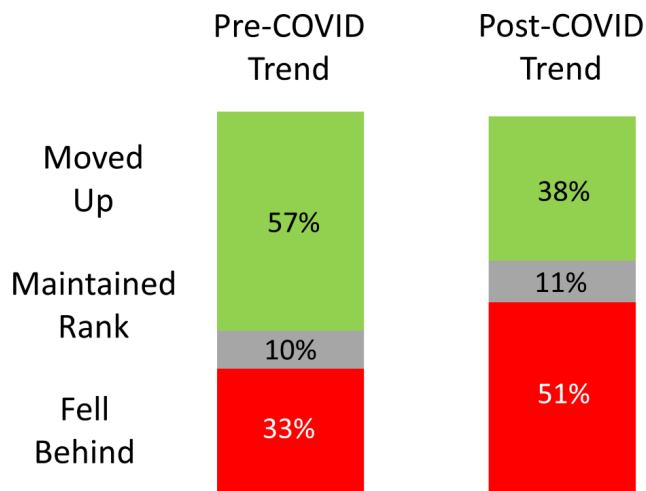
#	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
>8000	16	19	17	15	16
5000 - 8000	32	30	30	23	27
3000 - 5000	42	40	38	33	33
1000 - 3000	158	149	140	129	122
10 - 1000	1306	1271	1260	1177	1122
All	1554	1509	1485	1377	1319
%	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
>8000	1	1	1	1	1
5000 - 8000	2	2	2	2	2
3000 - 5000	3	3	3	2	3
1000 - 3000	10	10	9	9	9
10 - 1000	84	84	85	85	85
All	100	100	100	100	100

(Data Source: iie OpenDoors 2018 – 2022)

*Table 1. Number and Percentage of U.S. Institutions by International Enrollment.*

Notice in Table 1 that the number and percentage of institutions enrolling between 5,000 and 8000 international students remained remarkably constant over the 5 years, despite major challenges in international student mobility during that period.

IIE's annual *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange* provides a count of the number of international students enrolled at higher education institutions across the U.S. Based on this data Figure 2. presents a comparison of the international enrollment trend before and after the COVID pandemic.



Data Source: iie OpenDoors 2022

*Figure 2. Trend in International Enrollment at U.S. higher education institutions.*

Notice in Figure 2 that, while international enrollment at more than half of all the institutions was trending up prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, only just over a third of the U.S. institutions experienced international enrollment growth directly after the pandemic. Red and green are used to indicate to the human eye the relative size of each component.

Another great source of data for international enrollment managers is the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). These data are publicly available and searchable through: [www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/](http://www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/)

Figure 3 and Figure 4 present NCES data related to the key international enrollment question: 'Who gets in where?' Color coding and layered labeling aid in interpreting the complex data presented in these charts.

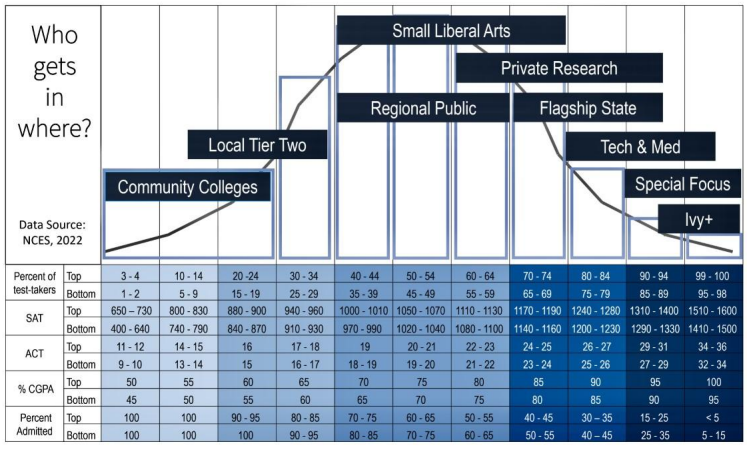


Figure 3. Admission Requirements by Type of Institution.

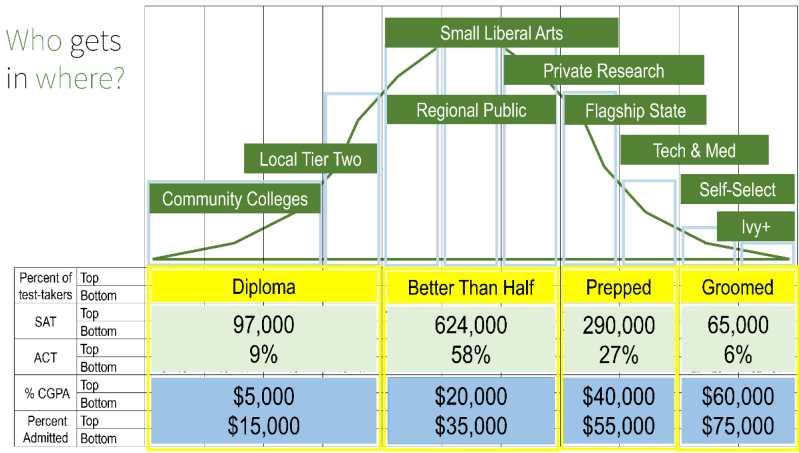
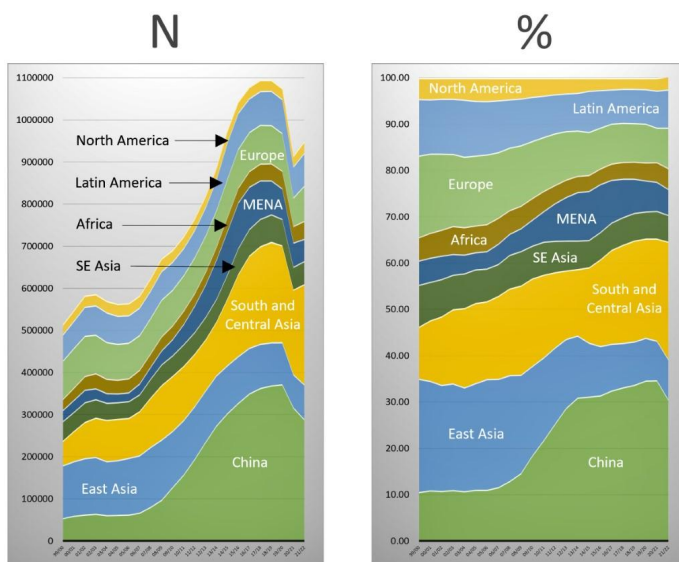


Figure 4. International Enrollment by Type of Institution.

Layered labeling is a technique used to highlight particular portions of dense data graphics to aid in their interpretation.

### The 3Cs

In essence, international recruitment planning is framed by 3 key questions: 1) Where will the students come from (countries of origin)? 2) Where will they be enrolled on campus (colleges and majors)? and 3) At what level will they start (classification)? These 3 elements inform the choices of outreach channels and recruitment approaches.



Data Source: IIE OpenDoors 2000 - 2022

Figure 5. International Enrollment in the U.S.A. by Region of Origin.

Figure 5. presents a LONG VIEW based on 20 years of IIE OpenDoors data on international enrollment numbers and percentages in the U.S. by region of origin. International student mobility worldwide tends to fluctuate significantly over time, so taking a multiyear perspective is advised. The LONG VIEW format utilizes the horizontal axis to represent the years included in the graphic, as many people are familiar with the ‘time-line’ presentation of trends. Presenting a numeric and percentile view, side-by-side allows you to enrich the insight into the relative magnitude of the numeric data you are presenting. This can be further enhanced by consistent color coding that draws the eye to the elements you are comparing side-by-side. Figures 6 to 9 illustrate this technique. Notice in Figure 5 that the rise and decline of students from the Middle East (mostly Saudi Arabia) and the recent strong enrollment growth from South Asia (mostly India) offset a significant decline in enrollment from China.

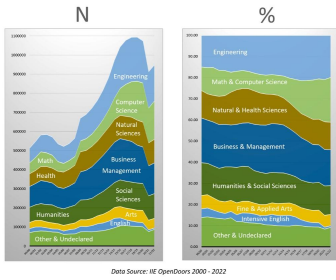


Figure 6. International Enrollment in the U.S. by Field of Study.

Figure 6. presents a LONG VIEW based on 20 years of IIE OpenDoors data on international enrollment numbers and percentages in the U.S. by field of study. Notice in Figure 6 that Engineering growth has reached a plateau, with the recent boom in computer science & analytics, in which students in STEM fields now exceed 50%, the recent decline in Business majors, and the collapse of enrollment in Intensive English programs.

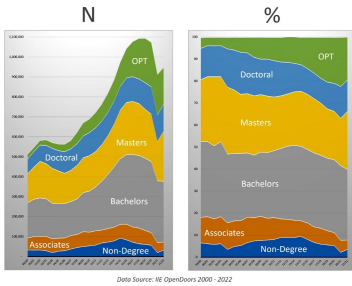
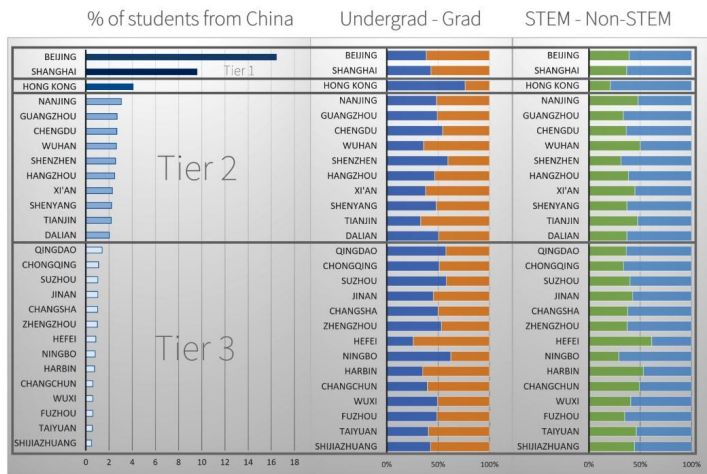


Figure 7. International Enrollment in the U.S. by Classification

Figure 7. presents a LONG VIEW based on 20 years of IIE *Open Doors* data on international enrollment numbers and percentages in the U.S. by academic level. Notice in Figure 7 that the growth in popularity of STEM OPT is not been a recent trend. Additionally, notice the year-on-year strength of enrollment in bachelor’s programs: consistently 1 in 3 of all international students in the U.S.

Figure 9. presents a combination of the 3Cs, in this case, location (cities in China), interest in STEM programs (colleges), and undergraduate vs. graduate academic start level (classification). Notice in Figure 9 how enrollments from Tier 1 cities, Beijing and Shanghai (together a quarter of all students from China in the U.S.) are skewed to Graduate and Non-STEM. The graphic also reveals higher STEM interest in the Nanjing, Hefei, and Wuhan corridors and strong interest in undergraduate and non-STEM (particularly Business) studies in the South China tricity region of Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong.



Data Source: Beijing Prepare Education

Figure 9. Percentage of Students from China by City, Program and Classification.

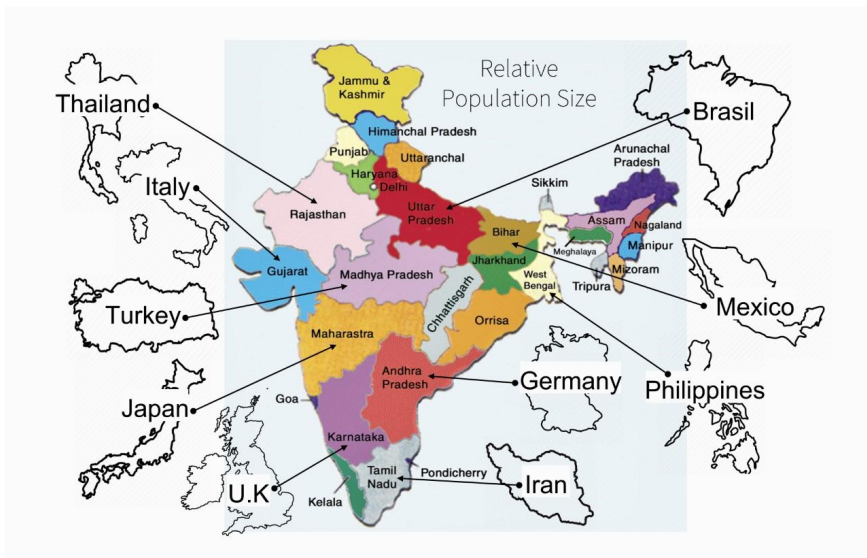


Figure 9. Relative Population Size of States in India. Source: Beijing Prepare Education, 2022

**Deep Dive: India**

As India overtakes China as the world’s largest and fastest-growing internationally mobile pool of talent, data related to international students from

India provide a great opportunity to showcase several forms of data visualization. A key challenge with a massive market such as India is deciding how much time, treasure, and effort to invest in student recruitment from this vast subcontinent.

Figure 9 provides a map of the relative population size of the states of India compared to that of entire countries around the world. Notice in Figure 9 that the population of India exceeds that of at least 10 major countries of origin of international students in the U.S., justifying the allocation of significant time and resources to recruiting students from India. Not all market intelligence comes in the form of numeric data. Local marketing (such as advertisements on the back of Auto Rickshaws in India) can reveal much about which careers and field of study are ‘trending.’

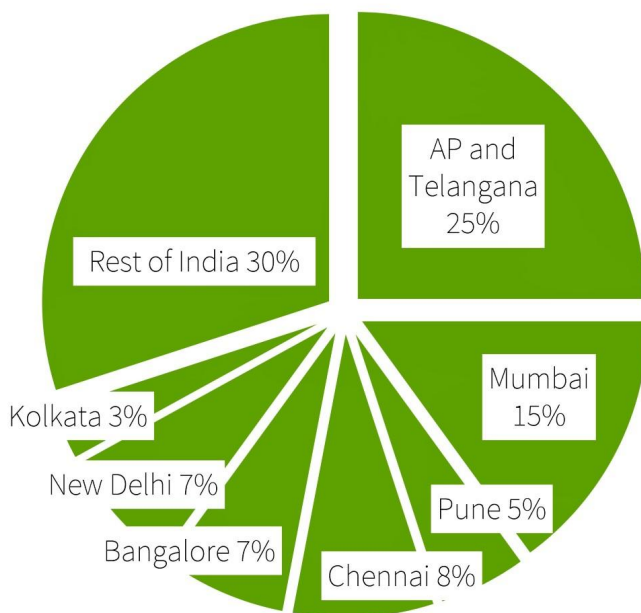


Figure 10. Auto Rickshaw Market Research.

Figure 10 illustrates the trends in the field of study based on local advertising. Notice on Figure 10. How many engineering students were interested in a career in Telecom Engineering just 10 years ago, why many students aspired to become Network Engineers, and why the Big Data economy and popularity of Data Analytics programs recently emerged.

A dilemma in international recruitment relevant to campaigns in many countries spanning a large geographic area is whether to focus/limit physical outreach to capital and Tier 1 cities or to venture further afield and regularly visit secondary and even third-tier cities. India’s massive geography underlines this challenge.

Figure 11 presents a pie chart showing the percentage of students from India in the U.S. by region/city of origin based on data from the U.S. India Education Foundation (USIEF).



*Figure 11. City/Region of Origin of Students from India in the U.S.A. USIEF, 2022*

Notice in Figure 11 that a quarter of all students from India in the U.S. come from the states of Telangana (Hyderabad) and Andhra Pradesh, an additional 40% percent from tier 1 cities, and as much as a third of students come from secondary and third-tier cities.

Figure 12 and Figure 13 draw on IIE *Open Doors* data to provide insight into questions such as: Are all students from India in the U.S. graduate students interested in Computer Science programs?

Figure 12 combines both a 20-year LONG VIEW and a recent SNAPSHOT showing the rise of undergraduate enrollment—now 20% of all students from India in the U.S.

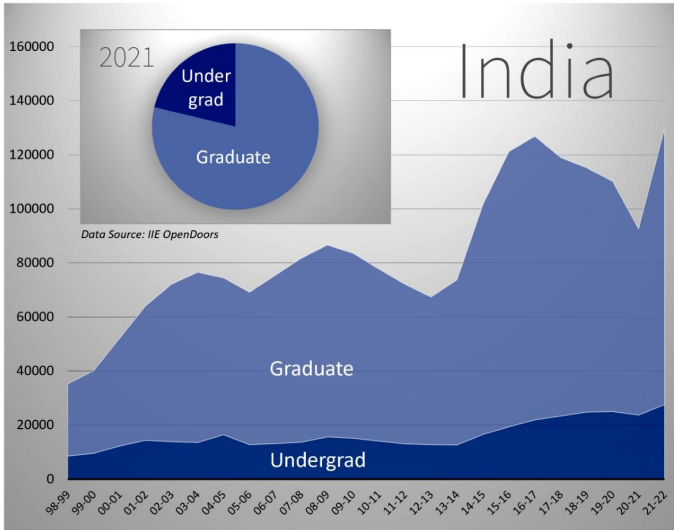


Figure 12. Students from India in the U.S.A. by Classification.

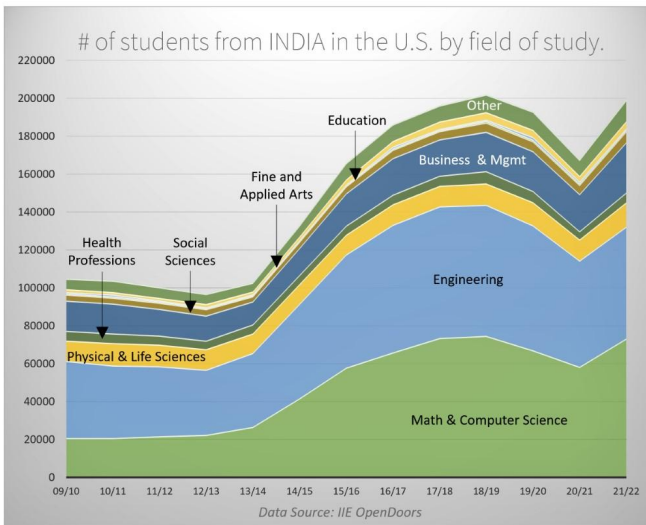


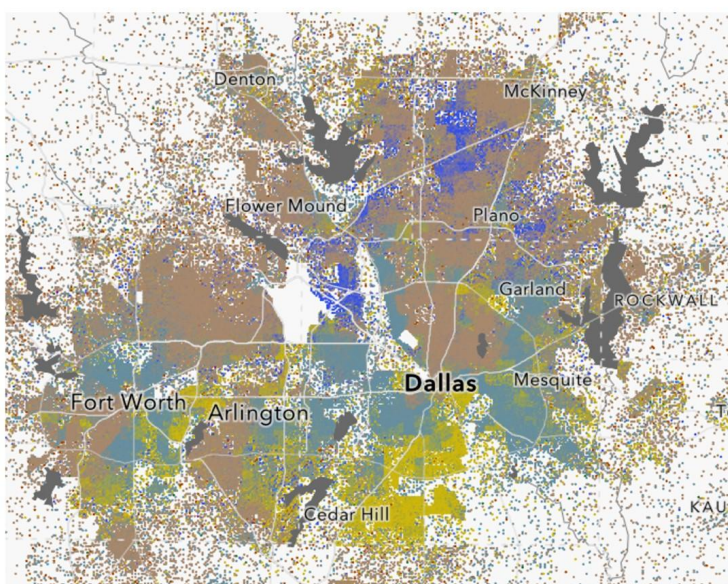
Figure 13. Students from India enrolled in the U.S.A. by Field of Study.

Figure 13 shows which field of study students from India in the U.S. have enrolled over the past 20 years. Notice in Figure 13 that, relative to Engineering, the

Computer Science trend only truly gained momentum less than 10 years ago and represents (only!) A third of the students from India were enrolled in the U.S.

A comprehensive recruitment strategy should include outreach to recommenders located on campus and in the direct vicinity of the institution. After all, no applicant wakes up one day halfway around the world and decides on their own to move to your city and attend your institution. There are always recommenders who suggest or confirm that your institution should be on the applicant's shortlist. For students from India, the "aunties & uncles" in the Desi diaspora communities located near your institution are an important source of referrals.

Figure 14 shows how demographic data can be used to locate diaspora communities.



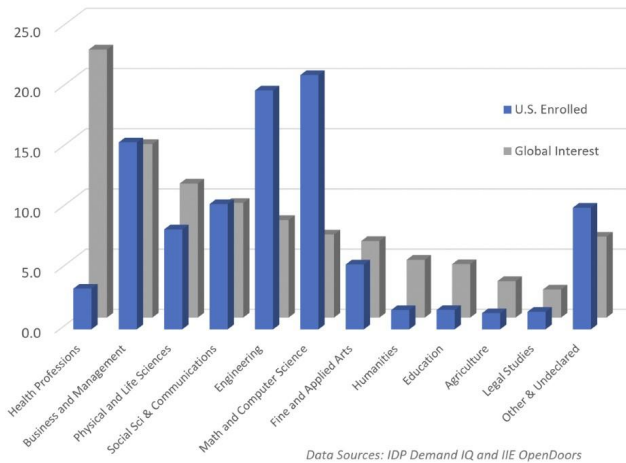
*Figure 14. Demographic Dot Map of the Dallas - Fort Worth metropolis. ARCGIS, 2022*

The map shown in Figure 14 was used to select the locations of informal information sessions at coffee shops to engage diaspora communities.

**Diversification**

The recent downturn in student mobility from China underscores the need to draw students from different regions and countries. Additionally, a comprehensive recruitment strategy targets students with interest in a variety of fields of study.

Figure 15 shows interest per field of study from students around the world interested in studying abroad.



*Figure 15. U.S. Enrollment vs. Global Interest by Field of Study. IDP Demand IQ*

In Figure 15, notice the underrepresentation of international students in the health professions field and the overrepresentation of international students in the STEM fields in the U.S.A. Note the use of color to draw the eye to the primary data (presented in the foreground, in blue) relative to the secondary data (presented in the background, in gray).

A second aspect of diversity relates to region and country of origin. Figure 16. Shows a 20-year LONG VIEW and a SNAPSHOT of international student enrollment in the U.S.A. from the Middle East. The dominant influence of students from Saudi Arabia in this region should be noted. The enrollment of

intensive English institutes in the U.S. has been severely affected by the decline in enrollment in Saudi Arabia. Another ‘volume’ country of origin in the region: Iran faces its own challenges. This underlines the need for diversity within and beyond the region.

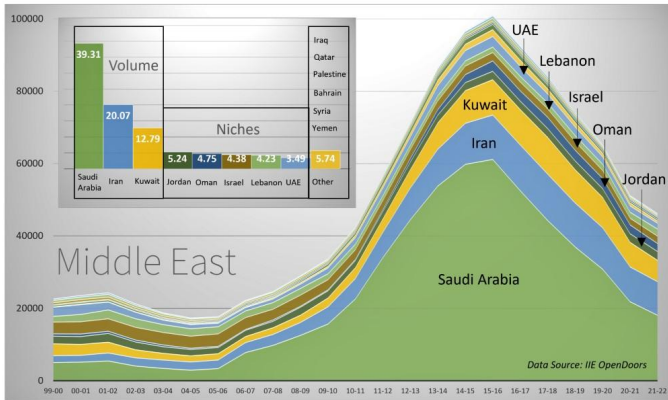


Figure 16. Enrollment of Students from The Middle East in the U.S.A.

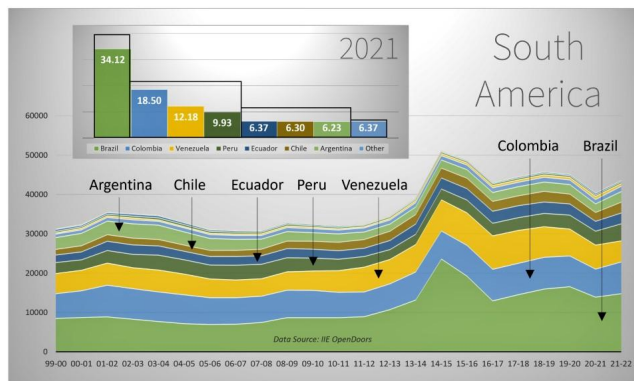


Figure 17. Enrollment of Students from South America in the U.S.A.

Figure 17 underscores the importance of taking a multiyear perspective when presenting data about international enrollment trends. Student mobility from South America in general and Brazil in particular has shown repeated ups and downs driven by economic trends, scholarship program changes, etc. The graphic

suggests that Colombia may be a regional diversification possibility for research. The ‘timeline’ format lets you put recent trends in perspective and emphasize the stability or volatility of the trends you are presenting.

**Proprietary Data**

Beyond public data and data obtained through external recruitment partners, institutions manage their international enrollment based on proprietary data gathered throughout the recruitment and admissions funnel: from the number of applicants to admits, to I-20 letters issued, to visas granted to actual students enrolled. Proactive yield management at each step of the funnel prevents costly melt.

Figure 18 shows how enrollment numbers only sometimes keep pace with application trends. By presenting aggregated data (in this case, by region), you can avoid presenting proprietary data at a granular level, which may reveal too much sensitive information.

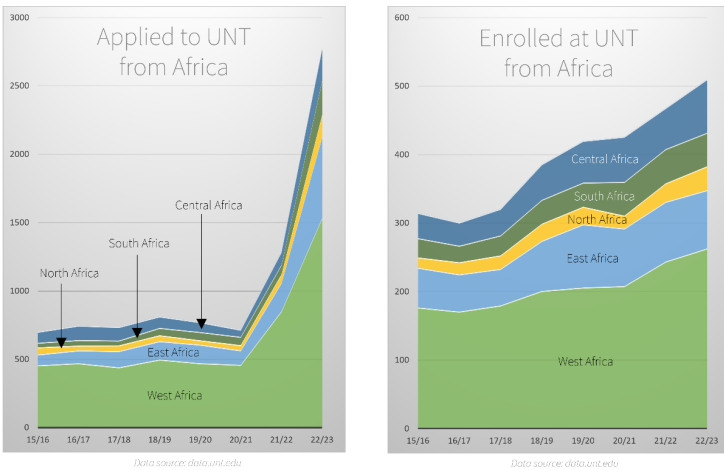


Figure 18. Applications vs. Enrollments from Africa at the University of North Texas. Source: data.unt.edu

**Other Graphics**

To conclude, this chapter includes four additional examples of formats in which graphic representations of data can support International Recruitment and International Enrollment Management.

Figure 19 shows how a color-coded table can be used in planning international recruitment campaigns to navigate the puzzle of academic calendars and public holidays around the world. These data are publicly available at

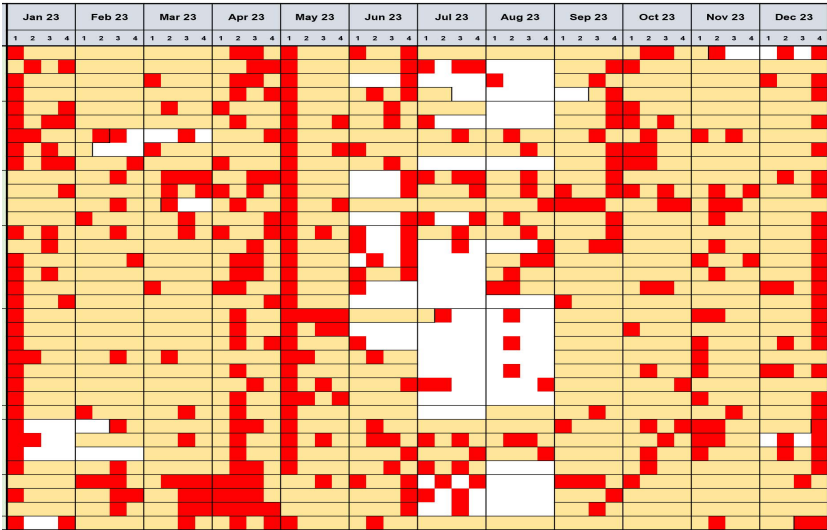


Figure 19. Academic Calendars and Public Holidays around the World; Source: [timeanddate.com](http://timeanddate.com)

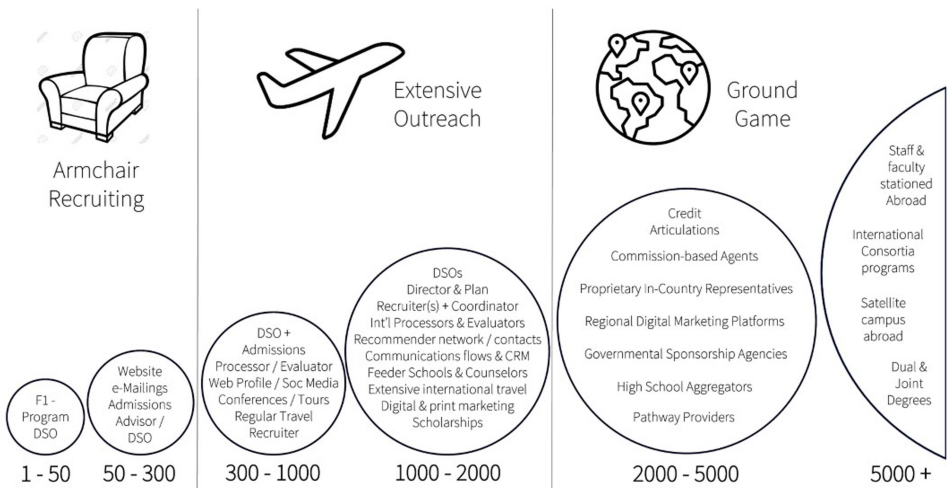
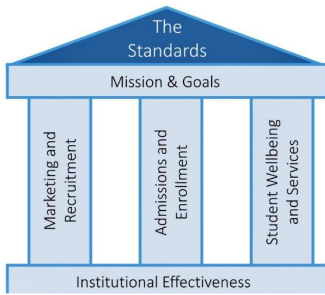


Figure 20. International Recruitment Growth Model.

Figure 20 provides a model for exploring which types of resources and staffing levels may be considered as you plan to expand your international recruitment approaches to increase your institution’s international enrollment. Such a model can support your on-campus dialog to secure adequate funding in proportion to your institution’s international enrollment goals.

AIRC: The Association of International Enrollment Management recently published “The Standards for International Enrollment Management”. Figure 21. aims to make the IEM Standards accessible to a general audience.



Finally, as the international recruitment landscape is rapidly evolving, a number of new organizations are presenting their services to higher education institutions at industry gatherings such as the NAFSA and AIRC annual conferences. Figure 22 offers a map of ‘who is who’ in the emerging EdTech era.



Figure 22. Who is Who at AIRC?

**Bio**

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# National Conversation on Entry Points

## Recommendations and Actions for International Education

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### **Abstract**

In the current international education discourse, the necessity for a nuanced understanding of student mobility and diverse educational entry points is imperative. In this chapter, we offer actionable items in global student mobility entry points, specifically focusing on the United States' role as a premier destination for over a million international students. We also share the multifaceted nature of educational pathways, ranging from K-12 to postgraduate programs, highlighting the significance of alternative entry points such as community colleges and intensive English programs. The narrative underscores the importance of reimagining educational strategies to accommodate the preferences of Generation Z students, who are navigating through an AI and digitized educational environment. Based on the Association of International Enrollment Management's national recommendations approach, we strongly

advocate actionable strategies for enhancing global mobility, emphasizing the need for a seamless integration of diverse educational experiences to create coherent pathways for students. This discourse is pivotal for stakeholders in the state of international education to foster inclusivity, accessibility, and flexibility in the pursuit of academic and career aspirations.

**Keywords:** Global student mobility, educational pathways, international students, Generation Z, U.S. education system, entry points

## **Introduction**

International education has been significantly transformed by the increasing mobility of students across the globe, offering them a plethora of avenues to pursue academic degrees beyond their national borders. The United States, as a premier destination for over a million international scholars, has emerged as a focal point for those seeking quality education across various levels of study. In the academic year 2022-2023, the U.S. welcomed a total of 1,057,188 international students originating from over 210 different countries across the globe (Institute of International Education, 2023).

Entry points into the U.S. education system are manifold, ranging from secondary education to postgraduate studies, including specialized programs like intensive English courses and vocational training. These diverse pathways cater to the varied needs and aspirations of international students, enabling them to craft personalized educational journeys. The American International Recruitment Council (2023) highlights the importance of recognizing these entry points, particularly in the post-pandemic era, where the competition for attracting international students has intensified. As institutions vie to increase their international student body, understanding the multifaceted profiles of these students becomes crucial.

Achieving a degree in the U.S. encompasses a multifaceted process of credit accumulation, which can commence at any stage, location and through various modalities across the student lifecycle. An increasing number of international students are strategically compiling diverse educational experiences, thereby forging pathways that are not only relevant and cost-effective but also of significant value. The completion of secondary education, particularly at boarding schools, marks a critical juncture, facilitating progression towards an associate or bachelor's degree. Engaging in two years of academic work at a community college stands as a pivotal milestone, acting as a bridge to the completion of a bachelor's degree while ensuring the democratization of

access to quality education. Mastery of the English language, achieved through dedicated language programs, is fundamental in equipping students with the necessary tools for academic success and broadening their prospects for further educational endeavors. Moreover, even transient educational engagements, such as participating in study tours or earning training certificates, serve as valuable conduits, potentially navigating students toward the various entry points of U.S. higher education.

Direct enrollment in undergraduate and graduate programs at U.S. institutions represents a traditional pathway, yet the landscape is much broader. The U.S. boasts a rich tapestry of nearly 4,000 accredited higher education institutions, offering an unparalleled diversity of academic options (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Today's international students have the option to pick from a diverse mix of non-credit and credit-earning opportunities, tailoring multiple experiences to suit their academic and career objectives. They seek educational paths that offer ease of access, value, relevance, and flexibility, covering everything from applying and getting admitted to selecting courses, transferring credits, and studying abroad (Kommers & Bista, 2021; Malvaux & Bista, 2022). Student mobility encompasses the movement through different entry and progression stages, not just arriving in the U.S. This broader perspective not only acknowledges the complexity of entry points but also enhances the U.S.'s ability to attract and enroll them effectively.

### **Ten Entry Points**

Luan and colleagues (2024) examine the changing dynamics of international student mobility and the imperative to adapt international education perspectives to meet the preferences and pathways of Generation Z, who are navigating a digitized and complex educational setting. They advocate for a data-driven and open-minded approach to redefining educational policies and opportunities, highlighting the diverse 10 entry points to U.S. undergraduate degrees based on insights from global surveys and the AIRC Spring Symposium.

The 10 entry points serve as valuable and productive platforms for initial engagement with prospective students, with the aim of attracting them to study in the U.S. Some of these entry points, such as University Freshman Admission (UFA), are straightforward and have long been the dominant routes, overshadowing other lesser-known but equally effective ones, such as UTA. These entry points have expanded to include university credits earned

in-person or online. Furthermore, some entry points that may seem unrelated to undergraduate recruitment can indeed be leveraged to attract students to pursue a bachelor's degree in the U.S.

Nevertheless, none of the 10 entry points represents a novel invention. Through thorough research in the field, the authors have chosen to present them impartially, acknowledging that some have been overlooked while others are less developed. Additionally, there is a need for further work to interconnect these entry points in a manner that facilitates the seamless integration of individual educational experiences." Without entry points that are horizontally or vertically integrated, therefore enabling students to navigate and plan their educational journey easily, students are faced with institutional silos lacking clear directional signs. The interests of the student should be, and indeed are, at the forefront of global student mobility. Therefore, it is imperative that we develop, expand, and enhance transitional points for international students and ensure that earned academic credits are truly transferable from state to state and nation to nation. This will make students' educational pathways as efficient as possible and their educational outcomes as equitable and meaningful as possible.

### **Enhancing Equity in Global Education**

It is essential to look into the impact of various educational entry points on equity and global mobility growth, challenging the traditional focus on University Freshman Admission (UFA). We need a broader recognition of entry points beyond the conventional freshman year, highlighting the benefits of community colleges and other pathways that offer more accessible and flexible options for students. These alternatives are essential for students who may not be ready for traditional university entry due to various reasons, offering them a chance to pursue higher education in a manner that suits their unique circumstances.

The central question is: will these entry points impact equity and growth for global mobility? Since the majority of University Freshman Admission (UFA) takes place in the year preceding high school graduation, we are ignoring the fact that not all of them are mentally, financially, or academically prepared at that young age. To begin with, educators worldwide should steer students away from the sole idea of obtaining a university degree by entering as a freshman. Instead, they should counsel students on all available entry points, allowing them to make informed choices. Community colleges, for instance, assist students in achieving their desired outcomes through lower tuition, simpler entry requirements, small classes, and high admission rates to top universities via UTA. They epitomize the American model of democratic choice and equal opportunity. Non-UFA entry

points provide valuable opportunities for students to flourish later in life or assist late bloomers or students with unique learning styles.

Non-UFA entry points such as community colleges, vocational and technical schools, intensive English language programs, online education, MOOCs, gap year programs, and professional certification courses offer diverse and flexible pathways to higher education, catering to different needs and preparing students for university study or direct workforce entry. These non-UFA pathways allow students to pursue education at their own pace, cater to their individual learning styles, and address financial or personal constraints, offering a more inclusive approach to higher education. This could be particularly beneficial for students from countries where falling behind could mean missing out on students' entire educational opportunities, a concept contrary to American values.

### **AIRC's National Recommendations**

In August 2023, AIRC: The Association of International Enrollment Management issued national recommendations advocating for heightened awareness and promotion of various entry points. This initiative was spearheaded by a working group composed of experts, professionals, and practitioners in the field, including Jing Luan, Cheryl Delk Le Good, Maria Dietrich, Daniel Harper, and Michael Shaver (AIRC, 2024). Over a period of two years, AIRC integrated feedback from its general membership, government agencies, and peer associations. With the belief that a national strategy for global mobility, taking into account the complete student lifecycle, their entry points, and the potential benefits this vision could bring to the host nation and humanity as a whole, the AIRC recommendations highlight two crucial areas pertinent to the educational journey of international students to the U.S: 1) the promotion of the numerous and diverse U.S. educational entry points to broaden access to global student and social mobility, and 2) the facilitation of connections between these entry points (AIRC, 2023). As scholars and practitioners in the field, we wholeheartedly endorse the following AIRC 2023 national recommendations:

#### **Recommendation 1**

**Promote the many and diverse U.S. educational entry points to expand access to International Student Mobility.**

With entry points spanning K – 12 schools, public and private secondary schools, community colleges, as well as undergraduate and graduate institutions of higher education, the U.S. educational landscape offers unparalleled opportunities for international students. These entry points include intensive English and pathway

language programs, vocational and business training, short-term study abroad and exchange programs, volunteer, work and cultural programs, an online learning. However, many of these entry points are not known or appreciated even by international student recruitment professionals. As a result, some of these opportunities are left out of the promotion of the U.S. as an international student destination.

Increasing knowledge of the entry points that are available to international students will provide more options for students to begin their U.S. educational journeys, thereby expanding access and increasing program enrollments. Entry points are very often a first step in a longer educational avenue that includes other educational experiences. Increasing awareness and promotion of the number and range of entry points can therefore lead to increased enrollments in additional educational programs.

*Actions:*

- Identify and promote model practices that demonstrate the benefits of a wide variety of educational entry points.
- Train those who advise and counsel students about the diversity of educational entry points.
- Promote multiple entry points to students, their families, and stakeholders so that they are aware of the robust educational choices students have.
- Increase the attractiveness of student educational entry points by providing evidence on how the opportunities are an excellent value.
- Advocate for improving the processing of student and exchange visitor visas to make entry to and transition between educational opportunities as seamless as possible.
- Promote and conduct training on enrollment management standards and best practices that support the features of international student mobility.

Achievement of a U.S. academic degree involves accumulating course credits, a process that can start at diverse entry points throughout the student lifecycle. Increasingly, international students are taking ownership of their educational avenues, combining discrete educational experiences to construct what they

believe are the most relevant, affordable, and valuable experiences. Completing an English language program is an entry point that can provide a solid foundation for educational success. A summer work or internship experience can ignite interest in pursuing a professional degree program. Graduating from a secondary school can provide an effective entry point to a two- or four-year college degree experience. Completing two years at a community college can be a valuable entry point toward a four-year college degree.

Linkages between entry points are not currently well articulated or developed to benefit the international student's educational avenue. Ideally, discrete educational experiences should be connected seamlessly together to foster continuation toward completion of an educational journey that delivers relevant and valuable outcomes. Instead of entry points that are well integrated horizontally and vertically so that students can easily map out their educational path, students often encounter institutional and programmatic silos without clear road signs between them. To that end, we must develop, expand and improve the links between international student entry points, and make earned credentials truly portable from state to state and from nation to nation. Achieving this will help make students' educational avenues more efficient, and their education outcomes more meaningful and relevant.

## **Recommendation 2**

### **Facilitate connections between entry points to support international student mobility.**

#### *Actions*

- Highlight models of articulation that link entry points into educational pathways to serve as examples for institutions and students to emulate.
- Advocate for policies and financial practices that support international students' access to funding to support their international educational avenues.
- Support greater portability of international students' educational credentials and transfer opportunities by adopting the principles of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region | UNESCO.
- Develop course articulation databases and assessment practices that include the use of life skills equivalencies and non-standardized aptitude

tests.

- Develop a scorecard for “accessibility of entry points and outcomes” and conduct listening sessions and surveys to monitor improvement

Stakeholders should actively enhance and streamline the connectivity between various educational entry points for international students. This involves reducing and eliminating barriers and bottlenecks that obstruct equitable access to student mobility and hinder positive educational outcomes. Stakeholders must focus on developing clear, integrated pathways across institutional and programmatic silos, facilitating the transferability of credentials across state and international borders.

For the stalwart of international education, the outlook of the U.S. is dim, should the traditional institutional-based and free-market-style operations of the past decades continue. Highly-ranked schools thrive with little effort to recruit international students, while the majority of U.S. universities and colleges are left to compete on their own, often against each other, by using their limited institutional resources. Further, international education does not reflect the domestic educational avenues and practices which, if promoted abroad, would increase the sources of international students by giving them a greater number of entry points with more flexible options. Summing up sentiments from the field, there are fewer educational roads for international students to travel. Any efforts by students to seek learning away from their own countries are part of global student mobility. The classic adage “All Roads Lead to Rome” holds only partial significance unless we inquire about the specific path each individual has taken and the mode of transportation chosen. All in all, the U.S. needs reform in international education that requires concerted efforts among governmental agencies, institutions, and stakeholders.

We emphatically encourage practitioners in the field to incorporate and adapt these recommendations into their practice. We should all contribute to the formulation and implementation of organizational action plans for each of the two critical areas outlined in AIRC’s recommendations.

Embarking on a journey to study in the U.S. offers students an opportunity to explore America beyond the confines of the classroom. Their purpose extends beyond acquiring academic tools; they are here to develop essential life skills and to become socially and emotionally adept and well prepared for a dynamic world that they shall face. Their journey is a privilege. It has the potential to reshape their actions, values, and even their aspirations. For those providing support along

their transformative journey, recognizing and facilitating various entry points can significantly broaden opportunities for both students and institutions. It is imperative for everyone to wholeheartedly embrace, support, and promote these entry points for the benefit of all involved.

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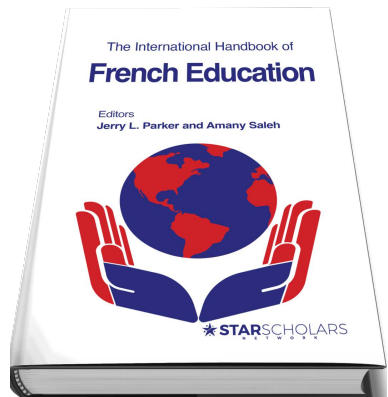
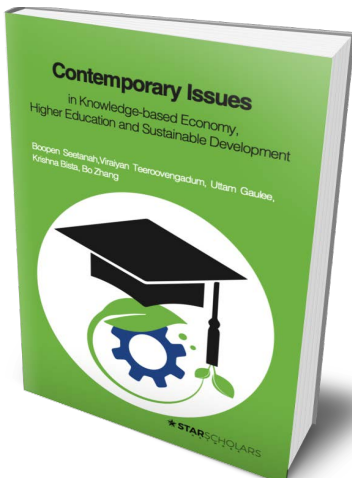
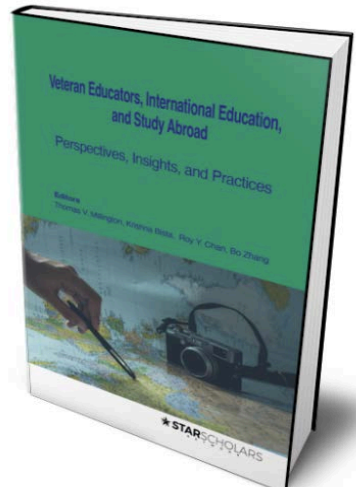
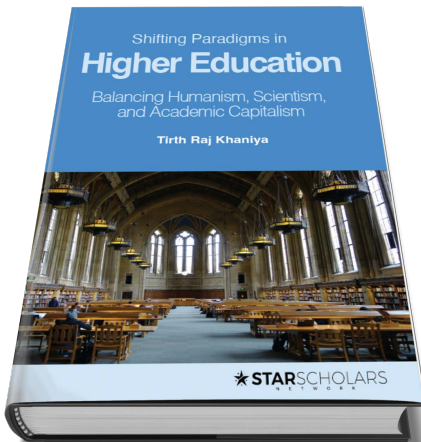
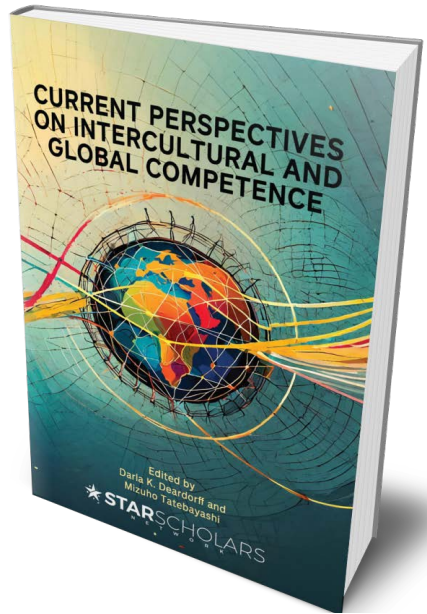
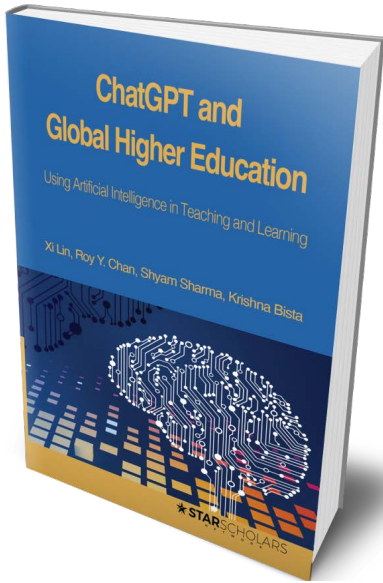
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