

The International Student Question: 45 Years Later

Response to “Will We Be Admitting Foreign Students in 1975” on page 4

Since the publication of Dremuk’s article 45 years ago, the landscape of international educational exchange has changed significantly. Some of the most notable trends distinguishing the past from the present are:

- Enrollments of international students have increased over the years, totaling 723,277 in 2011, according to the Institute of International Education. However, the growth in enrollments has been uneven, suggesting volatility in student mobility.
- Other nations, especially those in Asia-Pacific and Europe, are competing with the US to attract international students. Their strategies include aggressive branding and marketing of programs and institutions, relaxed immigration policies, and competitive pricing. The US faces serious global competition and may be in real danger of losing its dominance as the destination of choice for international students.
- International students constitute an ever-increasing source of revenue for colleges and universities, given declining state funding for higher education and increased operational costs. As institutions increasingly rely on tuition revenue, the race for full-paying international students has intensified within the US, but with little attention paid to the educational rationale.
- International enrollment has become a lucrative business for some institutions. As such, a larger number of higher education institutions are creating staff positions charged with international recruitment activities whereas others



are attempting to retrain admission professionals (especially those with a domestic orientation) to take on the task of international recruitment.

- In their quest to recruit larger number of international students, some institutions are outsourcing international recruitment to agents and other third parties. This practice is not without controversy with regard to ethical, legal and financial issues.
- Institutions engaged in recruitment activities often focus on recruitment and admission with little attention paid to retention and the overall student experience. This approach may result in possible “mismatches” and undermine institutional reputations if not carefully assessed.

Forty-five years ago, Dremuk’s article emphasized the importance of institutional commitment to international educational exchange while expressing concerns regarding different dimensions

of institutional readiness. Key issues of institutions’ ability to recruit, retain and graduate international students persist. In fact, the challenges identified in Dremuk’s article have become even more pronounced in this larger context of global competition for international students. The most pressing challenges are:

- **Socioeconomic diversity:** More than 80 percent of undergraduate international students in the US are family- or self-financed. The US, therefore, continues to educate principally the younger generation of elites from other nations. There is very little socioeconomic diversity among the international student body.
- **Lack of diversity in institutions where international students study:** International students continue to be concentrated in a relatively select number of institutions. Despite the number and diversity of accredited institutions in the US, close to 60 percent of international students choose to attend the 170 institutions, each hosting more than 1,000 students. This type of concentration fails to leverage the competitive advantage of the US higher education system.
- **Knowledge base of admission professionals:** Institutions continue to be challenged in expanding the knowledge and expertise of admission professionals as it relates to evaluating foreign credentials, academic background of international students and English language proficiency. Meanwhile, US institutions also must stay abreast of changes in educational systems throughout the world that impact international student admission to remain competitive globally.

- **Intercultural competence:** The level of intercultural competence of professionals engaged in international enrollment and international student programs and services continues to be a challenge, particularly for smaller institutions with little infrastructure in place and a short history of hosting international students.

The changing landscape of international educational exchange calls for US institutions to consider a holistic, strategic approach to

international enrollment management. Such an approach includes strategic recruitment, admission, retention, graduation, and re-entry of international students. Professionals engaged in international enrollment management and student program and services must be held to high standards of ethical practices by their professions and institutions, and must avail themselves of professional development resources available through international education associations and others. Ultimately, US universities hosting international students have an obligation to

do “right” by students and their families. Short-term gains from increased recruitment of international students should not and cannot be made at the expense of students and institutional reputation.



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Entrance Examination Board during 1963-64. These workshops, held at five different locations, were aimed at strengthening the admissions processes at schools with limited experience in admitting foreign students.

The recent creation of foreign student admission sections in the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers are also potentially important developments for the academic community. By enabling admissions officers to exchange information and ideas, to initiate studies and other projects, and to arrive at a common understanding of admissions practices, much can be accomplished in this key phase of the exchange program.

By pooling resources and sharing ideas, both locally and nationally, colleges will best be able to initiate and carry out international student programs most appropriate and beneficial to them. Our overall efforts, through cooperative ventures, will be the most important step toward achieving the educational exchange objectives of our universities, our students, and our nation.

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