

Why Should We Recruit International Students?

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ABSTRACT

International students make up a significant number of the student body on most US colleges and universities (Institute of International Education (a), 2010). They come from many countries and represent many varied cultures. These students bring diversity to the universities and give their respective schools the opportunity to add diversity to the curricula of their chosen schools. This paper explores ways that a small public university has used their international business students to add diversity and breadth to their business program. It also compares the Major Field Assessment Test results of the international students to the US students in the School of Business to determine the impact of international experience to an overall understanding of global business.

INTRODUCTION

The number of foreign students attending American colleges hit an all-time high in 2008. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2009), 671,616 students attended US institutions in 2008-09, which is an increase of almost 8% from the year earlier. Though graduate schools tend to rely more on international students, enrollment grew far more strongly at the undergraduate level, where the number of students jumped 11%, compared to 2% at the graduate level. (Fisher, 2009)

The increase continued for the year 2009/10, as the number of foreign students grew to 690,923, for a 2.9% increase. This increase included both undergraduate and graduate students. The largest increase was a 29.9% increase from China, followed by a 24.9% increase from Saudi Arabia. However, there were some decreases, as Japan (-15.1%) and Mexico (-9.4%) saw a drop in their international students studying in the US. California and New York hosted the largest number of foreign students, 94,279 and 76,146 respectively. Business and Management (21%), Engineering (18%), Physical and Life Sciences, and Mathematics and Computer Science (9% each) lead the fields of study for international students. (Institute of International Education (b), 2010)

WHY DO THEY COME?

Why is studying in the US so attractive to students around the world? It is a lure for the adventurous and courageous, not to mention the perceived quality of US schools. Traveling

around the globe may be a dream that individuals can realize through US-based studies via exchange programs, colleges and universities and vocational schools. The quality, diversity, affordability, and flexibility offer students a broad scope of opportunities unlike anywhere else.

Quality is a big issue. The US system of national accreditation makes finding a quality educational program in the US a simple process. Most programs have a national accrediting body that assures quality in their areas. Schools that are accredited must meet rigorous standards to receive accreditation. Accrediting agencies must be recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the US Department of Education. Accreditation helps insure that graduates of these programs receive an education that is consistent with other institutions.

The diversity of institutions make US study attractive to international students. There are public, private and vocational schools that offer many programs with varying levels of entry requirements, tuition and financial assistance. The depth and breadth of these choices mean that almost any international student can receive a quality education in their chosen field.

The flexibility of credits earned at a US institution generally are transferable to other institutions. This gives international students the flexibility to move from one school to another during their residence in the US. It allows them to complete the first two years at a less expensive college and then transfer to a four-year college or university to complete their degree. (Why International Students Come to Study at US Colleges and Universities, 2011).

PROBLEMS INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FACE

Even though international students face many problems when they choose to come to the US to study, many seem to handle the transition well. They face the same problems the US students face in addition to many others. One of the biggest problems international students face is a financial one. They must have the resources for not only tuition and living expenses, but also the funds to travel from their home countries to the US. International travel is expensive and it is not covered by financial aid. A US education is expensive and tuition, room and board at an undergraduate institution will cost from \$15,000 to \$40,000 per year. A graduate education can be even more expensive. There is very little aid available with the exception of citizens of Canada and Mexico. Most grants, scholarships, and loans from public and private sources are restricted to US citizen (eduPass, 2011).

Language can be a problem for some international students. However, many international students begin studying English in kindergarten and can speak and write English very well. Many have also been immersed in classes in their home country that are taught in English. In addition, some colleges require an English proficiency test before they are accepted.

Foreign students often experience homesickness and loneliness. One way they try to overcome this is to choose roommates from their country. They also make friends with international students from other countries who face the same problems they do. Attending a college that has a large body of international students makes this much easier. The students may form a support group for each other. Other foreign students choose to interact with US students to become acclimated to the culture change more quickly (Studying InThe US Is Not For Everyone, 2011).

International students can also be introduced to activities that are unfamiliar and may even be illegal. There may also be scam artists who prey on their vulnerability. Finding a US friend they can trust is imperative for those students. Foreign faculty members are often mentors to the international students because they understand the problems the students face. They can also participate in campus programs and become familiar with campus and local customs. International students should be able to explore freely, but must be able to make smart decisions that are in their best interest (Studying In The US Is Not For Everyone, 2011).

USING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO ADD DIVERSITY TO CURRICULA

This influx of foreign students gives universities the opportunity to add diversity to the curricula by having the international students share their culture and practices with the body of American students. Many of our US students do not have the opportunity to go abroad for study. By using the international students, our US students can experience some of their culture by simply being in the same classroom with them and hearing of their experiences in their home country. It is up to the individual schools and professors who teach the classes to best determine they can take advantage of the opportunities provided by our international students.

A small public college in the southeast has used the expertise of their Slovakian students to improve the structure of a School of Business study abroad program to the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Slovakian students have afforded opportunities to the study abroad group that would not have been available without their help. The study abroad group has had the opportunity to tour the facilities of US Steel and Whirlpool in Kosice, Slovakia. Not only were the students allowed to tour the facilities, but they also met with the CEO's of both companies. They were able to explore the differences in the two companies in Slovakia and their parent companies in the US. The group also met with the Prime Minister and Parliament. They toured the US Embassy in Bratislava and met with the US Ambassador. The group was also greeted in the hometown of the Slovak students, Stara Lubovna, by the Mayor and entertained with a traditional Slovak dinner with a band. These meetings and business visits arranged by the Slovak students or their parents greatly enhanced the study abroad experience to the Czech Republic and to Slovakia.

International students also share their culture and introduce their US peers to the food from their homeland by having a night when they cook and invite all the students to come and sample their local foods. They also share their customs and local dress. This has become an annual event and takes place in the Student Activities Center.

Another way the foreign students share the culture and customs with "Bag Lunch" seminars. They may form panels to answer questions or present a seminar on their home country. Foreign faculty members also take a big part in these seminars.

PERFORMANCE OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS STUDENTS

An important research question remains concerning the impact of the growing number of international students in the United States. This study examines the success of international business students as measured by the Major Field Test in Business and compares that success to US students. We also examined ways that international students added to the overall diversity of the university.

The school of business under study uses the Major Field Assessment Test (MFAT) as part of their assessment of the business curriculum. It is administered to all seniors in the capstone course, Strategic Management. The international students are tested the same as US students. The results of a two-tailed T test, $t(387) = 1.96$, $p < .01$) suggest that even though there is a significant difference in the scores, we believe that difference is explained by the high quality level of the international students (means are found in Table 1. The competition is fierce for the opportunity to come to the US to study and the top students are the ones that receive the student visas. Occasionally there is an exception to this with athletes. Some visas are granted to athletes who also receive athletic scholarships. However, while these students may not be the top students in their home country, they are usually still good students. They must meet the same entrance requirements as all other students.

Table 1

Students	N	Mean
US	360	150.9*
International	29	157.9*

(** $p < .01$)

The international students are often sponsored by a company that sends them to the US for study and expects them to return home and work for their sponsor. The university has had several accounting students from the Bahamas that had their expenses paid and in turn they knew they would return home to work for the company. They know they have to excel in their field to meet their commitment; therefore, they do all they can to prepare themselves to return home

Another interesting question concerning MFAT scores explores any difference in male and female students. The resulting output, $t(387) = 1.96$, $p < .10$), although marginally significant, does show a difference between the scores of male and female (means can be found in Table 2).

Table 2

Students	N	Mean
Male	196	152.5+
Female	191	150.4+

(+ $p < .10$)

The issues of gender diversity are widely discussed and often rest on the attention given to male students at an early age. However, with such a negligible difference, we do not consider this an issue for analysis. .

CONCLUSION

International students bring much needed diversity to a university. They are excellent students, add value to classes, and share their customs and culture with their peers. Universities would do well to actively recruit international students. If the university provides support services and

orientation programs specifically for the international student, they should be successful in their efforts to increase the number of international students they enroll. A multicultural office can give them the support they need and encourage them to immerse themselves in the university by taking part in students activities, and making friends outside their comfort zone. The international student adds value to the university and to the programs they select for study.

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