

International Students in U.S. Higher Education

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Student Population Overview

- International students are a unique student population in U.S. higher education because institutional reporting of international student demographics, enrollment, and visa statuses are required and regulated by U.S. federal law (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2021).
- There were 914,095 international students enrolled at U.S. Higher Education institutions in the 2020-21 academic year, and international students make up about 4.6% of all students in U.S. Higher Education. (*IIE Open Doors FAQs*). Over 75% of these students were enrolled in Doctorate-granting institutions, while 11.4% were enrolled in Master's Colleges and Universities, as defined by the Carnegie Classification System (Institute of International Education, 2021b).

Relevant Terms

- The definitions of international student groups are federally mandated and very specific. They are based on the visa status determined by the U.S. Government. SEVIS (The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) is the federal database that tracks and monitors visa holders (Israel & Batalova, 2021) International Students are classified as students in F-1, M-1, or J-1 visa status.
 - F-1 visa for full-time students at an academic institution such as a college, university, or high school, or who are enrolled in a language training program.
 - M-1 visa for full-time students at a vocational or other nonacademic institution.
 - J-1 visa for participants in an educational or cultural exchange program. This visa category includes college and university students as well as physicians, summer work-travel visitors, visiting professors, research and short-term scholars, teachers, and au pairs.
- Immigrants (permanent resident with an I-151 or Green Card), U.S. citizens, undocumented immigrants, those with deferred action status, or refugees/asylees are NOT considered "international students" under federal regulations or data reporting purposes (*IIE Open Doors FAQ's*).

Historic Background & Trends

- The international student population has been steadily increasing since data has been collected. The 2020-21 year saw a 15% decrease in international student enrollment due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Institute of International Education, 2021a). 2021-22 data shows that post-pandemic international enrollment has increased by 4% the previous year, and is expected to continue increasing in the future. (Institute of International Education, 2022).

The International Student Experience (Issues)

- There are many varied challenges that international students face, ranging from the obvious to unexpected. In addition to general culture shock, international students might experience challenges relating to their new classmates, finding food that tastes familiar, accessing medical and mental health resources, and discrimination and prejudice in their new communities (Trestler & Potori, 2020).
- International students must also adhere to federal requirements and report any changes to their academic program, personal data, and post graduation intentions, as monitored by their SEVIS record. This presents specific and unique logistic challenges for international students that domestic students do not face, for example: planning spring break trips, applying for summer jobs and internships, and accessing health insurance and transportation.

International Student Population Demographics

- International students in the U.S. are a diverse population of students across racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries. While international students come to study in the U.S. from across the globe, the leading places of origin are China (35%) and India (18%). The leading fields of study for international students are Engineering (21%), Math and Computer Science (20%), and Business and Management (16%) (Institute of International Education, 2021c).

Student Development Considerations

- Relevant student development theories for international students are Tinto's (1993) Model of Institutional Departure and Schlossberg's (1995) 4 S Transition Model.
 - **Tinto (1993) Model of Institutional Departure:** explains the leading causes of departure from an institution (adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation) and the things students need to persist (integration into Academic and Social systems, both formal and informal).
 - International students arguably have a more difficult time with these four factors, which is why institutional support in the form of attentive advisors, active student organization, academic support, and other forms of formal and informal systems are crucial.
 - **Schlossberg et al. (1995) 4 S Transition Model:** discusses the four factors that influence a person's ability to cope with transition (situation, self, support, and strategies).
 - International students face a variety of challenges during the transition to a U.S. institution. This model can be applied to coping mechanisms that may be used by international students and ways an institution can support them.

Strategies for working with International Students

- Strategies we recommend for working with international students include: (Ting & Morse, 2016)
 - Offer language and academic support programs.
 - Promote positive social relationships between international students and peers.
 - Cultivate partnerships between international students and the community.
 - Create inclusive career planning and development services.
 - Establish campuswide partnerships to support holistic learning and development.
- Additionally, NAFSA (The Association for International Education), is the professional organization for student affairs professionals working in international education and with international students and scholars. NAFSA conferences, workshops, training, and advisor manual are resources recommended for professionals working with international students.

References & Recommended Resources:

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