

low language proficiency. The effect of this policy on the recruitment of international students has to be assessed and better coordinated with other policies.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Although there has been a rapid growth of the number of international students in China in recent years, there is room for further increase, given the low percentage of international students in the overall enrollment. China's policy to attract international students is just starting up. Support measures at the national, local, and institutional levels are still insufficient. Several challenges have to be addressed.

The current curriculum is too limited to meet the needs of international students. Given that more than half of the current international students are nondegree students who stay only for a short period, it is essential to develop courses in other languages, in particular English.

Current criteria regulating tuition fee levels are another obstacle. The fact that the national higher education administration has the exclusive authority to set these criteria leads to a dilemma for the institutions. Some universities have a strong wish to expand enrollments of international students by improving services and the quality of the educational offer. However, under the current rigid tuition fee criteria, these universities cannot invest sufficient resources to provide quality education and services to international students.

Universities have ignored the development of services such as websites with information in foreign languages, library services, club activities, and psychological counseling. For security reasons and to avoid possible conflicts, Chinese universities usually provide better accommodation conditions to international students than to their domestic counterparts. But this limits the possibilities for daily interactions and mutual understanding between the two groups. There is still a long way to go in cultivating a mature, multicultural campus culture.

International students, especially those from developing countries, are eager to seize opportunities for employment or internships in China. However, as a result of unfavorable visa, immigration, and employment policies, these opportunities are limited, except for a few initiatives launched in more developed regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2017.90.9865>

Are International Students “Cash Cows”?

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The budget cuts faced by many American higher education institutions have compelled its leaders to find alternative sources of revenue to ensure the financial sustainability of their institutions. In search for solutions, many spotted the opportunity of recruiting international students as a new source of cash flow to fund operations and fill the budget deficits.

Between 2007–2008 to 2015–2016, the number of international students in the United States increased by 67 percent to reach 1,043,839. At the same time, the economic benefits from the presence of international students on American campuses increased by 111 percent to reach US\$32.8 billion. This clearly indicates that the financial contributions of international students have outpaced the increase in enrollment.

The Boston Consulting Group developed a framework in the 1960s to help companies think about their allocation of resources. One of the terms they used in the framework was “cash cows.” Broadly, it indicated a product or company that provided steady, reliable cash flows to fund its growth and the growth of a company's other business units.

By the recent trends we have been witnessing, are some American institutions treating international students as cash cows? Are they placing high priority on expanding international enrollment with the lack of corresponding investment of time, attention, and resources to support the success of these students?

EXPANDING THE POOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The intensity of budget cuts and the opportunity to replace those cuts with international student tuition revenue came together to invite new entrants in the recruitment marketplace. In the last decade, many institutions started focusing on increasing the total revenue by increasing the number of international students and charging additional service fees to these students.

However, many have realized that expanding enrollment is not easy, especially if the institutions lack the global visibility and rankings valued by students, or if their geographic location is not appealing. In addition to constraints of visibility, institutions also realized that the segment of students who have both the financial means and academic preparedness to study internationally have many choices to

consider, making this segment highly competitive.

Given that many institutions were not able to award more financial assistantships or scholarships to the student body at large, they started recognizing the importance of expanding the applicant pool to students who may be less academically prepared, but have the financial backing to invest additional time to prepare to study in the United States.

The lower academic preparedness might be in English or other subjects. To help international students gain English preparedness for admission, Intensive English Programs (IEP) became an important support mechanism. Between 2007 and 2015, the number of international students in IEP grew by 145 percent to reach 133,335 students.

As IEPs were experiencing growth to meet English preparedness, private third-party players started emerging to provide additional remedial support for academic preparedness beyond English, and offered an opportunity to earn transferable academic credits. These providers also brought with them additional funds to expand recruitment and related support services.

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In response to this changing environment, NAFSA: Association of International Educators commissioned me as the principal investigator of a research study to understand the landscape of third-party pathway partnerships in the United States. The primary reason identified by survey respondents for partnering with third-party pathway providers was to access their recruitment network. In contrast, the top reason for not partnering was fear of loss of academic standards.

Despite the concerns for loss of academic standards, one cannot ignore the threat to financial sustainability faced by many institutions. An ecosystem of third-party providers, which partner with institutions aiming to grow enrollments, has been gaining stronger acceptance. This raises the question whether investments in recruitment and increases in tuition fees are matched with student success initiatives. Are institutions ready to support students who are coming with diverse levels of preparedness and expectations?

REINVESTING IN STUDENT SUCCESS AND CAMPUS READINESS

In its report *Integrating International Students*, the American Council on Education noted that “while efforts to recruit international students are on the rise, the data do not show a commensurate increase in support services for these students.” The last decade of student enrollment in the United States has exposed the lack of readiness among many campuses in engaging and supporting international students.

At many campuses, support services for international students mostly distill down to immigration and visa compliance. For example, while career advancement is a key consideration for many international students, for institutions it is the last priority. By continuing to increase tuition and fees for international students without a proportionate reinvestment in their success, some institutions are on the slippery slope of treating international students as cash cows.

American higher education has a strong reputation for excellence and quality among international students. Institutions that are only considering the revenue side of the equation without commensurate investment in campus readiness and student experience are not only threatening the appeal of the United States as a destination, but also pursuing an unsustainable way of expanding international enrollment.

To build a sustainable and inclusive model of enrolling and integrating international students with local students and campus communities, institutions of higher education must invest in training campus staff to effectively work with the culturally diverse students. They must understand the diversity of student needs and continually invest in improving student experiences and outcomes.

Asking for additional resources in times of fiscal constraints is unrealistic. What is needed is an innovative approach to reframe and reimagine the strategies that reinvest in supporting student success. In my article “Three Waves of International Student Mobility 1999–2020,” I argue that institutions are heading towards hypercompetition for international students not only from traditional destinations but also new destinations like China. This will require institutions to become innovative in allocating resources and supporting student success.

In sum, while cash flow challenges are a reality for many institutions, treating international students as cash cows is unethical and detrimental to the hard-earned reputation of American higher education. Institutions must innovate to balance recruitment with reinvestment in student experiences and outcomes. ■

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2017.90.9927>