



## Best Practices in Recruiting and Retaining International Students in the U.S.

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The number of international students on U.S. campuses is steadily increasing, and the prospect of the numbers increasing is in the forecast. According to Open Doors report (2012) the number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States increased by 5% to 764,495 during the 2011/12 academic year. Altbach (1991) argued that international students are “among the most important and visible elements of internationalism” (p. 305). This research intended to identify the best practices in recruiting and retaining international students through learning the best practices of the select U.S. institutions with the largest number of international students on their campuses. Findings indicated that the key when recruiting and retaining international students is the ability “to relate and communicate effectively when individuals involved in the interaction do not share the same culture, ethnicity, language, or other salient variables” (Hains, Lynch, & Winton, 2000, p. 2). Presence of international students on U.S. campuses is significant and the institutions surveyed are providing the best services that they can to make these students feel welcome. However, international students are not simply recipients of services provided to them by these institutions but rather are partners both benefiting from this exchange.

*Keywords:* international education, internationalization, student recruitment, retention

The number of international students on U.S. campuses is steadily increasing, and the prospect of the numbers increasing is in the forecast. According to Open Doors report (2012) the number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States increased by 5.7% to 764,495 during the 2011/12 academic year. This year's growth was primarily driven by a 23% increase in Chinese student enrollment in the United States to a total of nearly 194,029 students. This is nearly 22% of the total international student population, making China the leading sending country. Students from India decreased by 3.5% to a total of nearly 100,270. Indian students represent 14% of all international students in U.S. higher education. Open Doors (2012) further explained that international students contribute approximately \$22.7 billion dollars to the U.S. economy through their expenditure on tuition and living expenses. The report further stated that 63.6% of all international

students receive the majority of their funds from personal and family sources and almost 70% of all international students' primary funding comes from sources outside of the United States. What the report did not identify is how these institutions are recruiting and retaining their international student populations. This study clarifies and explains some of the methods of recruiting and retaining international students on U.S. campuses that the universities with the largest number of international students on their campuses utilize.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is a wealth of research on international students in the U.S. The needs of these students are well researched and defined (Hull, 1978; Stafford, Marion, & Salter, 1978; Zikopoulos, 1991; Huntley, 1993; Woolston, 1995; Lin & Yi, 1997; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009; Özturgut & Murphy, 2011; Lemke, 2011). Altbach (1991) argues that international

students are “among the most important and visible elements of internationalism” (p. 305) but the majority of foreign students studying outside their home countries are from developing countries and it is difficult to predict the flow patterns (Zikopoulos, 1989; Obst & Forster, 1995; Open Doors, 2012). Becker and Kolster (2012) stated that the United States has no comprehensive national policy in regards to recruiting international students or the internationalization of higher education. Even though the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) initiated drafting of a national policy in 2003, these efforts had failed. They further added that the U.S. “competes in the international student market on the basis of sheer size. The country receives the highest number of international students in the world, but on a *per capita* basis, its performance is modest, despite the fact that it has many of the best and richest universities in the world” (Becker & Kolster, 2012, p. 35). This argument certainly requires a self-reflection on the practices of recruiting and retaining international students on U.S. college campuses.

Lemke (2011) argued that with the significant contributions and the roles of international students in the United States, there is an increasing need for more research on this topic. Goodwin and Nacht (1983) argued that the most U.S. colleges and universities have been admitting international students without having a strong understanding of their purpose and how these international students would fit within their institutions. It is still the case. International students are sought after for their financial contributions (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Lasanowski, 2009) without much effort to having a plan in regards to how they would make sure that the both sides would benefit from this educational exchange. International students do not only contribute to the U.S. economy but also serve as research and teaching assistants in many fields but mostly in the fields of science and technology. In such areas, many academic programs rely on them.

With this in mind, what is missing in the literature is the best practices to recruit and retain these students. The intentions of these institutions certainly differ and this research does not intend to highlight the intentions of these institutions when recruiting and retaining their international student population but rather an exploration of the methods they use to recruit and retain. Some institutions are using agents (New York Times, May 11, 2008; Allen, 2011) and sometimes not-so-appropriate practices to recruit these students to include holding crucial information back just to get them to their campuses. Some of the institutions are utilizing their current students and online marketing tools to recruit (New York Times, May 11, 2008). The issue with retention is that once the students arrive on campus, the academic and social support services can be rather limited or sub-standard: “Upon arrival, they find a discrepancy between their social expectations and social reality”

(Klomegah, 2006, p. 305). It is therefore imperative to identify the best practices for the utilization by other smaller and institutions with less number of international students on their campuses in the U.S.

This research intended to identify the best practices for recruiting and retaining international students through exploring the current practices of the select U.S. institutions with the largest number of international students on their campuses. The data for the institutions selected for this research is from the Open Doors 2010 report. Open Doors’ 2010 survey lists 1,391 institutions with their numbers of international students on their campuses. One hundred and sixty Associates, Baccalaureate, Master’s and Doctorate granting institutions (McCormick & Zhao, 2005; Carnegie Classification, 2005) are selected to be surveyed. Top 40 institutions from each category are surveyed to find out what their practices are when recruiting international students and what their practices are in meeting the needs and expectations of these students (retention). The findings may inform other U.S. higher education institutions with a lower number of international students with their efforts in recruiting and retention of international students on their campuses and further inform policy makers about the weaknesses and strength of programs for international students on U.S. campuses: “when social scientists do not get involved, policies are made by others, such as politicians; and when not informed by scientific knowledge, they turn out to be less than adequate” (Kagitcibasi, 1996, p. 185). This study further intended to contribute to the policy making efforts in the field of international higher education and internationalization of higher education in the U.S.

#### **Review of Relevant Literature**

Knight (2004) defined internationalization as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education” (p. 2). It is “an ongoing, future-oriented, multidimensional, interdisciplinary, leadership-driven vision that involves many stakeholders working to change the internal dynamics of an institution to respond and adapt appropriately to an increasingly diverse, globally focused, ever-changing external environment” (Ellingboe, 1998, p. 199; Lemke, 2011). Even though international student recruitment and retention is one of the aspects of internationalizing postsecondary institutions, it is a key component. Therefore, it is imperative that we study the current practices of higher education institutions in the U.S. in regards to how they respond to internationalization and how they accommodate initiatives, progresses and policies of internationalization.

#### **Current Practices in Recruitment of International Students on U.S. Campuses**

With the competitiveness of the international student markets and the complexities surrounding each

country and culture, international student recruitment is becoming a more complex operation than it has ever been (Allen, 2011; De Luca, 2011; Lemke, 2011). Traditional recruitments have been done through local agents with local expertise in specific countries. This has been an effective way to recruit students mostly because of the logistics and financial considerations of sending recruiters to each country for recruitment. Although U.S. universities are increasingly willing to send recruiters abroad, working with local agents has been the main form of international student recruitment in the recent years. Other than logistics and financial considerations of maintaining offices in different countries, cultural nuances and overall expertise in the educational systems of different countries have been handicaps for international student recruitment initiatives of U.S. institutions.

For example, recruiting students from China and Turkey requires an extensive expertise of the higher education systems of both countries. Both countries have complicated higher education systems with extensive government oversight on regulations. Additionally, recruiting students from these two countries requires significant understanding of the cultural differences. One example would be that the prospective students in China and Turkey would be utilizing family funds for their studies. Therefore, an extensive understanding of familial relations is essential. That is, families need to be convinced rather than the students. Parents or in some cases extended family members (uncles, aunts, etc.) will be paying for the expenses of these students while they study abroad and therefore should be the main target groups for the recruiters. Local agents will have the advantage of insiders within these cultures and are more effective recruiters.

#### **Examples of Successful International Student Recruitment Efforts**

International student recruitment has been in the agenda for higher education professionals for some time. The forces that are driving universities to invest heavily on international student recruitment are complex. Each institution has its specific agenda and specific initiatives within its strategic goals. The cases below are the examples of such initiatives and the motives behind these initiatives:

##### **Case 1 - University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.**

C. Eugene Allen, Distinguished Teaching Professor and Former Associate Vice President for International Programs at the University of Minnesota, explains that: when the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities was facing a decline in the international undergraduate enrolment, they needed to find a way to attract more international undergraduate students. They identified some of the reasons for the decline in the international student enrollment: 1) 9/11, 2) increase in the non-resident tuition, 3) growing global competition, 4) lack of a stable

ESL program, and most importantly, 5) lack of a recruiting program. As a solution, they established a recruitment committee to meet two to three times a semester to identify the needs, plan activities and hear the reports on recruitment trips, and share recent and relevant information on international student flow trends. This recruitment committee was only one of the several initiatives to increase the number of international students on their campus. They further planned consultations with other institutions, sought student feedback, developed a comprehensive strategic plan with budget, staffing and recruitment goals, and reviewed the campus services for international students. As a result of their initiatives, there was a 105% increase in international freshman and 19% overall increase from 2005 to 2006 (Allen, 2011).

**Case 2 - International Consultants for Education and Fairs.** Marisa De Luca of the Marketing and Communications at International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF) explained that the international education markets represent more than 45 million students but we are currently at 2.7 million students in institutions across the world. This number (2.7 million students) is expected to grow to more than 8 million students by 2025. She argued that utilizing education agents for international student recruitment has several advantages: 1) As the agents know the language and the culture, they provide fast and direct access to specific markets, 2) cost-effective in regards to not having to send university staff for recruitment while also providing a diversity in the number of countries represented and provide local infrastructure and 3) improve the quality of student applications by enforcing the admission criteria. They further utilize value added services as providing counseling for both parents and students, and help with the visa and travel arrangements (De Luca, 2011).

**Other Relevant Cases.** Adam Beeson of the International Graduate Admissions at University of North Carolina- Charlotte (UNC-C) explained that the international undergraduate student number at UNC-C increased by 42 % between 2005 and 2007. International graduate students now represent 16 % of UNC-C's total number of students. The key for UNC-C's success is due to its clear and strong institutional commitment and by establishing mutually beneficial partnerships around the world (Beeson, 2011). An international education consultant, Tim Rogers, explains how effective the fairs can be for international student recruitment. He explains that electronic recruitment methods, online application systems, web-based consultancy are relatively common among international student recruitment initiatives. However, attending fairs is still one of the best practices to recruit international students. These fairs provide a way to connect the students and recruiters and establish relationships. For the attendance at these fairs to be effective, however, publicizing presence, having the right

materials, inviting your market to the fair, and following up are extremely important (Rogers, 2011). Heidi Buffington of Saint Louis University, Madrid Campus explained that their admission efforts include participation in international education organizations, recruiting tours and developing rapport with counselors, creative use of resources (current students and new technologies, etc.), promotional materials and mailings, and community outreach (Buffington, 2011). New York Times article (2008) explained that agents are especially crucial in Asia. Asian parents speak little or no English but have a significant historical trend of wishing to provide a prestigious education to their children. These agents can help them navigate through complex application processes, select an appropriate university, and help with getting visas. For lesser known American universities, using agents is a cost effective way to recruit students from Asia (New York Times, May 11, 2008).

An InsideHigherEd article (2009) explained that even though using agents is an effective and preferred method of recruiting international students, there are still concerns among international educators. They question the fact that these agents have no direct ties to a specific institution and they simply work to increase the number of students they recruit for commission revenue rather than focusing on finding the most qualified and appropriate students (InsideHigherEd, 2009). A more recent article in InsideHigherEd explains that it is important to ensure credibility and integrity among the education agents that are advising students on the education choices in the U.S. Mark Shay of American International Recruitment Council suggested certifying recruitment organizations as legitimate and trustworthy based on the certification standards developed by various university members (March 25, 2011).

Recruitment of international students for U.S. campuses focus on using agents in foreign countries and the issues this method brings with it. However, there is no further information about what other methods, if available, are being utilized for recruitment. It is therefore crucial to compile a list of best practices to inform U.S. institutions in their efforts to further internationalize their campuses through international students. It is especially important for institutions new to this field as there are significant research and decisions to be made before entering and expanding in this market.

### **Current Practices in Retention of International Students on U.S. Campuses**

Current literature on the retention issues for international students focuses on the challenges that international student face on U.S. campuses. Most international students face social problems related to social integration, daily life tasks, homesickness, and role conflicts. They often feel overwhelmed by cultural differences (Constantinides, 1992). They also express their concerns about competitiveness, individualism, and

assertiveness of American culture (Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992; Miller-Idriss & Worden, 2010; Arkoudis et al., 2012). Some even feel that American culture is somewhat offensive (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). When the international students come to the U.S. the first time, they feel the absence of their own traditional sources of social support (Pederson, 1991). Therefore, social support is important not only for self-esteem and self-confidence but also for helping reduce stress that plays an important part in academic achievement (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Glass & Westmont, 2013).

In a study investigating intercultural communication competency, Greer and Hinchcliff-Pelias (2004) explained that interactions between culturally different individuals involve complex understandings, dispositions, and abilities that must be learned if the intercultural communication is to be successful. For this research, data were collected through extensive interviews, focus groups, one-to-one interviews and by reviewing 64 international students' written personal narratives from 20 nations. Although the researchers were aware of the fact that these selected students were not to be considered representatives of their national cultures, Greer and Hinchcliff-Pelias (2004) considered them to be representatives of a contemporary "international student culture" (p. 9). They found that every one of the 64 students interviewed articulated one or more negative experiences related to their past and present intercultural interactions. A recurring theme across students' responses was the need to reflect on difficult intercultural interactions and then to make the commitment to learn from them. Hinchcliff-Pelias and Greer (2004) concluded that educators of international students are in a position to guide the learning of their international students. Because of this, they should take responsibility for helping their students develop better skills that would allow them to communicate more effectively.

When it comes to the retention of international students, current literature explains the significance of friendship networks (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Arkoudis et al., 2012). Furnham and Alibhai (1985) explain the friendship networks as international students' commitment to and level of interest in establishing friendships with host nationals. This is especially significant because when international students have strong social support system, they tend to adjust to college life in the U.S. more effectively and quickly (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Schram & Lauer, 1988; Ray & Solem, 2009; Glass & Westmont, 2013). Having friends from the same country or students from other nations over students from the U.S. help them adjust and adapt more easily. However, for all we know, while individuals foster positive self-appreciation as belonging to a specific group, they may also perceive the prejudice and stigmatization from other groups and

experience exclusion and isolation. Research further indicates that when the international students feel isolated and lonely and even feel severe depression (Dillard & Chisolm, 1983; Mori, 2000; Owie, 1982; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Yakunina et al., 2013), they tend to focus more on academic achievement (Chu, Yeh, Klein, Alexander, & Miller, 1971; Dozier, 2001).

If asked, probably, institutions with international students would argue that they have read the research and are using it to guide practice. In reality, they are doing 'good things' when they foster 'international nights' or help an international student with paperwork; however, this does not address the root of the problem expressed in the research which dates back to the late 1970's (Stafford, Marion, Salter, & Chu, 1978). Specifically, the current research suggests that U.S. citizens and educators do not understand their roles in the acculturation and thus the retention of international students on their campuses. It is therefore another reason, other than the financial contributions and so-called internationalization efforts, to learn about the best practices in the retention of international students.

#### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to find out the best practices for recruiting and retaining international students on U.S. campuses. Qualitative research is used to gather and analyze data. Berg (2004) explains that "this type of study may be seen as a prelude to a large social scientific study...This sort of exploratory study may be useful as a pilot study, for example, when planning a larger, more comprehensive investigation" (p. 256). This method is especially suitable for this study as the intention was also identify the best practices of several institutions, which may then put into a larger policy making context. Vissak (2010) noted that the "application of this method can be useful for transcending the local boundaries of investigated cases, capturing layers of reality, and developing new, testable and empirically valid theoretical and practical insights" (p. 372). Creswell (2009) further added that the qualitative researcher interprets what is seen, heard and understood" (p. 175) and the researcher interpreted the responses as he heard and understood.

Hundred and sixty (160) U.S. institutions hosting international students with the largest number of international students on their campuses in 2010 are selected for this study (Institute of International Education, 2010). The annual *Open Doors Report* (supported by a grant from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State) on International Educational Exchange presents the latest trends on international education through providing data on international students who study in the United States and American students who study abroad (Institute of International Education, 2013).

To find out current practices and performances in recruitment and retention, top Forty (40) institutions with the largest numbers of international students on their campuses from each Associate's, Baccalaureate, Master's, and Doctoral institutions (Carnegie Classification, 2005) were surveyed. Each of the 160 institutions are emailed with a link (SurveyMonkey™) asking to fill in a survey. Two questions were asked for survey: (a) Please list five best practices your institution is currently utilizing to recruit international students and (b) Please list five best practices your institution is currently utilizing to retain international students for survey and collection of data.

Survey questions were sent to the university administrative personnel related to international admissions. The participants of the survey were university administrators working with the international students and international academic programs, for example, Vice President, Director, Associate, and Assistant Directors of International Programs, and Director, Associate and Assistant Directors of International Admissions. Responses were kept anonymous and confidential. Out of 160 institutions surveyed, 22 doctoral, 14 Masters, 9 Baccalaureate, and 8 Associate's institutions responded to the survey (N=53).

#### **Analysis**

Data collected through this study is analyzed inductively and deductively. A list of thematic codes was developed based on an initial read of the survey responses (see Tables 1 & 2). Inductive analysis was conducted through "discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data" and deductive analysis was conducted through some of the categories developed "according to an existing framework" (Patton, 2002, p. 453), which is the review of recent related literature (piori codes). The researcher utilized preliminary research and related literature as the guidelines for the data analysis. "This early grounding and planning can be used to suggest several categories by which the data could initially be coded for subsequent analysis" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 209). As the researcher read and reread the data in depth, multiple themes emerged in addition to the themes that "were derived from the researcher's insider sense of issues that would occur in real life" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 211). The codes after the initial read were shifted and modified as the researcher reread and rethought the data (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). For example, preparing brochures for international student recruitment was categorized under "Marketing" theme. Providing "counseling services" was categorized under "Campus Resources" theme. Further engagement with the data helped generate the final themes. These themes "then became buckets or baskets into which segments of text are placed" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 159) and provided a basis for the analysis.

**Findings**

**Best Practices in Recruiting International Students**

The themes emerged in international student recruitment are: 1) Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources, 2) Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events, 3) Partnering with other organizations (colleges and universities, non-profit and governmental institutions, high schools, for-profit organizations), 4) Passive Marketing (Web advertising-online, brochures and booklets, etc.), 5) Utilizing staff and faculty, 6) Utilizing alumni, 7) Utilizing agents, and 8) Snowballing (word-of-

mouth). These themes are organized and presented through the tables below. These methods are listed under each institution category in the order of utilization.

The following table summarizes the prioritized methods of recruitment for the institutions that have participated in this research. It should be noted that the list below is the summary of all responses (see Appendices A & B) and shows how each institution category prioritizes its recruitment efforts. A consistency was seen in the responses of survey of 53 institutions across the categories of international student recruitment methods.

Table 1  
*Summary of Utilized Methods of International Student **Recruitment** in the Order of Utilization*

Doctoral	Masters	Baccalaureate	Associates
Passive Marketing (Online brochures and booklets, etc.)	Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources	Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events	Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources
Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events	Partnering with other organizations.	Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources	Partnering with other organizations
Partnering with other organizations	Passive Marketing (Online, brochures and booklets, etc.)	Utilizing international alumni	Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events
Utilizing staff and faculty ( international student office, faculty trips) Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources	Utilizing agents Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events	Passive Marketing (Online, brochures and booklets, etc.) Utilizing staff and faculty ( international student office, faculty trips)	Passive Marketing (Online, brochures and booklets, etc.) Utilizing staff and faculty ( international student office, faculty trips)
Utilizing alumni	Utilizing international alumni	Partnering with other organizations	Utilizing agents
Snowballing (word-of-mouth)	Snowballing	Utilizing agents	Utilizing international Alumni
Utilizing agents	Utilizing staff and faculty ( international student office, faculty trips)	Snowballing	Snowballing

**Best Practices in Retaining International Students**

The themes emerged from the data and the review of relevant literature are: 1) International Student & Scholar Services Staff, 2) Academic Programming and Support, 3) Social and Cultural Engagement and Support, and 4) Financial Aid, Health Services, Religious Support, and Immigration Support. These themes are organized and presented through the Tables below. These methods are listed under each institution category in the order of

utilization.

The following table summarizes the utilized methods of retention of the institutions that have participated in this research. It should be noted that the list below is the summary of all responses and shows how each institution category prioritizes its retention efforts. In the survey of retaining international students, responses of all participating institutions across different categories were found consistent.

Table 2  
*Summary of Utilized Methods of International Student **Retention** in the Order of Utilization*

Doctoral	Masters	Baccalaureate	Associates
Social and Cultural Activities Engagement and Support	Social and Cultural Activities Engagement and Support	Social and Cultural Activities Engagement and Support	Financial Aid, Health Services, Religious Support, and Immigration Support
Academic Programming and Support	Academic Programming and Support	International Student & Scholar Services Staff	Social and Cultural Activities Engagement and Support
International Student & Scholar Services Staff	Financial Aid, Health Services, Religious Support, and Immigration Support	Academic Programming and Support	International Student & Scholar Services Staff
Financial Aid, Health Services, Religious Support, and Immigration Support	International Student & Scholar Services Staff	Financial Aid, Health Services, Religious Support, and Immigration Support	Academic Programming and Support

**Discussion**

Findings indicate that there is not one preferred and appropriate method to recruit and retain international students but there are institution specific practices. The recruitment and retention efforts are planned and executed according the demographics of the international student populations at each institution.

**Recruitment of International Students**

Brown (2009) explains that there is an intensified competition for international students and this has put pressure on the institutions to “improve their product and to develop internationalization strategies to attract international students and to provide an environment in which domestic and international students can benefit from their confrontation with diversity” (p. 439). Bolsmann and Miller (2008) point out three major reasons to recruit international students: a) ‘academic internationalism’ that is a tradition of universities to recruit international students, b) international students are viewed as economic resources, providing education and training returns income to universities, and c) to civilizing, controlling, training and developing the

international students and build up an ‘academic entrepreneurialism.’ However, there is no simple or one method to recruit international students. Research findings indicate that using agents is not necessarily the most preferred method now. Even though several institutions utilize agents and it is still one of the strategies for their recruitment efforts, utilizing online marketing is considered to be the most common method with significant results. This passive and low-cost method is explained to produce significant results in the efforts of increasing the number of international students on their campuses.

Direct involvement of staff and faculty through fairs and other recruitment events is also utilized as an effective method to recruit students. Findings further indicate that the institutions are spending more time and effort in recruiting international students than they do for American students. They further utilize significantly more diverse approaches such as providing academic support and utilizing campus resources in addition to online

Table 3  
*The Summary of the Responses from **Baccalaureate** Institutions Listed in the Order of Utilization*

<b>Recruitment Method</b>	<b>Examples from the Responses</b>
Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events	-Attending international student fairs in different countries with members of enrolment staff (including the Dean for Admissions and the Director) -Making trips around the world at least twice a year -Meeting with college officials, non-academic organizations, and consultants in different countries -Participating in virtual fairs in different regions around the world
Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources	-Professional staff specifically for international student recruitment -Provide scholarships
Utilizing international alumni	-Engaging international student alumni, parents of international students and alumni -Alumni served as part-time recruiters in several countries
Marketing (Online, brochures and booklets, etc.) Utilizing staff and faculty	-Placing advertisements in local media (international locations) Participating in virtual fairs in different regions -Full time director of international student recruiting
Partnering with other organizations	-No Response
Utilizing agents	-No Response
Snowballing	-No Response



marketing and attending international education fairs. For example, Baccalaureate institutions responded in survey of best practices in recruiting international students: “Attending international student fairs in different countries with members of enrollment staff (including the Dean for admissions and Director), making trips around the world at least twice a year, meeting with college officials, non-academic organizations, and consultants in different countries, and participating in virtual fairs in different regions around the world” (see Table 3).

In short, all the methods utilized have merit and the traditional methods of recruiting students are less likely to be modified but simply replaced with the recent technological advances around the world. Countries sending students to the U.S. are extremely well-equipped to select institutions among thousands of possible institutions for their students to attend. That is, it is important to understand how these countries use, transfer, and manage information technology.

Responses from the institutions further suggest that one of the best practices is that they do respond to inquiries from students and agents in a timely manner. Developing a research-based recruitment plan is crucial.

Informing and getting the faculty (and other key stakeholders on campus) involved is equally important in recruiting international students. Bishop (2010) states that providing counseling service to prospective students and parents is another approach of recruiting and retaining international students. However, in survey responses, none of the universities mentioned this significant component but providing counseling was a campus resource available for all students. This shows the weakness of the institutions surveyed in providing services for international students through the guidance of research.

**Retention of International Students**

Even though bringing international students to the U.S. is getting rather competitive, findings indicate that the institutions spend more time, effort, and finances to retain the international students they recruit. They do focus on social and cultural activities and events more than they do on academic support. For example, these institutions provide orientation sessions to introduce new international students to the university community. They facilitate and advise various cultural sharing programs throughout the year which allow international students to

Table 4  
*The Summary of the Responses from Masters Institutions Listed in the Order of Utilization*

<b>Retention Method</b>	<b>Examples from the Responses</b>
Social and Cultural Engagement and Support	-Strong support program for international students -Pairing native students with internationals, Buddy program - match international with domestic students -Multicultural office with many events -Kitchen and social spaces for international student clubs, Support All Nations Club, Friendship Family Program -Bicycle and car rental programs -Outings and activities for international students
Academic Programming and Support	-English Language Institute -Strong support program for international students -English placement test
Financial Aid, Health Services, Religious Support, and Immigration Support	-Support with visas, work permits, tax laws -Employment on campus -In-state tuition for students with GPA's above 2.5
International Student & Scholar Services Staff	-Training faculty in managing classrooms with internationals -High quality international office

connect not only to the university, but also to the local community, and the multicultural students services – a resource for international students who need assistance with financial aid concerns, housing, tutoring, social-cultural issues, and academic support” (see Table 8, Appendix B).

Previous studies on the challenges of retaining international students on U.S. campuses indicated that the issues are commonly focus around the social integration into the life in the U.S. rather than any academic achievement issue (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Özturgut & Murphy, 2011; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992; Pederson, 1991). Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) suggested that international students “face the challenge of making new friends, coping with loss of social support, and developing a new social support system” (p. 30). However, one concern as highlighted in the literature that was not a significant finding of this research is providing personal support to retain international students (Dillard & Chisolm, 1983; Mori, 2000; Owie, 1982; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Yakunina et al., 2013). Even though international students are acknowledged and supported through various social and cultural activities, the strong need for personal support is a significant shortcoming of the efforts of the U.S. institutions with their retention efforts.

Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) suggested that there must be an assessment process to understand international students, have strong teams of administrators and counselors, and arrange the resources at the university to help ease the transition of international students. Galloway and Jenkins (2005) and Zhao et al. (2005) further confirmed that administrators and counselors need to help international students by giving them an opportunity to explore the differences and possibilities in intercultural communication. Another concern was that the English language challenges of international students were not expressed in the responses. Zhang and Mi (2010) explained that even though culture shock, homesickness, lack of study skills, etc. are significant challenges for international students, lack of language skills are the “biggest and the most urgent in the social and academic life of international students” (p. 372). Though there were no particular best practices for language skills, several institutions integrated this in Academic programming and support: “English language institute and English placement test” (see Table 4).

Therefore, prior to any intervention for the retention of international students through social, cultural, academic etc. programming, it is imperative that a strong language support system be provided (see e.g., Barat &

Huba, 1994; Lewthwaite, 1996; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011; Yakunina et al., 2013).

### **Developing a Model for International Student Recruitment and Retention**

This study explored the best practices in recruitment and retention of international students on U.S. campuses. The responses indicate that the methods adapted either for recruitment or for retention have to be aligned for both purposes. For example, when institutions utilize academic and campus resources for recruitment, these efforts also contribute to the retention of international students. Another example is that when utilizing faculty for recruitment, it is also important to utilize faculty when recruiting and retaining international students. Faculty members are crucial in the sense that they do have the most contact with international students on campus and are far more sought after for any questions international students may have. It is therefore imperative that when the institutions develop their international student recruitment and retention efforts, they do consider the interconnectedness of both efforts, include the faculty, and plan accordingly. Also, given the fact that each institution has its own reasons for having international students on campus and varied campus resources, they need to identify their reasons for having international students on campus.

**The Proposed Model.** Survey responses did not indicate a systematic method for recruiting and retaining international students. Practices were adopted successfully in most cases. However, there is not necessarily a model that guided these institutions. Findings indicated a need for systematic analysis and planning for the internationalization of higher education campuses.

The model for recruiting and retaining international students begins with institutions’ assessment of the reasons for wanting/needing the presence of international students on their campuses. This assessment (and clarification) ought to connect with the overall strategic plan of the institution. An analysis of current situation will help clarify the relevance of their recruitment and retention efforts. In this, it is important to state the challenge/issue/problem/goal, and identify available resources (campus resources, staff, faculty, and external sources). Analyzing the current status of international student recruitment and retention efforts is significant in order not to duplicate but to strengthen the already existing efforts. In this evaluation, a description of the inputs is necessary to ensure the quality of the efforts. These inputs may include the knowledge, skills, and expertise available and needed. Inputs are not only

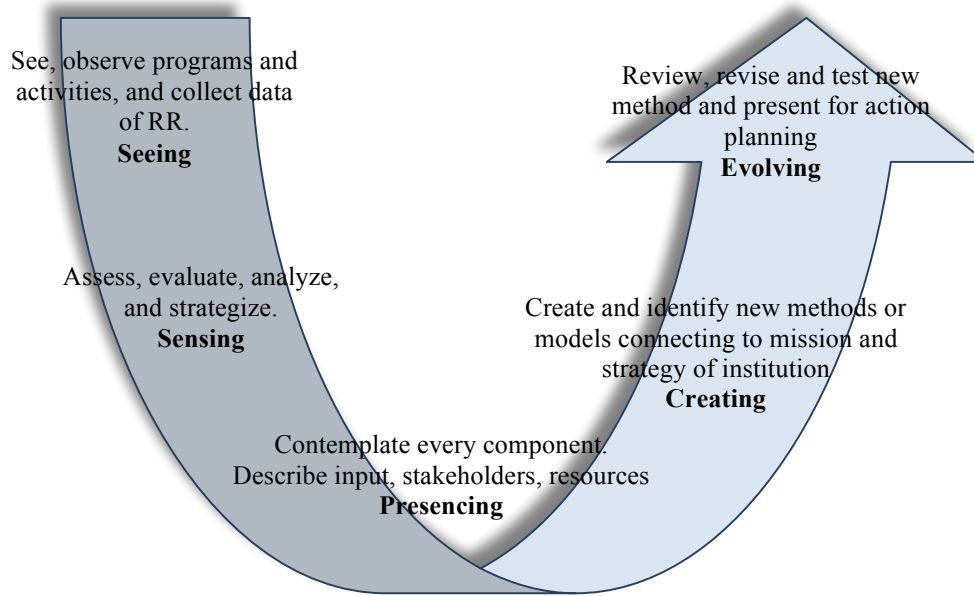


Figure 1. Model of Recruiting and Retaining (RR) International Students for U.S. campuses. Adapted from *Theory U*: (Theory U. Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizational Learning, 2007).

required from campus constituents (i.e. organize a campus-wide committee to discuss how each stake holder can contribute to the recruitment and retention efforts) but also from other national and international organizations and agencies. External influences are important in the sense that they provide further expertise but most importantly contribute to the resources already available. Involving stakeholders all across the community and in national and international levels will help the buy-in from the broader community. Further, a fiscal analysis will shape the future efforts in the recruitment retention. Evaluating the current situation and describing the inputs will determine the types of activities each institutions will need to help with their recruitment and retention efforts. These activities then will be tied to the overall goal of the institution, also making it easy to evaluate the benefits and shortcomings of their recruitment and retention efforts. Figure 1 visualizes the model for recruiting and retaining international students.

### Conclusion

U.S. Institutions are increasingly aware of the contributions of international students for their internationalization efforts (Wilkins, 2011). The key when recruiting and retaining international students is the ability “to relate and communicate effectively when individuals involved in the interaction do not share the same culture, ethnicity, language, or other salient variables” (Hains, Lynch, & Winton, 2000, p. 2). The responses indicate that the presence of international

students on U.S. campuses is significant and the institutions surveyed are providing the best services that they can to make these students feel welcome. International students are not simply recipients of services provided to them by these institutions but rather are partners both benefiting from this exchange. However, what is missing is that there needs to be a national international student recruitment policy firstly because the “best and the brightest” students may find other destinations, such as Australia and the United Kingdom, with “targeted recruitment measures” (Becker & Kolster, 2012, p. 36). Secondly, in order to utilize the experiences of international students to act as ambassadors when they return to their countries, it is important that these students receive the best possible service in their host institutions. This is especially important since 9/11 attacks; the relationships need to be reestablished to help with the image of the U.S. across the world.

Even though there are various successful practices, recruitment and retention of international students require a personal approach and this was not highlighted in any of the responses. This personal approach requires the involvement of all stakeholders both on and off campus. For example, any effort that fails to take culture into account is bound to give an incomplete and inconclusive understanding of the international student and recruitment in the overall picture of internationalization of postsecondary institutions as it is a complex issue. With the diversity of the stakeholders

involved in such cultural exchanges individual cultural and or national groups have to be treated differently. Strategic planning has to be done accordingly. Faculty and staff have to be hired and trained accordingly with a specific emphasis on cross-cultural competency. Without a personal approach to recruitment and retention, international students will not necessarily be simply attracted to “an American university” but rather, will explore other study abroad opportunities that are easily available around the world.

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Appendix A

Table 5 *The Summary of the Responses from Doctoral Institutions Listed in the Order of Utilization*

<b>Recruitment Method</b>	<b>Examples from the Responses</b>
Marketing (Online, brochures and booklets, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Direct use of magazine (ad-based) targeted marketing via third-party vendors to advertise and promote the opportunities for international students</li> <li>-Focused development and leveraging of web-based technology as a means to provide international student marketing (and related information) to international students desiring to attend their universities</li> <li>-Expanding email outreach to international students</li> <li>-Distributing limited and targeted brochures and marketing materials to foreign universities, schools, and agencies that promote study abroad in the U.S.</li> </ul>
Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Attending fairs and other recruitment events</li> <li>-Building relationships with counselors at international high schools</li> <li>-Participating in select college and high school recruiting fairs</li> </ul>
Partnering with other organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Partnering with foreign universities</li> <li>-Developing exchange programs to be able to tap into new markets of international students.</li> <li>-Working with a local international organizations with ties abroad</li> <li>-Networking with community organizations that support people from different regions/cultures</li> </ul>
Utilizing staff and faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Establishing contacts with AMIDEAST, Fulbright, and USEFI</li> <li>-Recruiting students sponsored by their home governments</li> </ul>
Utilizing staff and faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Establishing recruiters familiar with particular regions/countries</li> <li>-Adding international recruiting territories to additional counselors</li> <li>-Hiring and maintaining full-time professional staff members tasked with recruitment</li> <li>-Utilizing international faculty to network in their former home countries</li> <li>-Promoting shared recruitment among key campus stakeholders</li> </ul>
Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Providing academic and cultural sharing scholarship</li> <li>-Providing the opportunity to pay the in-state tuition rate</li> <li>-Utilizing web-based admissions applications and acceptance process</li> <li>-Utilizing Hotcourses</li> <li>-Utilizing innovative websites that provide institution information to international students interested in studying in the United States</li> <li>-Working closely with Intensive English Language Centers (IEC) in order to transition graduating IEC students to degree-seeking students. This cooperation with IECs helps the institutions offer conditional admission and a combined I-20</li> </ul>
Utilizing international alumni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Working with international alumni to assist with their efforts in recruitment.</li> <li>-Opening alumni chapters and recruitment centers abroad to support their recruitment efforts</li> </ul>
Snowballing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Drawing from a long tradition of hosting students from particular countries, they benefit from word of mouth attraction</li> <li>-Involving current international students in their recruitment efforts</li> </ul>
Utilizing agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Utilizing the services of reputable and fully vetted agents in targeted countries</li> </ul>

Table 6  
*The Summary of the Responses from Masters Institutions Listed in the Order of Utilization*

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<b>Recruitment Method</b>	<b>Examples from the Responses</b>
Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Developing programs international students seek</li><li>-Providing free in-house degree and qualification evaluation</li><li>-Offering low application fees</li><li>-Offering a simplified admissions process</li><li>-Providing a high quality international office</li><li>-Following-up with the incomplete applications [through personal communications]</li></ul>
Partnering with other organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Developing joint a dual degree programs with universities abroad</li><li>-Increasing the number of exchange programs (student and faculty exchange programs)</li></ul>
Marketing (Online, brochures and booklets, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Marketing through electronic advertising campaign.</li><li>-Utilizing social media sites such as Facebook and Youtube</li><li>-Utilizing institution websites.</li><li>-Texting and personal contacts through electronic mediums</li></ul>
Utilizing agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Utilizing agents for their recruitment efforts</li></ul>
Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Participating in recruiting tours organized by for-profit organizations</li></ul>
Utilizing international alumni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Recommendations from current students and alumni</li></ul>
Snowballing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Benefiting from word of mouth recommendations from current students and alumni</li></ul>
Utilizing staff and faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Utilizing administrators to travel abroad to negotiate partnerships</li></ul>

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Table 7

*The Summary of the Responses from Associates Institutions Listed in the Order of Utilization*

<b>Recruitment Method</b>	<b>Examples from the Responses</b>
Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources	-Adequate staffing in international students office -Building on retention elements and customer service -Targeted counseling
Partnering with other organizations	-Advertising with study in the U.S.A. -Partnering with local schools and programs -Education USA involvement (working with Education USA advisors) -Networking with 4 year colleges
Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events	-Seminars to explain community colleges in various countries -Occasional participation in recruitment fairs overseas
Marketing (Online, brochures and booklets, etc.)	-Active marketing and advertising abroad -Advertising with U.S. journal
Utilizing staff and faculty	-Targeted counseling -Utilizing the Director of International Student Office
Utilizing agents	-Organizing agent workshops -Utilizing recruitment agencies
Utilizing international Alumni	-No Response
Snowballing	-No Response

Appendix B

Table 8

*The Summary of the Responses from Doctoral Institutions Listed in the Order of Utilization*

<b>Retention Method</b>	<b>Examples from the Responses</b>
Social and Cultural Engagement and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Providing special programming and activities</li> <li>-Hosting a semi-annual International Student Conference</li> <li>-Organizing US-culture field trip excursions</li> <li>-Providing social support through clubs and organizations, roommate program, buddy program, and friendship family program</li> <li>-Host family and other volunteer supports</li> <li>-Focused provision of targeted (by academic-level) audiences of international students</li> <li>-Providing them with orientation sessions to introduce new international students to the university community</li> <li>-Initial &amp; On-Going Orientation &amp; Cultural Adjustment Programs engagement opportunities(i.e., international house living, int'l coffee hour, int'l culture/friendship program, etc.)</li> <li>-Taking an active role through the student organizations and getting involved in campus life and the community</li> <li>-Facilitating and advising various Culture Sharing Programs throughout the year which allow international students to connect not only to the university, but also to the local community</li> <li>-Providing co-curricular opportunities, programs, services and the environment they need to develop personally, socially and professionally</li> <li>-The Multicultural Students Services - a resource for international students who need assistance with financial aid concerns, housing, tutoring, social-cultural issues, and academic support</li> </ul>
Academic Programming and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The ongoing provision of top-quality international advising services to currently attending international students—from matriculation to graduation</li> <li>-"education" orientation to students: service combined with learning</li> <li>-Providing quality academic and support services</li> <li>-Presentation of well-planned international program informational workshops and seminars for academic, non-academic (e.g., immigration benefits), cultural, and employment purposes</li> <li>-Actively engaging with students having academic or personal issues</li> <li>-Provide special assistance to graduate students who need speaking practice</li> <li>-Providing academic support (tutoring, etc.)</li> <li>-Providing special English courses if needed</li> <li>-The Academic Learning Center provides study and reading assistance to international students to help them become more efficient and effective learners.</li> <li>-Courses are offered in Reading and Study Strategies and Power Reading to help students in target areas that they may be lacking the skills to achieve the grades they want</li> <li>-The Tutor Program offers individual tutoring in general study strategies, time management, and test taking, as well as subject tutoring for some general education courses</li> <li>-Through the Leadership Exploration and Development Program, international students are able to access leadership exploration, education, training, and development experiences in many different contexts</li> </ul>

*Best Practices in Recruiting and Retaining International Students in the U.S.*

	<p>throughout the University</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Engaging in many types of experiences within academics, as part of specific programs, and through co-curricular involvement</li> <li>- Actively engaging with students having academic or personal issues</li> </ul>
International Student & Scholar Services Staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Very professional International Student/Scholars service staff that ensure that the, International students are fully briefed about SEVIS regulations/restrictions</li> <li>-Professional and centralized international center</li> <li>-Prompt address of immigration concerns/support needed</li> <li>-Highly trained and professional international student advisors</li> <li>-The dissemination of international programs related information through multiple media platforms to international students about the University, including federal and local agency information and requirements</li> </ul>
Financial Aid, Health Services, Religious Support, and Immigration Support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Merit and Need-based Financial Aid</li> <li>-Offering continuing student scholarships based upon academic merit and involvement on campus</li> <li>-Emergency funds and other supports when faced with crises</li> <li>-Ensuring that international students have affordable health insurance</li> <li>-Providing religious support through programming and staff</li> <li>-Feasible tuition rate</li> </ul>

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Table 9  
*The Summary of the Responses from Baccalaureate Institutions Listed in the Order of Utilization*

<b>Retention Method</b>	<b>Examples from the Responses</b>
Social and Cultural Engagement and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-International mentor program</li> <li>-Host family program</li> <li>-Annual trips to nearby cities</li> <li>-Engagement of international alumni with current international students</li> <li>-Developing orientation programs for international students</li> </ul>
International Student & Scholar Services Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-International and Multicultural student services staff</li> <li>-Very strong director of international student programs</li> <li>-Very strong assistant director of international student programs</li> </ul>
Academic Programming and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Creating an advising system for international students</li> <li>-Learning lab for tutoring international students</li> </ul>
Financial Aid, Health Services, Religious Support, and Immigration Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Campus employment</li> <li>-Developing orientation programs for international students</li> </ul>

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Table 10

*The Summary of the Responses from Associates Institutions Listed in the Order of Utilization*

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<b>Retention Method</b>	<b>Examples from the Responses</b>
Financial Aid, Health Services, Religious Support, and Immigration Support	-Counseling access regarding academics and immigration regulations -Workshops on immigration issues -Improving customer service -Communication with other departments (Health Center) to help students -Targeted counseling services
Social and Cultural Engagement and Support	-Increase extra-curricular activities -Summer academy -Fun and social events
International Student & Scholar Services Staff	-Keeping a friendly International Student Office staff -Online orientation and multiple power point presentations
Academic Programming and Support	-Workshops on academic issues

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