

Additional Readings

Come Study in America

The U.S. Should Be Trying to Attract Foreign Students. Instead It's Keeping Them Away.

Philip G. Altbach

If the 21st century is to be the global era, then American universities will need to be international institutions.

A central part of this profile is made up of foreign students studying in American universities. But the news on this front is not good. According to figures from the Institute of International Education's recently released Open Doors study, the increase for this year is 0.3 percent—the smallest in the 26 years the IIE has been tracking flows.

If something isn't done, the United States will lose its standing as the world's preeminent place of study. At present, 453,787 foreign students study in the US—almost half of the world's total number of foreign students—indicating not only the size but also the reputation of America's colleges and universities.

After decreasing for two years, the number of foreign scholars—mostly senior researchers or scientists—increased only 2.3 percent in 1996 from the 1994–95 school year, totaling 59,074 such scholars.

These changes will affect American higher education significantly. US colleges and universities won't benefit from the infusion of new ideas from abroad. American students and faculty won't have direct contact with foreign colleagues. These contacts are especially important since so few Americans study overseas. This year, 84,403 American students went abroad—about one-half of 1 percent of the US student population.

The presence of a half million foreign students and scholars from virtually every country in the world is the most important element of globalism on American campuses. This decline in popularity indicates the decline in the status of American higher education—considered for decades as the best academic system in the world.

New Immigration Rules

A combination of government policies and current conditions in higher education contributes to this problem. New immigration rules will have a chilling effect on foreign student numbers. A hefty fee will soon be imposed on people coming to the US on student or scholar visas. Colleges and universities are being forced to police foreign students and scholars for immigration violations. Declines in research funds and other fiscal problems in higher education also have had a negative effect, since 16.5 percent of foreign students are funded by US colleges and universities.

At the same time that the US is making it more difficult to gain access to its higher education institutions, other countries are opening their doors. They recognize, for one

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thing, that foreign students contribute to the local economy. The European Union has several major programs to encourage intra-European study, and additional funds have been allocated to attract students from Russia and other Eastern European countries. Japan is getting close to reaching its goal of 100,000 foreign students by 2000. Australia is aggressively and successfully recruiting students from Asia. British universities have long been active in attracting students worldwide. Only the US seems to be turning its back on outsiders.

Foreign Aid

Foreign students and scholars contribute significantly to American higher education:

- Two-thirds pay for their education in the US and pump \$7 billion into the US economy.
- Foreign students earn about one-third of all doctoral degrees awarded annually. They serve as research and teaching assistants in fields that attract few Americans at the doctoral level.
- Foreign scholars provide their (modestly paid) expertise to the laboratories and research projects in which they are located.
- When foreign students return home, they often maintain close relationships with the US.
- The small proportion of foreign students who remain in the US after finishing their studies play a useful role in the economy and academic system. US policy is aimed in precisely the wrong direction and will result in future declines, much to the detriment of the nation's colleges and universities.

The following initiatives should be implemented to ready higher education for the global imperatives of the 21st century:

- The newly implemented and more restrictive immigration rules must be changed to make it easier, not more difficult, for legitimate students and scholars to enter the US for study and research.
- More American colleges and universities should recruit students and scholars from overseas.
- These institutions should at the same time make sure that the foreign students on campus are provided with the best possible academic experience and are fully integrated into the American student population.
- Programs such as the highly respected Fulbright scholarships and others that receive government funding should be adequately funded. Current budgets for many of these programs have been slashed in Washington.
- More American students should be encouraged to study abroad. Most who do choose to go abroad go to Western Europe. While 45,571 Japanese study in the US, only 2,212 Americans study in Japan. Worse still, few students sojourn in developing countries.

Current American policy will have two highly negative results. The US will no longer be the most attractive destination for foreign study, and American higher education will find it more difficult to internationalize. If the US is to maintain its worldwide academic leadership, it must reverse this trend.

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What Chinese Students Learned in America

A son of China on how U.S. educations affected its new elite.

Qian Ning

Qian, 38, son of the foreign minister, Qian Qichen, is an up-and-comer in China. He is a journalist, a manager for a U.S. consulting firm and a best-selling author. And like 250,000 other Chinese during the past decade, he earned his college degree in the United States. Those students, many of them the sons and daughters of China's elite, are now taking power positions of their own. How will their influence change China? Qian's perspective:

In 1978 Deng Xiaoping gave the go-ahead for Chinese students to study in the United States for the first time since the People's Republic was established, in 1949. His move reopened an exchange begun when Yung Wing enrolled in Yale about 150 years ago and became China's first American-university graduate. Yung recognized that learning about American culture and technology was critical to China's own development. Deng, too, reached this conclusion. Re-establishing educational links with the United States was one of his bravest decisions.

At first, only prominent scholars were selected by the government to travel to the States. Most were engineers, physicists or chemists. Later, as China's door opened wider, students were permitted to apply on their own to study business, medicine and even political science. I got my chance in 1989, when, after working as a reporter for the People's Daily in Beijing, I came to the United States and entered the journalism program at the University of Michigan.

Since Deng made his move, a quarter-million Chinese have studied in America. Some have come home to ministerial posts; others hold important jobs in academia, finance and business. I am not sure whether or not they will be the country's next leaders, but their influence could profoundly change China. While most returnees don't see America as an absolute model for our country, our experiences made us see that there are alternative ways for China to develop and for us to lead our personal lives. Being in the United States made us realize that things in China can be different.

Living in America is a mind-opening experience. My generation grew up viewing America as China's ideological rival. We were taught socialism's superiority, and didn't understand how people could live under capitalism. Confronting the reality of the United States was a shock, both culturally and ideologically. Some lessons were political: those of us who grew up during the Cultural Revolution, for instance, learned that political struggles and mass movements are normal. Some lessons were economic. Students and intellectuals here never worry about food or housing; the government provides them. In the United States, most Chinese students face real financial pressures. They sometimes arrive with only \$100 in their pocket. They take jobs on campus or in Chinese restaurants, earning low

wages. While in the States I often worried about whether I could pay my bills. Such austerity teaches Chinese students the importance of supporting oneself, and that China has to be strong financially to be respected by others.

Ordinary Chinese think the United States is a weird country. To them, relationships between men and women seem too casual, for example, and many don't understand homosexuality, not to mention bisexuality. But living in America, you become accustomed to such things. Others, you never get used to. Before I went abroad, I never understood why so many Americans allow drugs to destroy their lives. Living in the United States is easy, I thought. Just work hard and you will have a comfortable life. But once you see the way people live in places like Detroit or the Bronx, you sense their hopelessness. Many people have no future, particularly African-Americans in the inner city; it's like the movie "Boyz n the Hood." It's depressing.

Graduates face a tough decision: stay overseas or return to China. On the one hand, they believe they must do something for their country. But in America they enjoy comfortable lives, better career prospects and more freedom than they would back home. In addition, they've become accustomed to surviving by themselves. All this changes them inside. In the end, about two thirds of those who study in the United States don't come back to China. (This figure is somewhat misleading; students who return with green cards aren't counted.)

The government has a realistic attitude about the return rate. Students aren't pressured to come back; they are free to stay abroad but welcome to come home. In some ways, it doesn't matter. China is integrating with the global economy. One can do the same job while living in Beijing or New York. And as China develops, it will be able to offer jobs with better salaries, higher living standards and good housing. Students will return to share in the prosperity.

One of the things they will bring back to China is a new image of the United States—not an ideological concept anymore, but a real country with real people. Just as Deng planned when he first sent them to America.