US universities hold firm

Universities in the USA report healthy international student enrolments over the past year, although marketing plans for raising the profile of US higher education overseas remain muted.

International student interest in studying in higher education in the USA has always been high and while statistics show that international student numbers have been levelling off in recent years, many universities report that their international student populations have remained consistent over the past 12 months.

Julie Misa, Director of International Student and Scholar Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), IL, says that they have experienced a slow but steady growth in international enrolments in recent years. "From Fall 2005 to Fall 2006, the number of international students enrolled at UIUC grew by 4.1 per cent. The top five countries for 2006 were represented by South Korea [with] 24 per cent, China [with] 18 per cent, India [with] 12 per cent, Taiwan [with] eight per cent and Turkey [with] three per cent," she says. "This is consistent with the top five [nationality] ranking for the previous year with only slight variations in the percentages of the total international population."

Ivan Nikolov, Director of the Center for International Programs at Valdosta State University in Valdosta, GA, reports a similar story when he says that international enrolments have been "pretty stable". He continues, "On average, we have about 250 international students from 65-to-70 countries and we maintain an international diversity policy without leaning towards a focus student source country."

The latest *Open Doors* statistics for the 2005/2006 academic year show that international student numbers at US higher education institutions showed a slight decrease of 0.05 per cent on last year's figures. However, new international enrolments increased by eight per cent on 2004/2005, meaning that the outlook for the future is bright.

Viki Kimball from Northern Kentucky University in Highland Heights, KY, says that international enrolments at the university are definitely on the increase. "Enrolments have dipped slightly over the past 12 months but applications for Fall 2007 have increased significantly over the last year," she says, citing the "rising cost of education" as well as "visa issues and increased competition from within the USA and abroad", as reasons for the previous decline.

Visa issues are a particularly important aspect of any analysis of the incoming student market in the USA and are continuing to have a detrimental effect, according to sources. Luzia Tartari from Ferris State University in Big Rapids, MI, whose largest international student markets are Canada, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Zambia and Japan, says that visa delays rather than denials are having the biggest effect on international students. "Now international applications have to be processed much earlier to give students a chance to study in the USA," she says. "Not many are being denied, but many miss entry deadlines."

However, some student nationalities have been finding it easier to get a visa in recent months, according to Tina Segismundo from Virginia International University in Fairfax, VA. "We currently have more students coming from Nepal and Mongolia," she explains. "In the last 12 months it seems that students are having a better chance of getting a visa to study in the USA."

Tartari, however, adds that continued visa problems in the future may well have an adverse effect on the industry as a whole. "Unless visa procedures, immigration regulations and the general feeling against immigration in this country changes in the next few years, the number of international students will slowly decrease as students choose countries that have a more welcoming environment and a more reasonable cost of education," she says.

Despite rising tuition costs and continued visa problems, the USA currently attracts over twice as many international higher education students as its nearest rival, the UK, and its position as the most popular destination looks likely to continue for many years to come. Benefitting from such popularity, it is perhaps easy to see why for some universities in the USA, international marketing initiatives are not always a priority.

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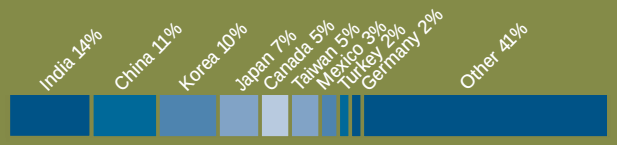
The University of Washington in Seattle, WA, for example, has seen international student numbers increase by 21 per cent since 2000. Yet Curt Devere, Director of the Office of International Students and Scholars at the university, points out, "The University of Washington doesn't recruit international students, at least not in the traditional sense of that term." However, he continues, "We consider ourselves a global university and I believe we successfully project a strong presence worldwide."

Other universities remain reluctant to use agents to recruit students due to regulations over paying commission as well as fears over the motives of some agencies. However, some have established satisfactory relationships with agent partners that benefit all involved. "Recruitment agents refer students to NKU and we have good relations with several, but we do not currently contract with agents," says Kimball, while Segismundo adds, "We definitely have agents from all over the world and I really think that they do help a lot in recruiting students."

Tartari says that Ferris State University also accepts international student enrolments from agents, although she adds, "We do not pay international recruitment agents any longer. We used to do it until three years ago but it was decided that it was not worth it. The quality of the student and the retention rates were not what was expected." International marketing efforts at the university now focus on advertising in international publications and improving their website.

However, a stable and varied international student population is the goal for most universities and increasing student numbers and nationalities remains key. Nikolov says, "We would like to increase the Asian and the Americas presence in a moderate way, maintaining the quality of education at the university and the individual attention to our students, domestic and international, that we are known for."

International student enrolments in higher education in the USA by country, 2005/2006



Source: IIE Open Doors 2006

subject focus

Hotel management courses in Europe

Europe has long been thought of as the hub of hotel management courses, with the region enjoying a strong affiliation with the tourism sector.

International students are drawn to Europe because of its reputation for high quality hotel management courses, and, as the World Travel and Tourism Industry Council predicts that the worldwide tourism market will double in size over the next 10 years, Annick Barbezat from the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) in Switzerland, says, "The market for hospitality [courses] is expanding strongly."

Switzerland in particular remains a popular destination for international students and Ludvik Bragason from the Swiss Education Group (SEG) – a group that comprises four of the most successful and prestigious schools in the country – says that the country's reputation in this field is a major draw for international students. "Switzerland has been teaching hotel management for over 100 years and the quality of our academic programmes [and] excellent facilities rank among the best in the world," he says.

Demand over the past few years has led many schools in Switzerland to increase in size. The Swiss Hotel Management School (SHMS) purchased a second campus in Leysin in 2003 and the Hotel Institute Montreux (HIM) introduced a new campus and renovated its main site in 2004. Today SEG has over 1,000 international students studying at its four institutions with over 65 different nationalities represented.

At EHL, student diversity is paramount, as Barbezat relates, "Programme[s] provide a truly international environment for interaction among multicultural participants and faculty," she says. "It is EHL's belief that attracting master-level participants from diverse educational, professional and cultural backgrounds enhances the richness of classroom exchange". The school has come a long way since it launched programmes in English 10 years ago and today Barbezat confirms that the total number of nationalities represented by the school stands at almost 90.

However, with global tourism picking up momentum, staying ahead of the competition is imperative. Eva Perez from the American College Dublin in Ireland, believes schools in France and Spain, as well as in Ireland and the UK, are providing Swiss schools with healthy competition and says course fees are at the root of it. "[Swiss] schools have lost out as they are too expensive," she relates. The American College Dublin isn't short of course applicants either, despite introducing hotel management courses just six years ago. "Eighty-five per cent of our total student body are international," says Perez, "and our hospitality programmes are the most popular [accounting for] 40 per cent of all students."

Courses in hospitality are constantly evolving and Iris Minke from Hotelschool The Hague in the Netherlands says that their entire curriculum is going to change next year. "[This] has been closely monitored by and discussed with the industry. [We are also launching] our new international fast-track programme – a two-year bachelor degree programme."

Internships are a fundamental part of any hotel management course and Bragason believes this training prepares students for their first job after graduation. Similarly, Jonathan Hilton at César Ritz Colleges in Switzerland says that internships are important and provide an added incentive to students who are keen to earn while they learn.

The future is bright for hotel management graduates and, as the hospitality industry expands, jobs will become more varied, says Barbezat. "Today's hospitality graduates are also being recruited to join management teams on cruise liners, in theme parks, country clubs and casinos, where the focus is on serving people," she says.

Name of school	Location	Language of instruction	Types of progs: Undergraduate	Post graduate	Certificate	Diploma	Distance learning	Work placement?
IMHI ESSEC Business School	Cergy, France	English		✓		✓		✓
American College Dublin	Dublin, Ireland	English	✓			✓		✓
Hotelschool The Hague	Various, Netherlands	English, Dutch	✓	✓	✓			req
César Ritz	Various, Switzerland	English	✓	✓		✓		✓
DCT Int. Hotel & Business Man. Sch.	Vitznau-Lucerne, Switzerland	English	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne	Lausanne, Switzerland	English, French	✓	✓				✓
Hotel Institute in Montreux (HIM)	Montreux, Switzerland	English	✓	✓		✓		✓
School of Hotel Management (IHTTI)	Neuchatel, Switzerland	English	✓	✓		✓		✓
Swiss Hotel Management Sch. (SHMS)	Various, Switzerland	English	✓	✓		✓		✓
Swiss School of Tourism & Hospitality	Various, Switzerland	English, German	✓	✓		✓		✓
London Hotel School	London, UK	English			✓	✓		✓
Oxford Brookes University	Oxford, UK	English	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

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