

destination analysis

US visa headaches

Visa problems continued to affect international enrolments in the USA last year, although admissions officers remain hopeful that the situation will improve.

According to the latest statistics from the USA's Institute of International Education, the number of international students at US higher education institutions fell for the second consecutive year during 2004/2005, although the individual experiences of institutions themselves varied greatly across the board. For those who experienced a decline in total or single market enrolments, however, continued visa difficulties are commonly cited as the main culprit.

Bill Barnhart, Director of the International Center at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, UT, says that he has witnessed enrolments decline by eight per cent over the last two years, and has no doubts as to the reasons. "We believe most of [the decrease] can be attributed to delays and barriers in the visa issuing process at US embassies and consulates," he says.

At Oklahoma City University in Oklahoma City, OK, international

student markets. "We would like to see more students from African countries," she says. "But these students have tremendous difficulty in obtaining student visas in spite of their solid credentials and scholarship offers."

Another student market to be particularly affected by visa problems is Saudi Arabia, where rising interest in US study options has been noted due to the provision last year of government scholarships for study in the USA. Despite a massive increase in applications from Saudi students, many universities have yet to see these convert into actual enrolments. "We've had over 100 applications, but so far only a few have actually arrived," says Barnhart. "Most are experiencing delays in the visa application process. Once that is corrected, we expect to see many more."

With visa issues still curtailing enrolments from some countries, institutions are diversifying their

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enrolments dipped in the spring of last year. "We attribute the decrease mainly to overbooking of visa appointments in India," says Julie Sinclair, Director of International Admissions at the university. She says student numbers from Taiwan have also decreased recently, although this market, together with India and Korea, remains one of the most important for the university.

Conversely, other institutions in the USA report more positive trends. "We have seen a six-to-10 per cent increase [in international enrolments] for the past six consecutive semesters," says Preble Girard from McNeese State University in Lake Charles, LA. "We continue to have a strong presence of students from Taiwan and Korea but have also begun to recruit students from countries like Nigeria, Azerbaijan and Nepal." Girard puts the enrolment increase down to the area's warm climate, affordable tuition and strong academic programmes, and adds, "We also have non-resident fee waivers and scholarships available for qualified international students, which makes McNeese State University an affordable educational option."

However, Girard also acknowledges that visa problems are affecting enrolments from some

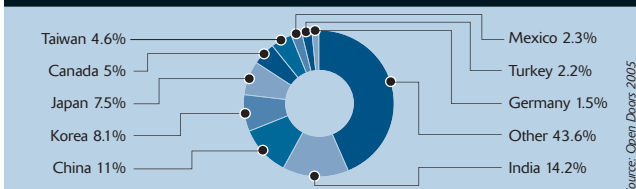
recruitment, and the Internet is playing an increasingly important role to this effect, says Sinclair. "The Internet is more and more important, as well as effective partnerships with agencies, other universities, etc," she confirms.

An increasing reliance on web-based marketing efforts is a trend noted by others in the industry. Girard says that a recent re-design of their website to cater to international enquiries has been a "successful strategy" for increasing international enrolments, while Ken Bus from Glendale Community College in Glendale, AZ, attests, "The Internet has become the most powerful tool for promoting the college overseas."

However, a government-backed international marketing policy is also being seen as step forward and recent government input in this direction has been welcomed (see *Education Travel Magazine*, March 2006, page 53). "I think the outlook is positive for the US international education market," states Girard. "However, US schools need to be aware of the competition and ensure that programmes remain affordable and of high quality.

Additionally, the US needs to further prioritise the processing of student visas in an effort to minimise delays."

International students in US higher education 2004/2005



subject focus

Fashion design

Italy and the UK are at the forefront of fashion design worldwide and education providers in this field are a popular choice for international students.

For students serious about breaking into the fashion design industry, two of the most obvious places to study, aside from possibly France, are Italy or the UK. This, according to Richard Young at Domus Academy in Milan, is because of these countries' formidable reputations within the field.

"Italy, and sometimes the UK, have companies that complete the whole fashion chain from the textile producers to the couture boutiques that display the final creations," he says. "[Italy] is where the headquarters of the most important fashion companies are, such as Gucci and Prada, and where the production systems have always existed. Studying at Domus Academy puts students in direct contact with the fashion and design system in Italy."

Meanwhile, in the UK, Stephen Roberts from Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication in London says that as well as the UK being "at the cutting edge of fashion design and fashion trends", the country has many attractions for potential fashion design students. "Students like to come here for inspiration," he says. "They not only look at what is going on around them, but they have access to well known galleries and museums such as the Victoria and Albert Museum."

Courses on offer for international students range from foundation courses, for those just starting out in the industry, to postgraduate diplomas for those with more experience. The Istituto di Moda Burgo in Milan offers a whole range of fashion design courses, including short courses involving 50 hours of tuition. Stefania Gulina from the school says that all their courses are popular with international students, who make up at least half of the total

school population. "We have students from all over the world: Korea, USA, South America, Europe, India, Israel and Turkey," she says, adding, "Italy is the only country where you can sit in a café and enjoy stylish people passing by every hour of the day."

Keeping courses up-to-date as well as creating new courses better designed to meet the needs of students and the fashion design industry is a priority for many colleges in this sector. Domus Academy has recently teamed up with Central St Martins College in London to offer students a truly unique opportunity. The colleges are to offer a series of short four-week courses starting in the summer of 2006 that will enable students to begin their courses in London and then complete them in Milan. "Both these schools have iconic world class reputations and would like to offer students the chance to discover the two fashion systems of the UK and Italy in two inspirational design capitals," says Young. "World class museums, galleries, design centres and fashion houses provide the perfect creative setting."

An important draw for international students wanting to enter the world of fashion and design for career purposes is the work experience opportunities offered at many colleges in both countries. To this end, contacts within the industry are an important component of courses themselves, as Roberts in the UK attests. "Ravensbourne is very proud of its links with the fashion industry and students have the opportunity to work and learn at some of the many internationally recognised [fashion] companies in London," he says.

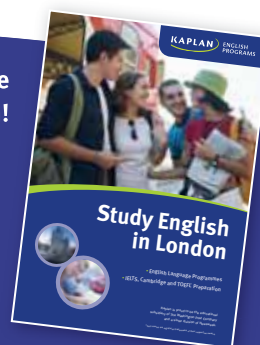
Location	Name of school	Min. hours tuition p/w	Separate lang. tuition?	Subjects covered				
				Design	Make-up	Merchandising	Styling	Other
Italy								
Florence	Fashion & Design Lab	30	✓	ug,pg,sh	✓		✓	It
Milan	Domus Academy	30	✓	pg,sh	✓	✓	✓	Eng/It
Milan	Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti	30	✓	ug,sh	✓	✓	✓	Eng/It
Milan	Istituto di Moda Burgo	15		ug,pg,sh	✓		✓	It
various	Istituto Europeo di Design	20		ug,pg,sh	✓	✓	✓	Eng/It
UK								
Bath	Bath Spa University	15	✓	ug,pg	✓	✓	✓	Eng
Birmingham	UCE Birmingham Inst. of Art&Design	-		ug,pg,f	✓	✓	✓	Eng
Brighton	University of Brighton	15	✓	ug,pg	✓	✓	✓	Eng
Leicester	De Montfort University	15	✓	ug,pg	✓	✓	✓	Eng
London	Centre for Fashion Studies	15	✓	ug,sh	✓		✓	Eng
London	Ravensbourne Coll. of Design	12		ug	✓		✓	Eng
various	University Coll. for the Creative Arts	-	✓	ug,pg	✓		✓	Eng
Worthing	Northbrook College Sussex	20	✓	ug,f			✓	Eng

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