

destination analysis

USA on track

After a few years of decline, the inbound student market for higher education in the USA looks to be back on track.

US international educators had reason to celebrate this year as international student numbers in the country increased for the first time in four years. According to the latest statistics from the Institute of International Education (IIE), 582,984 students were studying in US higher education in the 2006/2007 academic year, an increase of 3.2 per cent on the previous year.

Amber Mackenzie from Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA, says that international students numbers on their intensive English, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes have increased by 25 per cent since January last year and puts this down to a variety of reasons. "[Our largest provider markets are] Saudi Arabia – because of the ministry scholarships; China – because we have partner schools [there]; and Korea and Taiwan because of increased marketing efforts," she relates.

Numbers of Saudi Arabian students have been on the increase in the USA since the Saudi government introduced a scholarship scheme for citizens in 2005. According to IIE, student numbers from this country have increased by 129 per cent since 2005 to 7,886 students and the nationality is currently the 12th most populous student group in the USA. The top three nationalities of India, China and Korea maintained market share this year and all showed healthy growth of 10 per cent, eight per cent and six per cent respectively. This growth means that the future for the industry looks healthy, especially as many higher education institutions are also diversifying their recruitment outreach into new regions.

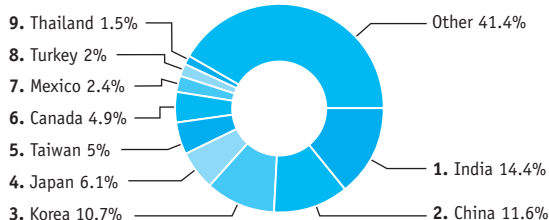
Christen Cullum from Furman University in Greenville, SC, reports that they have international students from 38 different countries on campus and the most numerous are Bulgarian, Chinese and Jamaican. "We have typically around 150 or so international applications per year and I think word of mouth and Internet searches are our main marketing points," he says. "However, we do travel to Jamaica and Trinidad most years and have some of our professors on study abroad programmes meet with students when visiting."

Other methods used by higher education providers to recruit international students include visiting student fairs, working with recruiters overseas and forging agreements with other universities. Some universities have also been adapting their programmes and campuses to support international student needs. Kate Blackburn from Millikin University in Decatur, IL, says that they have recently introduced an ESL Bridge programme to appeal to international students. "Students from Korea, India and France [are the most likely to enrol]," she explains, "due to agreements with other universities and working with recruiters."

Cullum also points to an increased interest among universities for building overseas enrolments. "Many universities are creating specific international immersion housing to connect American students with international students and vice versa," he says. "Also, many universities are creating more scholarship funding for international students in response to the increase in interest, recruitment and enrolment." ■

Top nationalities of international students studying in the USA
2006/2007

Source: IIE Network, Open Doors Survey



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