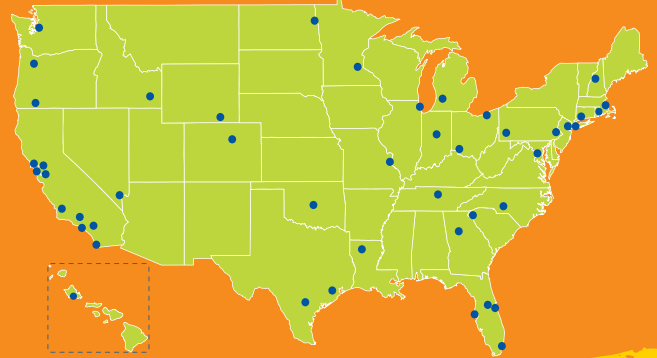


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US branch of university closes in UAE

As the UAE suffers from an economic downturn like much of the rest of the world, one of the international universities operating there has closed, three years after opening in the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah.

George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia blamed a change in subsidy from its partner as the reason for the decision. "Our partners there changed their policy three months ago with regard to the amount of subsidy they were willing to provide," Peter N Stearns, the university's provost, told the *New York Times*. "They did not tell me directly, 'We're getting hit, you have to understand our situation', but given the timing, I think it's fair to say this was about the economy."

Stearns said that the new budgetary constraints would have meant academic standards would have been in question, and Edrak, the private educational company that was George Mason University's

partner (all educational enterprises in the UAE have a partner) also wanted a shift in academic control which would not satisfy the university's accrediting body or its home campus.

Students at George Mason Ras Al Khaimah – there were around 120 in degree programmes and 60 in its English language programme, mostly expats from South Asia and the Middle East – were offered a discount on out-of-state tuition fees in the USA, but there was no guarantee that students would get a visa if they wished to transfer their studies to the USA, Stearns acknowledged.

The situation does put the rapid growth of satellite campuses in the Middle East under the spotlight. Stearns noted that the university's entry standards were difficult for many students to meet, and that long-term investment into the marketplace is needed: "Education leaders in the emirates themselves acknowledge that

[entry] preparation is not at the same level," he said.

While many of the remote campuses of universities that exist are co-financed by partners, the academic programming is organised by the institution itself. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, it is only in richer Abu Dhabi and Qatar emirates where some university branches have been able to set up without profit issues looming in the background. It reports that senior members of ruling families in these regions have provided funds for better known institutions, such as New York University, to set up campuses in-country.

Elsewhere, there is concern. In Dubai, one report suggests four in 10 expats will leave the country, taking any children with them who may have enrolled in local institutions. Australia's University of Wollongong campus in Dubai cut its June semester fees by 10 per cent, in "response to the current economic conditions". ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Paul Simon Awards for international approach on US campuses

While the Paul Simon Acts makes it way through congress yet again (see page 12), Nafsa, Association of International Educators, has presented five US campuses with Senator Paul Simon Awards for Campus Internationalisation. The winners were: Boston University; Connecticut College; Pacific Lutheran University; Portland State University and the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities.

"This is an outstanding honour and a great recognition of the university's efforts to internationalise the campus," said Meredith McQuaid, associate vice president and dean for international programmes at the University of Minnesota. "International programmes have become an integral part of the campus culture and our teaching, research, and outreach programmes. We are delighted that Nafsa has acknowledged our hard work with this award."

Navitas opens two more UK colleges

Navitas has added two more colleges to its international network. International College Portsmouth (ICP) and Plymouth Devon International College will offer pre-university and pathway programmes for students keen to continue on to degree programmes at the respective universities.

University of Portsmouth Vice Chancellor Professor, John Craven, said the new structure would make both ICP and the University of Portsmouth "very attractive educational options for international students", while Wendy Purcell, Vice-Chancellor Professor at the University of Plymouth, said the agreement with Navitas was an outstanding opportunity to expand avenues of entry to academic courses at the university. "We have always embraced the opportunity to enhance and further develop our engagement with students and we welcome Navitas as a partner in that process," she said.

US colleges concerned about Japanese dip

A GROUP representing 19 US universities (both public and private) met with Japan's Education Minister, Ryu Shionoya, earlier this year to press for government backing to encourage more Japanese to study overseas, as numbers decline.

It requested more funds for government scholarships, suggested improving the credit transfer system and introducing September admissions processes as helpful to rebuilding student numbers.

According to IIE, the number of Japanese studying in the USA has dipped from 47,000 in 1997 to 34,000 in 2007 – a drop of nearly 30 per cent. One reason for this decline is a move towards studying at Japanese universities with strong English departments, said Yoko Sanae, President of the Sakae Institute of Study Abroad and the organiser of the meeting.

Shionoya expressed support for the issue, according to the *Japan Times*, and

told the meeting, "Currently, only 80,000 Japanese students go abroad every year – ideally I'd like to see the number increase to 300,000, which is the same number of international students Japan is aiming to accept." No details were given about how this might be achieved.

Within Asia, there are other sizeable markets. According to IDP, China dominates the market with more than 350,000 Chinese estimated to be studying overseas. Japan does not figure in its prediction of top five source countries for 2025: After China, India will be the second-most important student source country, according to IDP, followed by South Korea, Morocco and Turkey.

Meanwhile, Unesco's Global Education Digest put Japan's outbound student population at 65,229 in 2005, compared with 394,669 from China and 97,395 from South Korea. ■

Numbers up 21 per cent in Australia

A HUGE surge in international enrolments in Australia last year meant that the country enjoyed its biggest increase in student numbers since 2002. A record 543,898 international students attended Australian institutions in 2008, said Education Minister, Julia Gillard.

The majority of students were enrolled at universities or Tafe (vocational colleges) with China responsible for almost a quarter of all students – 23 per cent. Overall, enrolments from Asia were up 21.5 per cent.

"The increase... from Asia is recognition of Australia's ongoing relationship with our Asian neighbours, and the strong awareness of Australia as a quality education destination around the world," said Gillard, who noted that international education was Australia's third-largest export. ■

