

# Today's Global Campus

The Covid-19 pandemic has left no part of college life untouched, but for international education, the impact has been especially far reaching. Study-abroad programs have been halted, their staff members furloughed or seconded to other offices.

Overall international enrollments plummeted 16 percent in fall 2020, and the number of new students from overseas was nearly halved. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, there were 240,000 fewer student-visa holders in the United States at that time than just prior to the pandemic.

College campuses are among the most globalized of American institutions, placing great value on the diversity of experience. Sending students abroad, bringing students from overseas into American classrooms — each is seen as a critical piece of a 21st-century college education.

But international students bring something else, too — revenue. In the academic year 2019, they contributed nearly \$40 billion to colleges and college-town economies, according to NAFSA: Association of International Educators, and their tuition revenue was critical in helping institutions recover from their recessionary slump. Covid has threatened that.



## Supporting the academic community during Covid-19



We are delighted to support this international report which gets to the heart of the issues the international education sector has faced in the last 12 months.

Cambridge Assessment English is heavily involved in international education and we've seen first-hand how Covid-19 has disrupted all aspects of the sector. The pace of change has been immense and accelerated the need for more online learning and other technology-driven education solutions. It's fantastic how the whole sector has pulled together and supported each other, and we are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel. Before we take the next step, it's important to reflect and build on what we've all learned in the last year. In Cambridge we accelerated our online teaching, learning and assessment programs in collaboration with our colleagues at Cambridge University Press and across our University. This involved rolling out large-scale programs to support teaching and learning. As Cambridge English Qualifications, including B2 First and C1 Advanced, are integrated into many schools around the world, we were able to support you in recruiting from the pool of millions of students who were ready to go. With our IELTS partners, we launched IELTS Indicator to help universities in these difficult times.

To serve the academic community we have been determined not to cut corners on the reliability or security of the high-stakes tests used to recruit students for higher education. Academic success, the ability to integrate effectively with the life of their universities and long-term career prospects all depend on effective communication skills.

It's great that we're seeing student mobility and face-to-face teaching resuming in some locations, and the sector is in a really strong position to offer amazing opportunities and experiences to students. We're working with universities around the world and will continue to listen to your pain points and ongoing challenges. For example, we are partnering with universities in the US and Canada to run student webinars, where institutions can showcase exciting opportunities directly to the pool of students who already have a Cambridge English Qualification.

There is a big responsibility on all of us, but I have no doubt that if we keep up the level of momentum and collaboration from the last 12 months, there are brighter times ahead which will create huge opportunities to enhance teaching and learning.



**Nicola Johnson**  
Global Recognition Manager  
Cambridge Assessment English



## Collaborate with us

Over the next few months we will be delivering a series of joint webinars to support our higher education partners and students based overseas.

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Still, despite the short-term dislocation caused by the pandemic, the coronavirus may be most consequential in shining a light on the challenges colleges were already facing in international education, including: Overreliance on recruiting students from a small number of countries; stagnating study-abroad participation by Americans; difficulties in fully integrating foreign students on campus; the impact of climate-change activism; and the prohibitive costs of travel that limit participation by students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

To help college leaders understand how the pandemic, political shifts, and other factors have affected international enrollment in U.S. colleges and in study-abroad programs for American students, *The Chronicle* published *Today's Global Campus: Strategies for Reviving International Enrollments and Study Abroad*. The 37-page report provides an overview on the challenges and future of international education, and explores some of the strategies colleges are using not only to recruit students from overseas but also to internationalize academic programs at home.

This “Inside Look” focuses on two crucial issues the report explores: the impact and innovations of the Covid era and a growing reliance on partnerships.

### THE IMPACT AND INNOVATIONS OF THE COVID ERA

Many of the headwinds facing U.S. higher education are fed by broad economic or geopolitical forces. Others, however, are more within college leaders’ control. Some graduates have questioned the return on an American degree, saying they have spent tens of thousands of dollars only to struggle to find work when they return home. Colleges are working to adapt their career counseling to better serve global graduates.

Likewise, American colleges have struggled to integrate international students, many of whom report having few, if any, American friends. Colleges bring in international students to diversify campus but can fail to do enough to foster connections with local students.

The consequences of the lack of a strong support network have been underscored by the past year. In the spring of 2020, as many as nine

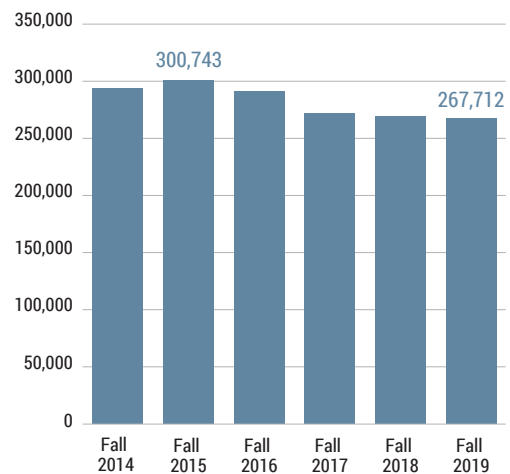
in 10 international students remained in the United States after their campuses closed, unable to return home, according to the Institute of International Education.

During the pandemic, colleges have ramped up programming for international students, both those still in the United States and those unable to enter the country. Post-pandemic, there will continue to be pressure on colleges to improve their “customer service” for international students, doing more to help them to adapt and acculturate to the American campus as well as providing more globally focused career services for newly minted alumni.

The outbreak’s early months coincided with the end of the college-admissions cycle, as offers were being made. With visa processing frozen and travelers barred from key countries like China, many would-be freshmen deferred. No other demographic group saw their enrollment numbers fall so sharply in fall 2020 as international students.

### Decline in New International Students Persists

Even before the pandemic, the number of new international students arriving on American campuses was on the decline. Their attendance fell for the fourth year in a row in the fall of 2019. And a survey by the Institute of International Education has since found that enrollments plummeted 43 percent in the fall of 2020, as tens of thousands of students deferred their admission or called off their studies altogether.



Source: Institute of International Education/U.S. Department of State

Many of those who did enroll did so remotely, logging on from their home computers in Bangalore or Beijing, often taking middle-of-the-night classes because of the time difference. Some colleges took advantage of empty study-abroad sites to set up temporary overseas campuses. Franklin & Marshall College welcomed 65 first-year Chinese students unable to make it to its Pennsylvania campus to a Shanghai center typically used by the Institute for Study Abroad. The college's faculty members taught special, remote class sessions, while the study-abroad provider offered on-the-ground support.

But the pandemic proved especially disruptive to recruiting the entering class for the fall of 2021. Many colleges took their recruitment efforts virtual, signing up for online fairs or teaming with other institutions to host joint Q&A sessions. A survey by the Institute of International Education found that 84 percent of colleges had adopted new recruitment strategies, says Mirka Martel, the organization's head of research.

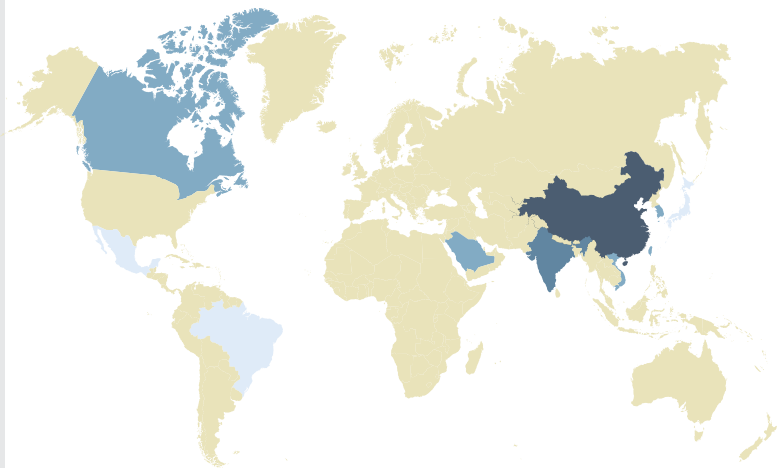
Emily Dobson, a college counselor in Brazil, noticed admissions officers' increased attention

to applicants during the pandemic, something she attributes, in part, to virtual recruiting. "Follow up is tough when you're always getting on another plane," she says.

Dobson, who helped found a network of college counselors across Latin America and the Caribbean, says another unexpected benefit is that colleges are connecting with students in countries that they otherwise would not have visited. A virtual fair hosted by Study Texas, a consortium of 40 Texas institutions, attracted interested students from Indonesia, Paraguay, and Taiwan. Some 1,200 students from around the globe logged into a single Cornell University admissions event.

In the past, many colleges, limited by time and money, have focused their recruitment efforts on sure things, tapping existing pipelines, like China and India, rather than nurturing new markets. In 2021, initial Common App data showed a surge of applicants from Nigeria, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates. When it comes to diversifying the international student body in the United States, Covid could be a welcome disruption.

## These 10 Nations Sent the Most Students to the U.S. in 2019-20



Source: Institute of International Education, Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange

<b>Total international students</b>	<b>1,075,496</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>372,532</b>	<b>34.6%</b>
<b>India</b>	<b>193,124</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>South Korea</b>	<b>49,809</b>	<b>4.6%</b>
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>30,957</b>	<b>2.9%</b>
<b>Canada</b>	<b>25,992</b>	<b>2.4%</b>
<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>23,777</b>	<b>2.2%</b>
<b>Taiwan</b>	<b>23,724</b>	<b>2.2%</b>
<b>Japan</b>	<b>17,554</b>	<b>1.6%</b>
<b>Brazil</b>	<b>16,671</b>	<b>1.6%</b>
<b>Mexico</b>	<b>14,348</b>	<b>1.3%</b>



## A GROWING RELIANCE ON PARTNERSHIPS

Even as the pandemic has given colleges new tools for global outreach, there are questions about what will happen when international travel resumes: How will these new strategies supplement more traditional approaches? Will college admissions offices be asked to do more but with the same resources?

The uncertainty extends to international students themselves. While enrollments have rebounded after a dozen previous pandemics, including Ebola and SARS, none of those outbreaks were on the scale or duration of Covid-19. The United States has received particularly low marks for its handling of the coronavirus — a median of just 15 percent of respondents in a 13-nation Pew Research Center poll said the country did a good job handling the outbreak — and that perception could stoke parents' pre-existing concerns about safety. The economic fallout of the crisis also could mean that fewer families around the world can afford an American degree.

Rather than relying solely on a model that brings international students to America, colleges may seek to take an American education abroad. In some cases, this may follow the model of Duke and NYU in China, of joint overseas campuses. More often, however, it will mean the expansion of joint programs or degrees with overseas university partners.

Many colleges, of course, have such partnerships, in which students spend time at an overseas university before coming to the United States for a year or more to complete their studies. But they typically have been on the departmental or school level and have enrolled relatively small numbers of students. Post-pandemic, joint programming could become a key part of international-enrollment strategy, moving from boutique to big time. West Virginia University, for example, has already begun expanding such programs, betting on the continued appeal of an American degree.

Such programs may not be merely a route to retain students who would have previously come to the United States but a way of expanding the pool to include those for whom studying overseas may have been financially, culturally, or otherwise out of reach, says Janet Ilieva, a Britain-based higher-education consultant.

In some cases, colleges may offer full academic programs overseas without students ever coming to their home campus. British universities, in fact, already serve more international students overseas than at home. But this approach may not appeal to groups of students for whom the cultural experience of being on the ground in America, interacting daily with Americans, is key. And setting up programs many time zones away that meet U.S. standards for academic quality is never an easy task.

For American institutions, delivering a degree overseas may mean turning to online education. The University of Arizona has taken a bifurcated approach, setting up microcampuses — that is, homegrown degree programs offered with a partner university, with the benefits of campus infrastructure — around the world, while also offering fully virtual programs through its expanded online arm.

A legacy of the pandemic may be a greater comfort level with remote learning, on the part of both students and professors, Ilieva says. Additionally, a number of countries, such as China, have temporarily lifted restrictions against students studying for foreign degrees online, and that could continue post-Covid. “Everyone has invested a great deal in online technology, and it’s not just an investment in technology but also the pedagogy that has been developed,” Ilieva says. “Universities will probably make the most of it rather than scrap it.”

### These American Colleges Hosted the Most Global Students in 2019-20

New York U.

Northeastern U.

U. of Southern California

Columbia U.

U. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Arizona State U. at Tempe

U. of California at Los Angeles

U. of California at San Diego

Purdue U. at West Lafayette

Boston U.

Source: Institute of International Education, Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange

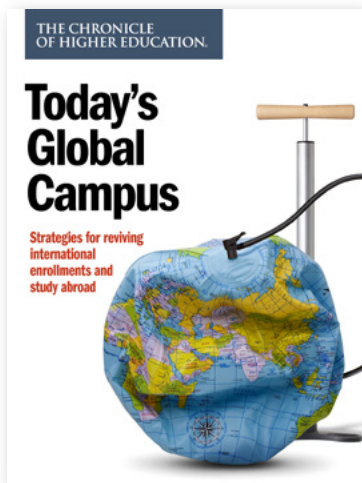
## A FINAL WORD

Covid-19 struck global education with disruptive force, and its turbulence is likely to be felt for years to come. It's unclear whether study abroad and student mobility will resume at the same participation levels, or in the same way. At the same time, the pandemic forced colleges to consider the value of their global-education activities — both academically and to their bottom line — and necessitated creativity. It could bring a new openness — among colleges, professors, students, and even international employers — to online education. Institutions may seek out overseas partners to help deliver their degrees abroad and bring a global experience to students back on the home campus.

While remote learning cannot offer the same opportunities for cultural enrichment and engagement, reduced reliance on students' ability to travel could make international education less vulnerable to future disruptions, whether from public-health, economic, or political crises. And even if colleges do not make fundamental changes in their global-education strategies, new attention resulting from the pandemic could lead to a greater consciousness about some of the field's shortcomings, such as the lack of diversity among the students who take part in and benefit from internationalization. The result could be more intentional, equitable, and sustainable global programs.

This "Inside Look" was produced by Chronicle Intelligence.  
Please contact [CI@chronicle.com](mailto:CI@chronicle.com) with questions or comments.

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The Chronicle's report, *Today's Global Campus: Strategies for Reviving International Enrollments and Study Abroad* provides an in-depth look at how colleges are adapting to new realities when their usual means of recruiting students or giving them an international experience is no longer feasible.

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