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ABSTRACT

Foreign students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities form a substantial proportion of the student population. The majority of these students come from Asia and most often choose to study business, management, and engineering. The number of female foreign students is rising. The foreign student population has special educational, social, and financial needs, and is sometimes criticized for a lack of academic, intellectual, and motivational preparation. The share of foreign students coming to the United States has decreased in proportion to those studying in other countries, and the proportion of foreign students to native students in the United States is lower than in other countries. Much of the higher education community has historically shown little interest in accommodating the special needs of foreign students, despite the estimate that one-third of the world's top positions in education, politics, the military, and business will be held by foreign students now attending American institutions. Weaknesses in recruitment, admissions, advising, and services are well-documented. In light of the importance of this population for institutions and for the world, improvement in recruitment, policy, and services for foreign students is essential. (MSE)

Just Who Are These International Students Anyway?
Joy Allameh

Perhaps, many beginning English as a Second Language teachers as well as students enrolled in teacher education courses getting an endorsement in ESL have questions about just who international students are, exactly where they are coming from, what are the policies institutions enact concerning their enrollment, and how we can best serve their interests. Since a requirement of both my theory course and methods and materials course in teaching English as a Second Language consists of tutoring freshman international English composition students at the University, I understand the need to acquaint these seniors and graduate students with realistic expectations of the characteristics of these newcomers to American culture and American English.

A publication with which many may lack familiarity is Open Doors, an annual foreign student census. The latest one (1987/88) indicates that international student enrollment continues to grow with 356,187 in the United States from 186 different nationalities. Last year, seventy-nine institutions enrolled 1,000 (or more) international students; this enrollment accounted for 40 percent of the foreign student enrollment in the United States.

Miami-Dade Community College for at least the second time reported the largest enrollment with over 5,100. Massachusetts Institute of Technology reported the highest

international student proportion of total enrollment--20.2%. Over 122 nationalities were represented at the University of Arizona, which reported the greatest diversity of foreign students. Again, California housed the greatest number--49,200--coming from 160 homelands.

Also, last year, four of each six foreign undergraduates (40.7%) came from Asia and over 60% of foreign graduate students originated there; this is the first time Asians comprised more than 50 percent of the total foreign student enrollments in the United States. Latin America was the second largest contributor, and the Middle East fell to third place.

Undergraduates chose business and management in greatest numbers while most graduate level internationals chose engineering. Last year female foreign students made up nearly one-third (32.3%) of the international student population, their highest proportion ever. Open Doors calls it "the most significant trend in academic level of foreign students . . . the increasing proportion in graduate study" (p. 1). Foreign graduate students exceeded undergraduates by almost 19,000 in four-year institutions. The previous year was the first in twenty years when this condition existed.

Approximately, two-thirds of the funding for international students originated from private sources--personal and family--thus helping to account for

three-quarters (75.6%) of the students receiving their primary source of funding from sources outside the United States.

Another influence affecting international student enrollment relates to the decline in domestic enrollments. As Goodwin and Nacht (1983) have noted, foreign students have become "consumers of educational services for which there currently was depressed U. S. demand." For example, in many engineering graduate programs

> from the least to the most prestigious, 70 percent or more of the students come from abroad. In some cases this proportion approaches 100 percent and only in few cases is it below 40 percent. Several engineering deans suggested that without foreign students they would have had to close down their graduate programs in the short run and their whole operation ultimately. (pp. 12-13)

Kahne (1983) reported that "in 1982 almost half of all American Ph.D. degrees in engineering went to foreign students . . . . With such a large contingent of foreign students it is remarkable that the United States has no national policy on foreign students" (p. 54).

Solmon and Young (1987) write that "the typical foreign student partakes of a more expensive post-secondary education experience than does the typical American resident" (p. 46). They reiterate that the tuition

Internationals "pay in public institutions more closely reflects actual costs than what is paid by domestic students, and they often fill empty seats not sought by Americans" (p. 93). Goodwin and Nacht (1983) report that some faculty, especially in agriculture "wondered wistfully why, after so many years of experience, we could not provide an education that was less expensive and more useful for these persons. This is a question that should, perhaps, be asked in more fields than agriculture" (p. 24).

Solmon and Young (1987) wrote at the conclusion of their research, "The data we have received gives us little reason not to welcome foreign students to our institutions of higher education" (p. 94). They also report that they are more similar to than different from American students in many ways. Moreover, they conclude that "non-resident international students" have "demonstrated consistently higher indicators of quality than did their American counterparts" (p. ix). In additional contrasts between international and native freshmen, they write that "it appears that those who come from abroad to study are higher achievers than the 'typical' domestic students" (p. 48).

In addressing international students' special needs, Solmon and Young (1987) cite the compounded problems for them of being out of school for a number of years and thus finding adjustment to academic life more difficult than if they moved immediately from one level to another and also

the problem of being disadvantaged when taking standardized admissions tests. (pp. 4-5). In 1982, 94 percent of domestic freshmen had graduated that year from high school while only 70.1 percent of Internationals had graduated in 1982, e.g., only 6 percent of American freshmen compared with 29.9 percent of internationals failed to enter college directly from high school. Selecting an American college, applying, gaining acceptance, and accumulating sufficient funds to pay for American schooling, of course, each consumes time.

Goodwin and Nacht (1983) report that among some faculty they found "a prevailing apathy and, in some cases, hostility to the foreign presence. It was frequently observed that foreign students retard the educational process and are an annoyance to be minimized" (p. 9). In addition, they write in their report Absence of Decision that they

> heard a wide variety of unflattering analogies used by faculty to describe foreign students ("wet noodles soaking up anything you pour over them," "bazaar merchants haggling over grades," etc.). The evident depth of feeling behind some of these remarks only highlights the need for accurate information about and reasoned attention to the subject from all concerned." (p. 10)

They concluded that three reasons account for the

antipathy: "fear of the unknown . . . unwillingness of faculty to commit the extra time needed to teach foreign students effectively or even to take seriously their pedagogical problems" and thirdly foreign students represent for some faculty "in varying degrees (correctly or incorrectly) academic values that they presumably abhor: passivity in the classroom, unwillingness to accept objective grading, even slowness to laugh at faculty jokes" (p 10).

They encountered numerous faculty who argued that foreign students are "less prepared academically, on a lower intellectual plane, and less well motivated than their United States counterparts" (p. 37). They report that administrators and faculty often "voiced strong views . . . despite, in many cases, the absence of data" (p. 38). Yet these same researchers found "at some prestitious institutions known for the quality of their instruction and research," that they "claimed that the foreign students are consistently among the best [students] on campus" (p. 37).

Rogers cites the extraordinary growth of higher education around the world as "one of the hallmarks of social progress in the twentieth century" (p. 20). An "approximately eightfold increase has occurred worldwide in the last 30 years" (Barber, Altbach, & Myers, 1984, p. 163).

An estimated fifty million students are enrolled worldwide in postsecondary education programs (Rogers,

1984). A world-wide total of approximately 1,037,606 study outside their native countries (IIE, 1987), 36.9% of whom have come to the United States. Cummings (1984) has projected that "overseas students will number nearly 2 1/2 million by the year 2000" (p. 241). The United States' "share of the global foreign student population has decreased in recent years" (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985, p. 512). For example, foreign students in France in 1982 constituted approximately 11 percent of total university enrollments whereas for the United States the percentage was only 2.7 percent (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985). The five leading countries in numbers of international students enrolled within their boundaries in descending order are the United States, France, Germany, the U.S.S.R., and the United Kingdom accounting for 70.4% of the world total (IIE, 1987). However, the proportion of foreign students to domestic enrollments is lower in the United States than in these four other countries; for the 1987/88 school year, in the United States the foreign student percentage of total enrollment was 2.8%. Thus, even though the actual foreign student enrollments have increased in this country, "the number of individuals who could potentially study in the United States has grown even more rapidly" (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985, p. 512). Hugh Jenkins (1973) in NAFSA and the Student Abroad lamented that in spite of the largest foreign student population in the world that the proportion of foreign

students in relation to the total United States population in colleges and universities placed the United States proportionately in only the twelfth place among countries receiving international students and by 1979 the proportion had decreased to twenty-first place (1979) although in 1978, "over 30 percent of all overseas students were in the United States" (Cummings, 1984, p. 243). Kahne (1983) also wrote, "Although the number of foreign students in the United States has been growing, in the past 20 years we have had a decreasing share of the world's foreign student population" (p. 55). That the United States is "educating those who will be the leaders of the world during the first half of the 21st century" should motivate the nation's commitment to international education, international students, and global foresight, but instead "higher education may be faltering in this commitment" (Surdam and Collins, 1984, p. 240).

Herbert (1981) has written that much of the higher education community has until quite recently shown little interest in either special needs of the foreign students or in the impact of such growth on colleges and universities themselves.

In fact, Herbert (1981) maintains that most foreign student advisors believe that the situation has not changed since the 1930's when a poor student from West Africa came to the United States to attend Lincoln University in

Philadelphia and recalled later his sojourn as 'years of sorrow and loneliness" during which "he experienced poverty and racism" unknown in Africa and "nearly died of exhaustion from working nights in a shipyard and attending classes during the day" (p. 68). This student, Kwame Nkrumah, rose years later "to international prominence as founding father and president of the new African nation of Ghana" (p. 68). His American foreign student experience directly translated into his nation's foreign policy in dealings with the United States.

Indeed, our treatment of foreign students often has lasting global consequences. Lawson Lau, the author of "The World at Your Doorstep," has written that one-third to one-half of the world's top positions in education, politics, the military, and business will be held during the next twenty-five years by the international students now attending U. S. colleges and universities. Yet in a 1976 study forty percent of the 247 foreign students surveyed at thirty-eight Southern universities felt "unwelcome, lonely, and isolated" (Rentz, 10), so we seem to lack foresight in our treatment of these ambassadors of their home countries.

Goodwin and Nacht (1983) have recommended "serious inquiry into issues related to foreign students" for it was "long overdue" (p. 29). Berendzen has written that "'the nation as a whole and many universities individually do not really have a policy of any form with respect to

international students" (p. 68). Brademas (1987) comments that the international student presence in American institutions helps "prepare Americans for work and life in a world that will never again be narrow" (p. 11). Furthermore, he urges that the United States enlarge upon educational exchange programs since he believes "our economic strength and our national security will depend in large part on our knowledge of other nations and peoples and our ability to deal intelligently with them" (p. 11).

At a dinner honoring Senator Fulbright back in 1975, Secretary Kissinger cautioned about unguided interaction, commenting that Fulbright

> recognized that the dramatically accelerating pace of interaction among peoples and institutions would not necessarily lead to increased understanding or cooperation. He foresaw that interaction, unguided by intelligent and humane direction and concern, had the potential to bring increased tension and hostility rather than less. (NAFSA, 1975, p. 49)

Surely, if institutions neglect service to foreign students by failing to offer them guided agendas and by having a plan and policy to deal intelligently with them, that potential of increased tension and hostility will be realized and the challenge--to make the world whole--will be unmet.

Several persons involved in advising, counseling, and teaching international students have written descriptions of

them. For example, Kenneth Rogers, the Director of International Services at Indiana University, in 1984 characterized foreign students as "academically low-risk students, less likely to perform at a below-average level in the classroom and more likely to attain their educational objectives in less time than other nontraditional students" (p. 24). Judith Oster (1985) describes foreign students in English classes as "the brightest collection of students we have ever had in our classroom and [who] may be better educated and more motivated than any other group of students to whom we have ever had to teach subject-verb agreement" (p. 66). A NAFSA publication in 1972 included these characteristics of foreign students: they "are perceived by departments to be among the best and poorest of their graduate students, more successful as research assistants than as teaching assistants, more theoretical and analytical than United States students, and more industrious and hard-working than United States students" (p. 6).

Huang (1977) has described them as "especially vulnerable and often ignored" and "unique in their difficulties: (1) communication barriers, (2) shifting cultural gears, (3) replacing a support network, (4) multiple accountability" (p. 216). These characteristics then compel addressing the foreign students' different strengths and weaknesses, meeting them as they come from their cultures to engage them in a second culture.

Furthermore, Rogers (1984) further describes them as "discriminating shoppers" who, in this respect, are no different from their American peers . . . . They tend to shop for the best potential return on their large investment in United States schooling" (p. 24). Furthermore, he has said that although the United States is now "the prime purveyor of education to the world," the condition is not static but could change less favorably for this country (1984, p. 25). As a result of the possibility of instability, he suggests the following:

> Foreign student enrollment should be studied, developed, justified and above all improved--like any other United States industry that hopes to retain its competitive edge in world trade. More attention than ever needs to be given to quality relevance and what we in NAFSA call 'standards and responsibilities' by educators, public policymakers, and the citizenry at large" (p 25).

In fact, many have cited weaknesses in recruitment, admission, advisory practices, and services in the treatment of international students in higher education. Rogers (1984) cited the need for an articulated "definitive frame of reference" (p. 21); Tonkin (1987) the need for a "national policy on foreign students" (p. 22); Berendzen (Herbert, 1981) the need for coherent policies toward foreign students; and Enarson (1979) the need for a

"premise, plan, system, or strategy." As Rogers (1984) comments, the norm may be "institutional irresponsibility, indifference, or inadequacy" and "the absence of decision" cited by Goodwin and Nacht.

Richard Farmer, Chairman of International Business at Indiana University, has said of the $2.24 million which four hundred student dependents of foreign students at just the Bloomington campus poured into Indiana in 1974, "Ironically foreign students continue to come in increasing numbers despite official neglect, almost total lack of financing to encourage them, and great indifference to their problems" and added "in our review of the current foreign student population we have found a growth industry, one that seems bound to continue growing, regardless of the state of the economy" (1975, pp. 7, 9). His final comment was

> It is sad that we cannot do more for them while they are here and that we cannot figure out more effective techniques for getting more of them to come. We have a real growth industry which yields important benefits to the state, and few Hoosiers even know it exists. (p. 9)

Goodwin and Nacht (1983) have noted that

> the characteristics that make foreign students distinct from others in United States higher education were perceived to be of different significance in different cases. They are (not in

> the order of importance) first, lack of English language facility; second, cultural differences; and third, political allegiance to another government which generates second-order issues ranging from national security to complexity in arranging for exchange of currency. (p. vii)

Certainly, from reviewing the literature, we can only agree with Rogers that foreign student enrollment requires improvement. Moreover, since the proportion of graduate foreign students in 1986-87 rose above the proportion of undergraduate foreign students in four-year institutions "for the first time in two decades" and again in 1987/88 the numbers increased (IIE, 1987, p. 1), it would seem even more crucial to serve well the foreign students entering the more rigorous academic world of graduate school that requires a 3.0 grade point average (even the first semester of study) than even the undergraduates who are required by United States Immigration, of course, to carry a load of twelve hours every semester of study and who lack the drop option enjoyed by American students. It is crucial then from the onset of study in the United States that Internationals experience quality guidance and advisement. Institutions must send correct messages about intended service, empathetic understanding, warm welcome, and considerate, compassionate important guidance, advice, teaching, and placement in a non-threatening environment to facilitate

learning. This hosting relationship demands responsible service.

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