

Recruiting International Students to Your Campus

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to determine what institutional, program, and recruitment characteristics influenced international students to attend institutions in the United States. Two hundred sixteen international students at a Southern public research university responded to the survey (53% response rate) from 56 countries representing 8 regions. An empirical analysis using t-tests and analysis of variance was conducted to determine what characteristics international students found to be most important when selecting an institution. Regardless of degree level, all students ranked faculty/student ratio as an important program characteristic. Second, students ranked both the admission process and time to degree as important characteristics. Third, doctoral, master's, and bachelor's students respectively ranked funding as an important characteristic in their decision making process. There are three basic implications for recruitment officers. First, as size matters, international students need to feel connected to faculty and staff. Second, institutions need to implement business strategies to improve efficiency and performance. Third, if the U.S. wants to continue to be a destination for international students, institutions and the federal government need to offer more funding.

Key Words: International Students, Recruitment Characteristics, Degree Programs

According to the Open Doors 2010 report (Bhandari, 2011), published annually by the Institute of International Education (IIE), a record number of 690,923 international students studied in the U.S. in 2009/2010. The University of Southern California is the top United States institution for receiving international students (7,987) followed by the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (7,287), New York University (7,276), Purdue University (6,903), and Columbia University (6,833) for a total of 36,286. The primary nations of international student origin are China, India, South Korea, and Canada. What do these students study in the U.S.? It is no surprise to find these students majoring in business management, engineering, physical and life sciences, and mathematics and computer sciences (Bhandari, 2011). Nearly half of the PhD's in science and engineering have been awarded to international

students since 2006 (Adnett, 2010). What can today's universities do to recruit students from abroad? Why are many U.S. campuses working diligently to recruit international students? What are the barriers to their recruitment efforts? In the process of attempting to recruit international students to our particular campus amid a global economic recession, the researchers examined why international students selected a large, public research university in the state of North Carolina and what strategies other institutions are implementing to make their campuses internationally appealing and diverse.

Although the previous research regarding international students is copious, this study focuses on the benefits of recruiting international students, barriers to recruitment efforts, current recruitment practices that attempt to overcome these barriers, and factors that contribute to students making their



decision to attend a specific university in the U.S. Thus, the immediate purpose is to assist university administrators both to craft a systematic institutional approach and identify specific strategies for recruiting international students.

Literature Review

The literature focuses primarily on two distinct benefits concerning recruiting international students: cultural and economic. International students create a colorful heritage on our campuses (Bevis, 2002). Universities and colleges strive to create an environment on their campuses that is reflective of today's society and the world. A culturally-rich environment prepares students to interact with diverse populations and to develop global competence. This competence enables students to comprehend world events and develop plans and solutions to address the consequences of these occurrences (Reimers, 2009). Populating our campuses with international students will encourage both international and domestic students to develop intercultural proficiency. Moreover, this responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of institutions of higher education (Starobin, 2006).

The barriers to recruitment efforts can be divided into three categories: student demographics, political, and economic. The demographic profile of international students has changed over the last decade and has had a direct impact on recruitment and retention planning. Furthermore, traditional-age undergraduate international students, from middle class backgrounds, exhibit "country-specific cliques" (Fischer, 2011a). Because these students are younger than their predecessors, especially students pursuing their undergraduate degree, they often are unsure of where they want to study which makes the recruitment effort much more labor intensive. International graduate students are more definitive of their major and institutional choice.

Differences among cultures often create barriers for recruitment officers (Bevis, 2002). The U.S. is a socially and religiously tolerant country while many other countries are not as open-minded. Differences in gender roles, religious practices, and moral values may create tension when international students consider studying abroad. For example, religious conservatives may be uncomfortable with opposite-gender instructors and co-ed housing (Fischer, 2011a; Lee & Rice, 2007).

Political barriers in the U.S. include strict governmental policies and regulations implemented after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and subsequent Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) were created and initially affected access to U.S. institutions (Starobin, 2006). SEVIS, a web-based data collection and reporting system, monitors the enrollment status of international students and exchange visitors. International student enrollment declined for the first time during the 2003-2004 academic year by 2.9% (Chin & Gallup-Black, 2004) and international students were dissuaded from applying to U.S. institutions because of SEVIS restrictions (Starobin, 2006). But since 2006 those international student numbers have begun to climb each year.

Economic barriers can be further identified as institutional and/or global. Institutional barriers can include an insufficient number of undergraduate scholarships and available financial aid, tuition increases and out-of-state tuition costs for international students, limited overseas travel budget for recruitment officers, increased workload associated with federal compliance regulations, and changing student demographics without additional human resources. Other countries have recognized the need to recruit international students for economic development and have extended scholarships as an incentive (Adnett, 2010).

The current U.S. economic recession has resulted in reduced state funding for institutions and consequently, universities and colleges compensate for the shortfall by increasing tuition and fees. Alongside tuition increases it is also the policy of many states for international students to pay out-of-state tuition costs. As stated earlier, most institutions use this as a mechanism for increasing revenues (Fischer, 2010).

The current global financial crisis will most likely have an effect on recruitment efforts. Just as the current economic recession in the U.S. has had a profound effect on universities and colleges, the world financial crisis will undoubtedly affect international student enrollment as countries experience high unemployment, lower growth in the Gross Domestic Product, and economic uncertainty.

In 2007 over three million students enrolled in countries outside their citizenship with France, Germany, Britain, and the U.S. receiving over half (Adnett, 2010). International students are a key factor in promoting economic development and

the federal government plays a critical role in their recruitment. There are three practices that the federal government could employ that would help recruitment efforts on campuses. First, the federal government should continue to promote American higher education as a financial investment (\$13 million in 2007). It is small price to pay for the \$20 billion international students contribute to the U.S. economy each year (Chow & Bhandari, 2010). Second, streamlining visa-approval procedures would facilitate the application process. Third, developing grants for testing fees and travel costs to visa interviews would assist potential students and aid in the recruitment efforts (McMurtrie, 2008).

Our literature review focused on the cultural and economic benefits of recruiting international students to campuses and the barriers to recruitment efforts. We categorized these barriers into three areas: student demographics, political and economic. International students create a richness to campuses both in terms of cultural and financial benefits as evidenced by the literature. The evolving nature of the student demographics coupled with federal and state policies and regulations and need for financial assistance create obstacles for recruitment officers. To better overcome these obstacles, a study of international student selection choices was conducted

Methodology

The methodology used for this study was quantitative in nature. A college choice factor survey that was designed specifically for international students used in a previous study (Ruby, 2007) was also used for this survey (see Appendix A). The instrument had been tested for reliability and validity. The survey instrument consisted of a combination of items originally developed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Pooch (1997) and Waters (1992). The survey was updated to reflect changes in political restrictions, recruitment characteristics and institutional characteristics which occurred since the origin of the original survey.

The population surveyed was all international students who accepted a position as either an exchange student at a Southern public research university or graduated from a bachelor's, master's or doctoral program at the same institution. This study began in Fall 2010 and consisted of three waves – Fall 2010, Spring 2011, and Fall 2011. One-hundred sixty-four individuals entered the program in Fall 2010; 58 in Spring 2011, and 114 in Fall 2011. The survey was also sent to 71 continuing international students in Fall

2010. The students possessed two types of non-immigrant visa status: exchange student (J-1 visa) and degree-seeking (F-1 visa). The total response rate for the survey was 53%.

Research Questions

This empirical study sought to determine what institutional, program, and recruitment characteristics influenced international students to attend a U.S. institution – specifically, East Carolina University. These responses were stratified by gender and type of degree to determine if there were any significant differences. The study also sought to determine if there were any differences by world region. The following research questions were explored:

1. What characteristics were most important to males when choosing an institution?
2. What characteristics were most important to females when choosing an institution?
3. What characteristics did bachelors, masters and doctoral students find most important when choosing an institution?
4. Were there any differences in these characteristics by region and degree?

Results and Discussion

Population Demographics

Of the 216 respondents who completed the survey, 122 respondents were degree-seeking. Forty respondents were pursuing bachelor's degrees; 54 pursuing master's degrees and 28 pursuing doctoral degrees. Fifty-six countries were represented consisting of eight regions. Asia and Europe contributed the greatest number of international students followed by Oceania, the Middle East, Central and South America, Africa, Caribbean, and North America. There were 87 males and 127 females who responded to the survey. Two respondents chose not to provide their gender and were excluded from the gender study. Table 1 provides information on the percentage of males and females for each region. The percentage of students seeking undergraduate and graduate degrees for each region is shown in Table 2. This table also includes the percentage of the total degree seeking population of each region.

Significant Differences by Gender and Region

Gender

Two-tailed, independent sample t-tests were conducted to determine whether there were any significant



Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents: Region by Gender (N=212)

| | Gender | n | % | % Total Population |
|-------------------------|--------|----|------|--------------------|
| Africa | Male | 4 | 44.4 | 4.2 |
| | Female | 4 | 44.4 | |
| Asia | Male | 30 | 39.0 | 36.3 |
| | Female | 47 | 61.0 | |
| Caribbean | Male | 3 | 37.5 | 3.8 |
| | Female | 5 | 62.5 | |
| Central & South America | Male | 7 | 58.3 | 5.7 |
| | Female | 5 | 41.7 | |
| Europe | Male | 26 | 38.2 | 32.1 |
| | Female | 42 | 61.8 | |
| Middle East | Male | 7 | 50.0 | 6.6 |
| | Female | 7 | 50.0 | |
| North America | Male | 2 | 40.0 | 2.4 |
| | Female | 3 | 60.0 | |
| Oceania | Male | 7 | 36.8 | 9.0 |
| | Female | 12 | 63.2 | |

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents: Region by Degree Currently Seeking (N=122)

| Region | Bachelor's n/% | Master's n/% | Doctoral n/% | % Total Population |
|-------------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Africa | 1 (33.3) | 0 (0.0) | 2 (66.7) | 2.5 |
| Asia | 8 (12.5) | 35 (54.7) | 21 (32.1) | 52.5 |
| Caribbean | 7 (87.5) | 1 (12.5) | 0 (0.0) | 6.6 |
| Central & South America | 5 (83.3) | 1 (16.7) | 0 (0.0) | 4.9 |
| Europe | 16 (57.1) | 9 (32.1) | 3 (10.7) | 23.0 |
| Middle East | 3 (30.0) | 5 (50.0) | 2 (20.0) | 8.2 |
| North America | 0 (0.0) | 3 (100.0) | 0 (0.0) | 2.5 |
| Oceania | All students in Oceania were non-degree students | | | |

differences by gender. All respondents, degree and non-degree seeking, were included in the gender study. Two characteristics were significant at the .05 level: university size and enrollment, and rigor of the program. Males were more likely than females to rate university size and enrollment more important. They were also more likely to rate rigor of the program more important than females (see Table 3). It should be noted that 64% (n=56) of the males who responded were from Asia or Europe so this data may be biased towards those areas. Research clearly indicates that more males than females major in science and engineering (Bhandari, 2011) so type of degree sought may also have an influence on these characteristics.

Degree

Since degree has three categories, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there were any significant differences by type of degree sought. One hundred twenty-two respondents were degree seeking. All other students who were non-degree students at the time of the survey were excluded from the analysis of variance.

There were significant differences between the three groups at the .05 level. They included institutional characteristics (exciting place to live, university size and enrollment, physical attractiveness of campus, and social atmosphere of campus), program characteristics (friendliness of department staff, faculty/student ratio, and length of time required to complete program), and marketing recruitment characteristics (saw a list of ranking universities, speed of acceptance into the program, and ease of admissions process and amount of funding offered). The results of the ANOVA can be found in Table 4.

This study has acknowledged that there were differences by type of degree but how did degree students rate the importance of each of the characteristics. Were there any differences by region?

Undergraduate students rated friendliness of the department staff, speed of acceptance into the program, ease of the admissions process and length of time required to complete the degree most important. They also were concerned about the university size and social atmosphere of the campus. This finding may be attributed to the changing demographics of the international student. As noted in the literature review, they are traditional-age university students and more likely from a middle class background (Fischer, 2011b). As a result, it is possible that aesthetic characteristics are more appealing to them than other factors. Understandably, undergraduates rated

friendliness of department staff, small class size, and ease of the admission process as important to them. Fischer would suggest that more support services were necessary to today's undergraduate students.

Master's students appear to be focused exclusively on three characteristics: amount of funding, speed of acceptance into the program, opportunity for assistantships/scholarships and length of time required to complete degree. Program characteristics appear to be very important. The availability of financial assistance is more important to master's students than undergraduate students (Adnett, 2011). Doctoral, master's, and bachelor's students respectively ranked funding as an important characteristic in their decision making process, and if the U.S. wants to continue to be a destination for international students, institutions and the federal government need to offer more funding. International students contribute to our economic development both on the state and national level, and recruiting these students needs to be a priority (Adnett). Institutions can offer aid in the form of graduate assistantships, scholarships and tuition waivers. State government relations personnel can lobby for funding to support international students.

Overall, doctoral students were most concerned about funding but upon examination of country differences, they were also concerned about the rigor of the program and friendliness of departmental staff. Small class size was also an important factor. Doctoral students may perceive their time investment to be significant and thus desire an atmosphere that fosters familiarity. Doctoral students rank financial assistance higher than undergraduate and master level students. This may be attributed to the substantial financial investment required of a doctoral degree and the fact that other countries are offering funding for graduate students (Adnett, 2011; McMurtrie, 2008).

Regardless of level of degree, all students ranked faculty/student ratio as an important program characteristic. Thus, if institutions cannot afford to reduce class size, they should make small discussion groups a possibility. This could be accomplished with establishing a cohort model in programs. Students could be divided into cohorts based on concentrations in majors, geographic regions, or service providers, to suggest a few. Consortiums could be developed to create intra-organizational communication among various student interest groups (Starobin, 2006).

Students also ranked both the admission process and the time to degree as important characteristics. If an institution can improve these processes, it will benefit both the student and



Table 3

Group Differences by Gender for Students Who Pursue Degrees

| Variable | Males (1) | | Females (2) | | <i>t</i> |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | |
| University Size and Enrollment | 3.47 | 1.172 | 3.06 | 1.303 | -2.210* |
| Rigor of the Program | 3.48 | 1.107 | 3.15 | 1.080 | -1.992* |

Note. **p* < .05.

Table 4
One-Way Analysis of Variance Summary for Degree

| Variable | Source | <i>df</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig</i> |
|---|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Exciting Place to Live | Between Groups | 2 | 16.680 | 8.340 | 5.906 | .004* |
| | Within Groups | 121 | 170.869 | 1.412 | | |
| Affordability of Off Campus Housing | Between Groups | 2 | 9.159 | 4.585 | 3.044 | .051* |
| | Within Groups | 121 | 182.250 | 1.506 | | |
| University Size & Enrollment | Between Groups | 2 | 19.491 | 9.745 | 6.67 | .002* |
| | Within Groups | 121 | 176.598 | 1.459 | | |
| Physical Attractiveness of the Campus | Between Groups | 2 | 18.321 | 9.161 | 5.731 | .004* |
| | Within Groups | 121 | 193.421 | 1.599 | | |
| Social Atmosphere | Between Groups | 2 | 12.001 | 6.000 | 3.587 | .031* |
| | Within Groups | 121 | 202.387 | 1.673 | | |
| Friendliness of Department Staff | Between Groups | 2 | 13.536 | 6.768 | 4.189 | .018* |
| | Within Groups | 115 | 185.794 | 1.616 | | |
| Faculty/Student Ratio | Between Groups | 2 | 13.460 | 6.730 | 4.982 | .008* |
| | Within Groups | 115 | 155.362 | 1.351 | | |
| Length of Time Required to Complete Program | Between Groups | 2 | 10.634 | 5.317 | 3.211 | .044* |
| | Within Groups | 115 | 190.417 | 1.656 | | |
| Saw a List of Ranking Universities | Between Groups | 2 | 14.306 | 7.153 | 3.858 | .024* |
| | Within Groups | 112 | 207.659 | 1.854 | | |
| Speed of Acceptance into The Program | Between Groups | 2 | 13.375 | 6.687 | 4.377 | .015* |
| | Within Groups | 113 | 172.660 | 1.528 | | |
| Ease of Admissions Process | Between Groups | 2 | 12.928 | 6.464 | 4.027 | .020* |
| | Within Groups | 114 | 182.987 | 1.605 | | |
| Amount of Funding Offered | Between Groups | 2 | 17.070 | 8.535 | 3.563 | .032* |
| | Within Groups | 113 | 270.688 | 2.395 | | |

Note. **p* < .05.

the institution. Colleges and universities need to implement business strategies designed to improve efficiency and performance (Starobin, 2006) but, with that said, institutions must consider recent reductions in budgets at all campus levels.

Region

There were not enough observations in each region when the analysis was stratified by both region and gender or region and degree to conduct an analysis of variance. However, overall mean differences in the characteristics which showed significant differences among bachelor's, master's and doctoral students revealed important differences by degree regarding those attributes that were deemed significant by the respondents (see Table 5 and Table 6).

Although there were two African doctoral students, the characteristics of the institution that they valued most highly were departmental course offerings and rigor of the program, financial aid, input from teachers, relatives, friends, and input from their sponsor.

Asian bachelor's students ($n=8$) valued a number of factors highly. Among these were university size and physical attractiveness of the campus, departmental course offerings reputation of the professors, friendliness of admissions and departmental staff, and the opportunity to develop friendships. Marketing characteristics included the ability to file an on-line application, mailing the I-20 early, and meeting in person with a university representative in their own country. They also valued the advice from individuals who they deemed important. Asian master's students ($n=32$) did not rate university characteristics as highly as bachelor's students; funding was most important on their agenda. For Asian doctoral ($n=19$) students research opportunities and a safe low crime area surrounding the university were most important followed by reputation of their program and program professors.

All Caribbean students were bachelor's students ($n=7$) and like Asian bachelor's students their highest ratings included the institutional characteristics such as academic accreditation and standards, reputation of the institution, and university size and enrollment. They valued friendliness of department faculty and staff and length of time to complete their program. They were encouraged to attend the university's website, lists of ranking universities, speed of acceptance into the program, and the ease of the admission process. Other influences consisted of alumni, students currently in the program, parents and family, and faculty. Central

and South American bachelor's students ($n=7$) also were influenced by a number of issues including affordability of off-campus housing, social atmosphere of the campus, cost of tuition books and fees, library facilities and collections as well as university size and enrollment.

European bachelor's students ($n=16$) rated the accessibility of an online application and ease of the admissions process as their highest criteria. Like Caribbean students they were also affected by the affordability of off-campus housing, and friendliness of department staff and faculty. For European master's students ($n=9$), length of time to complete the program rated highest on their list followed by academic accreditation and friendliness of the department faculty. Doctoral students ($n=3$) rated scholarship and assistantship availability highest followed by reputation of faculty, internship opportunities, and a visit to the campus which, was not part of the interview. They also received input from students not currently in the program.

Middle Eastern bachelor's students ($n=3$) were influenced by a number of criteria like their Caribbean and Asian counterparts. Five Middle Eastern master's students ($n=5$) rated location, affordability of housing and the online application process highly as well as input from their program faculty. Middle Eastern doctoral students ($n=2$) rated information about the institution in a guidebook about programs in the United States highly as well as written correspondence from the university and advising centers abroad. Finally, North American master's students ($n=3$) rated location in the U.S. and physical attractiveness of the campus most highly.

Limitations

This study is a case study of limited to a Southern public research university as classified by the Carnegie Foundation. We would suggest that the study be carried out on a larger scale so that comparisons can be made across Carnegie classifications. This would also address the issue of the number of respondents in each degree group (bachelor, master and doctoral) and region since it would increase the size of the respondent pool and allow the authors to do more investigative analysis and interpretation.



Table 5

Mean College Choice Characteristics for Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral International Students

| Choice Type | Choice Factor | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--------------------------|--|----------|-----------|
| Bachelor's (n=40) | | | |
| Program | Friendliness of Department Staff | 4.08 | 1.14 |
| Marketing | Speed of Acceptance into Program | 4.08 | 1.07 |
| Marketing | Ease of the admissions Process | 4.05 | 1.09 |
| Program | Time Required to Complete Degree | 3.98 | 1.19 |
| Institution | University Size/Enrollment | 3.88 | 1.10 |
| Institution | Social Atmosphere of Campus | 3.73 | 1.18 |
| Program | Faculty/Student Ratio | 3.70 | 1.02 |
| Program | Opportunity for Assistantships/Scholarships | 3.60 | 1.50 |
| Program | Rigor of Program | 3.48 | 0.93 |
| Marketing | Department Offered an Assistantship/Scholarship | 3.03 | 1.59 |
| Marketing | Amount of Funding Offered | 2.90 | 1.62 |
| Program | This was the only program to offer financial aid | 2.67 | 1.53 |
| Master's (n=54) | | | |
| Marketing | Amount of Funding Offered | 3.78 | 1.52 |
| Marketing | Speed of Acceptance into Program | 3.70 | 1.25 |
| Program | Opportunity for Assistantships/Scholarships | 3.65 | 1.62 |
| Program | Length of Time Required to Complete Degree | 3.63 | 1.30 |
| Marketing | Department Offered an Assistantship/Scholarship | 3.60 | 1.62 |
| Program | Friendliness of Department Staff | 3.52 | 1.37 |
| Marketing | Ease of the admissions Process | 3.46 | 1.30 |
| Institution | Social Atmosphere on Campus | 3.31 | 1.39 |
| Program | Rigor of Program | 3.29 | 1.21 |
| Institution | University Size/Enrollment | 3.20 | 1.29 |
| Program | This was the only program to offer financial aid | 3.08 | 1.57 |
| Program | Faculty/Student Ratio | 3.00 | 1.24 |
| Doctoral (n=29) | | | |
| Marketing | Department Offered an Assistantship/Scholarship | 3.52 | 1.67 |
| Program | Opportunity for Assistantships/Scholarships | 3.50 | 1.79 |
| Marketing | Amount of Funding Offered | 3.41 | 1.50 |
| Program | This was the only program to offer financial aid | 3.40 | 1.41 |
| Program | Rigor of Program | 3.27 | 1.12 |
| Marketing | Ease of the admissions Process | 3.22 | 1.45 |
| Program | Friendliness of Department Staff | 3.19 | 1.27 |
| Program | Length of Time Required to Complete Degree | 3.15 | 1.41 |
| Marketing | Speed of Acceptance into Program | 3.15 | 1.43 |
| Program | Faculty/Student Ratio | 2.96 | 1.22 |
| Institution | Social Atmosphere on Campus | 2.90 | 1.26 |
| Institution | University Size/Enrollment | 2.86 | 1.19 |

Table 6

Percentage of Males and Females Who Chose University Size or Rigor of Program as an Important Factor in Their College Choice

| | University Size | | Rigor of Program | |
|-------------|-----------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>F</i> |
| Overall | 93.9 | 87.5 | 95.9 | 91.6 |
| Asia/Europe | 94.0 | 87.2 | 97.9 | 93.3 |

Implications

What are the outcomes of our study for recruitment officers? The products of the study are student-centered and may clearly be implemented into the institution with a modicum of change.

Relevant literature is replete with information espousing the economic benefits of international student enrollment. Not only do international students generate revenue for campuses from tuition and fees, but they stimulate the local economy as well. The internationalization of education along with transferable knowledge and increased human mobility is likely to promote economic development in the future (Adnett, 2010). During 2008-2009, international students contributed more than \$20 billion dollars to the U. S. economy (Chow & Bhandari, 2010). Institutional and local officials need to understand the financial contributions and commitment international students have to their community.

A consequence of the economic recession is reduced budgets for overseas travel and inadequate department staffing (Fischer & Pace, 2010). Competition for foreign-born students is intense and traveling abroad helps but overseas travel is expensive and labor intensive. Student service personnel who are not engaged in recruitment travel are consumed with assisting current international students. Noncompliance issues that may result in denial of visa renewal, re-entry, or deportation while simultaneously providing support services to these students utilize a great deal of staff time (Starobin, 2006). Today, institutions are developing consortiums to share in the expenses of recruiting international students (Fischer, 2011b). Study Mississippi, Study New Jersey, Study New York, and others are just a few examples of the many consortiums that exist. These consortiums collaborate on marketing and admissions efforts such as sharing booths at recruitment fairs, traveling overseas together to cover various legs of the

trip, website development, hosting counselors from foreign countries, and offering professional development opportunities on best practices (Fischer, 2011b). Although ordinarily these institutions would be competitors, the financial benefit outweighs other dynamics.

There has been much written on recruitment practices and the factors that contribute to international students' choice of a particular institution and these practices and factors can be divided into three categories that include institutional, private, and governmental. These are all key components toward looking at ways to attract international students.

Institutional practices and factors begin with the development of a comprehensive university student recruitment plan that is not the sole responsibility of one department but shared with all of the stakeholders (Starobin, 2006). This includes students, alumni, faculty, administrators, board of trustees, and members of the community. Each has an investment in the success of the institution and should be encouraged to participate in the process. For example, current international students, faculty, alumni, and foreign-born community members with ties to their homeland may identify potential students (Mallett & McFadden, 2009; McMurtrie, 2008). Many faculty members have opportunities to teach or work in another country or lead study tours, making them a viable recruitment resource with no additional cost to the institution as well. Alumni were also found to be the single most effective group of recruiters for an institution (Stevenson, 2006). Alumni would need to be briefed on the full range of academic programs as their own experience is usually confined to one program. Again, there would be no additional costs to the institution as the travel expense would be absorbed by the alumni or their employer.

An added practice employed to recruit international students is for the institution to develop an academic transfer program with universities in other countries (Starobin, 2006). Undergraduate international students could begin their academic program in their home country and then transfer to the U.S. (McMurtrie, 2005). Although the U.S. institution does not receive four years of revenue from the student, it nonetheless receives at least two years or more if the student enrolls in a graduate program upon graduation.

It has already been acknowledged that international students pay out-of-state tuition which is generally three times the cost of in-state tuition. Another practice would involve lowering the tuition by one-third



for international students (McMurtrie, 2008). Although this practice may appear to be counter-intuitive, institutions are still increasing their revenue from international students by generally one-third more than in-state students. If this practice is successful, the institution can make up any fiscal differences by recruiting more students.

Also discussed in relevant literature is to use the private sector to recruit international students (Fischer, 2010; McMurtrie, 2008; Starobin, 2006). Institutions recognize that they do not have the resources or the personnel to increase the international student enrollment on their campuses. Companies such as Into University Partnerships, Hobsons, and IDP Solutions are just a few examples of private companies that recruit students for institutions. Britain and Australia have been utilizing the private sector for over a decade and have the enrollment numbers to prove its benefit to the institution (Fischer, 2010).

Recommendations for Future Research

We conclude with three recommendations for future research. First, it would be important to perform a longitudinal study regarding the retention rates of international students by examining the impact of college choice factors. In-depth research investigating international experiences on American campuses would be valuable.

Second, country-specific research may be useful so universities and colleges may identify special recruitment practices for students of distinct cultural uniqueness. Research could be designed to explore what recruitment activities a university was implementing for a particular target country.

Finally, a study regarding how prospective international students search for institutions to apply to and factors that influence their choice, as perceived through an institutions point of view, would be valuable. Do students enroll at a particular institution as a first preference or as back-up in case they are not accepted into their favored institution of choice?

International students have contributed significantly to the rich heritage of U.S. higher education. They also add to the overall climate and international energy embraced by collegiate campuses across America. The purpose of our study was to determine what institutional, program, and marketing recruitment characteristics influenced international students to pursue their bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees at an American institution – specifically, East Carolina University. Further, the United States remains the most

popular destination for international students, especially with students from India and China (Bhandari, 2008). The U.S. should continually maintain its status as a key higher education destination and should continue to attract international students because of the size, importance, and excellence of its academic system. Whether or not our universities will preserve their competitive edge in the recruitment of international students over the next several years is yet to be determined.

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