



WHERE IN THE WORLD

As the political climate shifts around the globe, counselors in different countries are faced with new challenges

It seems as if everything around us is shifting.

From calls to close borders to intolerance for non-citizens, growing nationalism within the US and other countries threatens the global nature of higher education.

How are college counselors advising students in this new political climate? And are there differences depending on where counselors reside in the world?

The Journal asked five NACAC members from across the globe—John Evans from International School of Prague (Czech Republic), Jane Lowery from the American Community School

of Abu Dhabi (UAE), Wilson Lee from Yongsan International School of Seoul (South Korea), Kevin Randolph from the American School of Guatemala, and Jim Barekman from International Community School of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)—to address those questions and more.

Their responses can't be generalized across all populations. After all, the counselors we spoke to work at schools with strong international communities. As such, the families they serve likely approach higher education from a different

perspective than is found in local schools educating home-country students.

That said, a common thread is apparent: While students, parents, and the counselors who advise them are still looking for the *best fit*, for some, decision factors and destination countries are changing.

Here's what they had to say about the changing higher education marketplace, the advice they give families, and the best ways for admission representatives to engage with the students they serve. (Responses have been edited for length and clarity.)



WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU CURRENTLY FACE AS A COUNSELOR ADVISING STUDENTS ABOUT COLLEGE IN TODAY'S CLIMATE?

Randolph (Guatemala): There is so much information and there are many opinions on college admission; I see my students as overwhelmed or sometimes simply misinformed. . . . Breaking through the noise and clutter with honest guidance, to me, is like chipping away at stone.



Lee (Korea): The biggest challenge I currently face in advising students about college is knowing what is actually happening in today's geopolitical climate. With so many different sources and opinions, it is difficult to know whose truth I should believe.



Evans (Czech Republic): In my current school, the biggest challenge is providing a wide array of up-to-date information on colleges and universities in countries around the world. For example, of 65 seniors in last year's graduating class, 23 percent went to the United Kingdom, 22 percent went to the United States, and 18 percent went to The Netherlands. The other 37 percent went to universities in Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Korea, Malaysia, and Spain, or took a gap year.



Lowery (UAE): Having a large Muslim population, most of whom are US citizens, it brings up concerns about where they will feel safe and accepted. . . . and every time there is a shooting on a university campus or school, it sends a shiver into our parent community.



HAVE YOU SEEN A CHANGE IN YOUR JUNIOR YEAR STUDENTS' COUNTRY PREFERENCES OR COLLEGE CHOICES OVER THE LAST YEAR? WHAT IS DIFFERENT?

Lee (Korea): Not much, however, I think it would be fair to say that in South Korea we were all watching the US presidential elections very closely in 2016.



MY STUDENTS ARE VERY AWARE OF CURRENT EVENTS AND THE RAPID CHANGES AROUND THE WORLD. . . . [THEY] WANT THE 'KID GLOVES TO COME OFF' AND TO HAVE CANDID CONVERSATIONS."

Lowery (UAE): Overall there is a bit stronger push to be near family in whatever county or countries that is for the family. . . . We are seeing a few more families split on the destination: one parent still determined the US is the best place to go and one not convinced it is a good match or worth the bang for the buck.



Barekman (Ethiopia): Our students hear the news coming from the US and of course it raises concerns, but I don't see that concern translating into anyone rushing to apply elsewhere. The importance of our African students studying near family (if possible) continues to supersede any statements made at a political level. . . . However, I do feel that if US universities value having international students from developing nations the best way to say, "Despite what you may hear in the news, we welcome you!" is to consider offering financial assistance to bright young people who don't have the resources. The life-changing investments that universities have made in our students benefit those campuses immensely and, when those students return to their home countries, they make a global impact.



Randolph (Guatemala): In speaking with my community of students and families, I'm learning price is the main reason. European universities, along with those in Mexico and Canada, are increasing in popularity. Our families still love American universities but many have found equal alternatives in the UK, Mexico, and Europe, for a fraction of the price.



ON AVERAGE, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS APPLY TO US INSTITUTIONS? IS THIS CHANGING?

Lee (Korea): At my school, nearly 100 percent apply or show a great interest in the US. The only change we are seeing is a slight shift in students



applying to other countries. There is growing interest in Singapore and Hong Kong, and these two locations offer amazing programs at an affordable cost (compared to the US), while being geographically closer.

Evans (Czech Republic): Five or six years ago, it used to be around 30 percent or more. Now it's down to around 23 to 25 percent. The gradual drop seems to be due primarily to the rising popularity of interesting English programs in The Netherlands and the many options in the UK to study just the subject that interests students. . . . Rising costs are another factor. For an American student, paying full fare at a UK university is much cheaper than paying full fare at an American college, especially when financial aid or scholarships aren't forthcoming.



Lowery (UAE): We have a large percentage apply to the US. Over the past few years it is usually 75 to 80 percent of our students will submit applications to the US. I don't see a big change overall in the applications. . . . Our US matriculation dropped last year.



Barekman (Ethiopia): The percentage of our students who apply to US institutions varies from year to year depending on the composition of the class, but it is still the No. 1 destination for a majority of our students after they graduate. . . . Students from countries where education is free or very inexpensive are more likely to state, "I will only study in the US if I get accepted to a top-ranked university."



Randolph (Guatemala): Consistently, by January, we have seen 90 to 95 percent of all applications submitted go to the US. By Jan. 31, 2017, 98 percent of applications submitted by my students had gone to the US. By Jan. 31, 2018, 79 percent of all applications submitted by my students have





gone to the US. I'm eager to see where this year's class ultimately matriculates.

GIVEN RECENT GEOPOLITICAL FACTORS AND SAFETY CONCERNS, HAVE YOU CHANGED THE WAY YOU ADVISE STUDENTS? IN WHAT WAYS?

Evans (Czech Republic):

Yes, while we don't make a statement in formal settings like parent nights or in publications, I find myself addressing these matters a bit more than before in parent conferences when questions arise. Students usually do not raise concerns, but I may gently insert a perspective if I feel it is called for in a particular situation with a particular student.



Barekman (Ethiopia):

Rather than changing the way in which I advise one-on-one, through our advisory program "transition to university" seminars, we raise the topics through discussions to prepare our students for what they may encounter on their campus next year. I could see how that would change in a heartbeat if they were placed on a "list," as has been done to other countries, or if obtaining student visas started to become more difficult.



Randolph (Guatemala):

With no let-up in the violence we see here in Latin America, the USA is still a geographically close, safe option for a college experience. The price of a college



education in the US has forced me to look to Europe more and more. In my parent nights and workshops in our community, I used to speak about admission from a very American perspective. No longer. This year my presentations to parents devote equal time to countries like Canada, Spain, Korea, the UK, and Mexico where our students are looking. The word "value" is brought up often in my community.

WHAT ARE ONE OR TWO THINGS INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVES CAN DO TO EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE WITH YOUR STUDENTS?

Lee (Korea):

My students are very aware of current events and the rapid changes around the world. When a college representative comes to my school from the US, my students want the "kid gloves to come off" and want to have candid conversations about the issues that concern them. I do know this is easier said than done, but our students appreciate truth and respect genuineness. It is what they desire as young-adults.



Evans (Czech Republic):

It should be obvious (but sometimes is not) that other departments/groups on campus need to engage in the commitment to creating a welcoming environment. Departments and groups include summer programs, residential life, English Language programs, student senate, etc.



Lowery (UAE): My kids always want to know there is a large/active/engaged international population on campus. They are used to 50 nationalities as a way of life and celebrations of all religions and cultures.



Barekman (Ethiopia):

Consider what it takes to apply to your university through the eyes of an international student. How US-centric is your system? If your university does not accept documents electronically, consider changing that! Asking students to mail documents from this part of the world is not easy... On another note, every time you read an application from a developing nation know that it probably took that student that much more to apply to your university because the internet might be irregular and that student may not have had any electricity at home; hurdles our students overcome daily.



Randolph (Guatemala):

When a representative can show the student that he or she won't be the only Central American student there, that's when I see possibility on the horizon. Students are excited but nervous about leaving their home country and going to university alone. When my students know that they will be surrounded by a strong community of other Central American students with similar backgrounds, they are often excited to consider that school. ☐



—Lindsay Addington