As a major player in higher education in Asia, India is poised to further expand its footprint on the global stage through several recent initiatives launched both in the U.S. and in India and designed to leverage a natural affinity between two of the world’s largest democracies and higher education systems. At the national- and policy-level there has been a renewed effort to overhaul the Indian higher education system, with a new National Education Policy slated for release in early 2019; a greater emphasis on quality assurance; and the launch of the first-ever National Institutional Rankings Framework in 2016.

These changes come at a time when it is projected that in the next two decades, India—Asia’s third largest economy—will add up to 300 million people to its workforce, the equivalent of the entire U.S. population (Aiyar and Mody, 2011). This growth will primarily be amongst India’s youth between the ages of 18-24, or its “demographic dividend,” all of whom will need a world-class tertiary education, the demand for which will need to be met domestically through India’s own higher education capacity, but also through a global education in key destinations abroad. An estimated 278,000 Indian students currently study abroad in 121 countries, with the majority studying in Anglophone countries such as the U.S., the U.K., Canada and Australia (Project Atlas, 2017; UNESCO, 2017).

Conversely, only about 4,200 U.S. students studied abroad in India in 2015/16, a decline of 6% over the prior year. Even though the numbers of U.S. students going to India had inched up in 2010/11, the total has hovered at about 4,000 students per year over the past five years.

**BILATERAL INITIATIVES TO INCREASE U.S.-INDIA EXCHANGES AND PARTNERSHIPS**

In addition to the self-motivated mobility described above, there are several other initiatives—both at the U.S. and India end—that aim to increase higher education exchanges, mobility and knowledge flows between the two countries. EducationUSA, the U.S. Department of State supported program and the official source of information on U.S. higher studies, is located across India in 7 cities with over 30 advisers. It provides free information about U.S. higher studies and the application process. It works closely with U.S. Embassy and U.S. higher education institutions supporting mobility of Indian students to the U.S.

Funded by the U.S. Department of State and in partnership with the United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF), Fulbright program in India is one
of the largest in the world and from 2012-2017 a total of almost 1,580 Indian and American students and scholars participated in this flagship program. An additional 58 American students went to India in 2016/17 on the U.S. State Department’s Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program.

Another bilateral initiative between the two governments, the U.S.-India 21st Century Knowledge Initiative, aims to strengthen collaboration and build partnerships between U.S. and Indian institutions of higher education (United States-India Educational Foundation, 2018). Each project receives an award that can be utilized over a two-year period, with the aim of promoting mutual understanding, encouraging educational reform and economic growth, and developing junior faculty at U.S. and Indian institutions of higher learning.

In 2015 the Government of India launched the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) in higher education, aimed at tapping the talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs internationally to encourage their engagement with Indian institutions and to further develop India’s scientific and technological capabilities in the global arena (Global Initiative of Academic Networks, 2015). Also designed to attract faculty is the Department of Science and Technology’s Visiting Advanced Joint Research (VAIRA) faculty scheme aimed at faculty and designed to enable non-resident Indians and the overseas scientific community to participate and contribute to research and development in India (Department of Science & Technology, 2017). Underpinning all these initiatives is the consensus that investments in research are needed to spur innovation.

Finally, in addition to boosting faculty exchanges, in March 2018, the Ministry of Human Resource Development in India launched its Study in India initiative which aims to invest $23 million by 2020 to attract 200,000 international students initially from South Asia, other parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, with the goal of expanding to other countries in the future (Government of India, 2018). Providing scholarships to international students is a key strategy of the initiative, with about 55% of students slated to receive fee waivers at 160 Indian host institutions.

THE ROLE OF THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL SECTOR IN BOOSTING INDO-U.S. PARTNERSHIPS

While governments and institutions need to lead the charge, non-governmental organizations can also play a key role. In 2010 in recognition of the importance of the U.S.-India strategic partnership in higher education, IIE launched the International Academic Partnership Program (IAPP) to bring together U.S. and Indian institutions to develop campus-wide partnership strategies (Institute of International Education, 2018). A total of 29 institutions have participated in three IAPP delegations to India. The program helped jumpstart interdisciplinary cooperation and consensus among faculty, staff, and administrators.

The U.S.-India Knowledge Exchange is a new initiative launched recently by Sannam S4 in partnership with the U.S. India Strategic Partnerships Forum (USISPF) that aims to facilitate partnerships, advance research, foster innovation and spur entrepreneurship between the two countries (U.S.-India Knowledge Exchange, 2018). An inaugural event in Washington DC in June 2018 drew about 50 attendees from U.S. institutions, nonprofits, governmental agencies and industry and tackled issues such as the current higher education reforms underway in India; funding for U.S.-India research and development; and current opportunities and challenges to cross-border collaboration in higher education.

The annual IC3 Conference attracts high schools, higher education institutions, governmental agencies and industry delegates from around the world. Geared towards advancing career and college counseling in high schools in India and South Asia, the third and next edition will take place in New Delhi in August 2018. It will include key U.S. and Indian partner agencies such as EducationUSA, IIE, NACAC and College Board. The 2017 Conference had over 530 participants from 21 countries, with more than 75 delegates from U.S. institutions alone. Topics discussed included 21st century careers and counseling, global education opportunities, diversity, equity and access.

While educational exchange and partnerships between India and the U.S. seem to be receiving renewed attention, key considerations for both countries in this next phase will include grappling with issues around equity and access in education; quality assurance and the mutual recognition of degrees and credentials. Finally, a common challenge and opportunity for both countries will be to produce job-ready graduates and ensure that any higher education experience—at home or overseas—will equip both Indian and U.S. students with the 21st century competencies required to succeed in a global economy.