

GLOBAL EDUCATION RESEARCH REPORTS



Welcoming International Students at U.S. Community Colleges

Leah Mason, Ed. D.

Welcoming International Students at U.S. Community Colleges

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Table of Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	4
Key Findings	4
Community Colleges in the United States: Terminology and Overview	5
About the Data	6
International Students at U.S. Community Colleges.....	7
Community College Type	9
Places of Origin	10
Field of Study	11
Host states	12
International Student Recruitment Trends.....	13
Considerations for International Student Recruitment at U.S. Community Colleges	14
The Role of Community College Leaders in Internationalization.....	14
Community Colleges in the U.S. Higher Education System.....	15
Understanding University Rankings	15
The Benefits of Community College Study for International Students	15
Promising Practices for International Student Recruitment and Retention at U.S. Community Colleges	17
Support from Leadership	17
Serving the Whole Person.....	17
Developing Partnerships.....	18
4-year higher education institutions.....	19
EducationUSA	19
Government-sponsored programs	20
Local Partnerships.....	20
Engaging Current Students and Alumni	21
Embracing Technological Advancements	21
Building a Professional Network.....	22
Conclusion	23
References	24

Foreword

Internationalization is intensifying in nearly all higher educational institutions, including United States community colleges. The American Association of Community Colleges has embedded international education within the multiple levels of competencies for community college leaders. Nationwide, community college mission statements include text that supports the need to prepare students for the global economy and to recognize those traits needed to build a global citizenry. Yet, while acknowledging the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), community colleges are not linking them to their internationalization efforts to serve their local communities.

Research has long studied community college international students. The majority of this research focuses on student learning, student challenges and successes, and the student voice. A key finding of this report is that it shows that in some community colleges, international students are not an afterthought but instead are linked to strategies for student learning and success. The report also shows the dynamic nature of community college international student offices and sponsored programs. The sections on institutional practices of international student offices fill the knowledge gap for two important areas of internationalization. First, there is a focus on the practitioner voice as the person who works daily to ensure the international student programs. Second, sections on recruitment and developing global, national, state, and local partnerships present practices that have long needed to be documented. This report captures the various types of international student recruitment, outreach, and collaboration, all coordinated by the international admissions and student services offices and leadership.

Internationalization at United States community colleges requires a shift in the mindset of community college stakeholders to recognize that internationalization programs that occur in the classroom, on the campus, or in the community are key strategies to provide all community college students with competencies that support their preparation for work and society.

Rosalind Latiner Raby, Ph.D.
California State University, Northridge
Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education



Introduction

Community colleges fill a unique space in the U.S. higher education system supporting skill development and preparation for students to enter a global workforce. Over time, global workforce demands have prompted community colleges to focus with greater intention on global competency skill development and internationalization of programs and curricula, including welcoming international students. Raby (2020) emphasizes that international education is a priority in the community colleges' mission as it relates to employability and the development of international literacy skills.

This paper provides an overview of international students at community colleges in the United States. It describes the models for study and the benefits of studying at a community college for international students. It then brings together the information presented in these first two sections to discuss the experiences of eight international admissions and student services offices that approach international student recruitment and retention in different ways to illuminate the possibilities for supporting international students at these types of institutions.

International student recruitment is a significant endeavor with numerous stakeholders worldwide. This paper offers promising practices for international student recruitment and retention shared by eight institutional representatives for U.S. community college stakeholders looking at how to maintain or increase international student enrollment. It highlights valuable resources available to all institutions and organizations supporting international education professionals.

Key Findings

Although the initial shock of the COVID-19 pandemic effected international student enrollment at community colleges negatively, innovations and resilience within community college professionals have also created opportunities for international student recruitment moving forward.

60,170 international students enrolled at a U.S. community college in the 2020/21 academic year. These international students benefitted from the following:

- ❖ The pathways community colleges create to the workforce and to further their educational attainment, allowing students to plan their future.
- ❖ The care and attention community colleges offer to all students by focusing on educating the whole person.
- ❖ The affordable and high-quality education community colleges offer through low-cost tuition and fees and open access enrollment, allowing international students to gain support for English language development and academic preparation to pursue degree study.
- ❖ The opportunity to engage with a U.S. community for the mutual exchange of diverse perspectives and cultures.

Community colleges interviewed for this paper shared the following promising practices for increasing international student enrollment at community colleges:

- ❖ **Educating Leadership:** By educating institutional leadership on the value of hosting international students at a community college, international student offices can gain support for critical resources, including funding, staff, and office space, to develop a strategy and support the recruitment and retention of international students.
- ❖ **Supporting the Whole Person:** U.S. community colleges have support systems to educate the whole person, starting from where they are and focusing on what they need. This built-in retention mechanism offers international students English language training, academic preparation, and basic life skills for navigating life in the United States.
- ❖ **Developing Partnership:** Community college international student recruitment benefits from having multiple and different types of partnerships, including articulation agreements with four-year institutions, connections to EducationUSA advisors, government-sponsored scholarship programs, Study in the USA, and local community organizations. Partnerships can serve as a draw to the institution and help to bring a diverse international student body to the campus.
- ❖ **Engaging Current Students and Alumni:** Word of mouth is a powerful recruitment tool. Community colleges can channel current students' and alumni voices through initiatives designed to share their personal success stories with prospective international students. Institutions leveraged social media platforms, their websites, and other electronic means to amplify international student voices and connect them directly to prospective students.
- ❖ **Leveraging Technological Advancements:** Community colleges can leverage the latest technological advancements to increase communication and engagement with international students. By opening avenues to communication throughout the admissions processes, community colleges have been more responsive to students' needs leading to increased applications and admissions.
- ❖ **Building a Professional Network:** By increasing engagement in professional organizations and networks, community college professionals can benefit from the knowledge and experience of colleagues in the same field. Professional networks can provide resources for educating leadership, responding to students' needs, and building technical expertise among staff.

Community Colleges in the United States: Terminology and Overview

The term 'community college' is used throughout this paper when referring to associate's colleges as defined by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2022). Associate's colleges are traditionally two-year institutions that confer an associate degree as the highest degree level offered at the institution. The Carnegie Classification further breaks down associate's colleges by additional program categories: high transfer, mixed transfer/career, and technical colleges, and high career and technical colleges. In addition to these three categories, institutions classified as baccalaureate/associate's colleges are included under the umbrella of community colleges in the *Open Doors* data and analysis as they predominately offer associate degrees.

Community colleges are embedded into the local ethos of communities, small and large, with a mission to provide opportunity and support the educational needs of the surrounding population (Jennings, 2017).

Providing workforce training and academic programming designed for college transfer, community colleges award students associate's degrees as well as certificates and diplomas (Malveaux and Bista, 2022). The vast majority of community colleges (90 percent) are public institutions allowing them to provide an education at a low cost (AACC, 2022). This further ensures that they are accessible to students and life-long learners. Community colleges can be a bridge to further academic study at a four-year institution for students interested in pursuing their bachelor's degree. Only one-third of public community colleges offer students on-campus housing (AACC, 2022). These factors lead to the perception that a community college is limited to serving the immediate local community when, in fact, it is capable of serving a broader student body. Community college advocacy for international education is well documented. It connects the need for internationalization with the community college mission of open access and initiatives that build student success for workforce readiness (Raby, 2020). These advocacy efforts align with the broader trend in the five-decade period preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, with international student enrollment at community colleges increasing more than five-fold (Baer, 2022).

About the Data

The quantitative data presented in this paper is from the *Open Doors 2021 Report on International Educational Exchange*. The international student data represents international students enrolled at a U.S. community college and studying in-person or online in the United States or from abroad during the 2020/21 academic year, as well as students on Optional Practical Training. *Open Doors* data from institutions classified as associate's colleges by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education is used when discussing data on community colleges. In this way, the terms associate's colleges and community colleges are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

In July and August 2022, IIE interviewed staff at eight U.S. community colleges that were actively engaged in the international education field. These semi-structured interviews aimed to understand how U.S. community colleges have recruited and retained international students and the contributions of international students to their institutions and within the community. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for coding and analysis. Transcriptions were coded following an inductive approach to identify emergent themes. The themes were compared further with a review of recent research on international students and community colleges.

Community College	State	Area	Size	Type	International student enrollment 2020/21
Borough of Manhattan Community College	New York	City: Large	20,000 and above	High Transfer	736
Houston Community College	Texas	City: Large	20,000 and above	High Transfer	3,636
Kingsborough College	New York	City: Large	10,000-19,000	High Transfer	134
New Mexico Military Institute	New Mexico	Town: Remote	Under 1,000	High Transfer	51

Northwest College	Wyoming	Town: Remote	1,000-4,999	Mixed Transfer/Career & Technical	53
Ozarks Technical Community College	Missouri	City: Mid-Size	10,000-19,999	Mixed Transfer/Career & Technical	27
Snow College	Utah	Town: Remote	5,000-9,999	Baccalaureate/Associates	113
William Rainey Harper College	Illinois	Suburb: Large	10,000-19,999	High Transfer	92*

**This number reflects the international student data reported to Open Doors for the 2019/20 academic year.*

Interviewees were selected to represent the international recruitment experiences of various institutions – from those with extensive experience and sizeable international student enrollment to those beginning to look at how to recruit international students. Geographic location was also considered to ensure representation from all regions of the United States, as well as urban and rural locations.

A limitation of this paper is that we spoke with only eight community colleges engaged in some way with international education. As such, this paper does not speak to the experiences of all community colleges but brings insights into the recruitment trends and campus experiences.

International Students at U.S. Community Colleges

This section provides a comprehensive overview of international student enrollment trends at U.S. community colleges. It includes data on international students' places of origin, leading fields of study, details about the U.S. destinations hosting international students, and data on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected associate colleges.

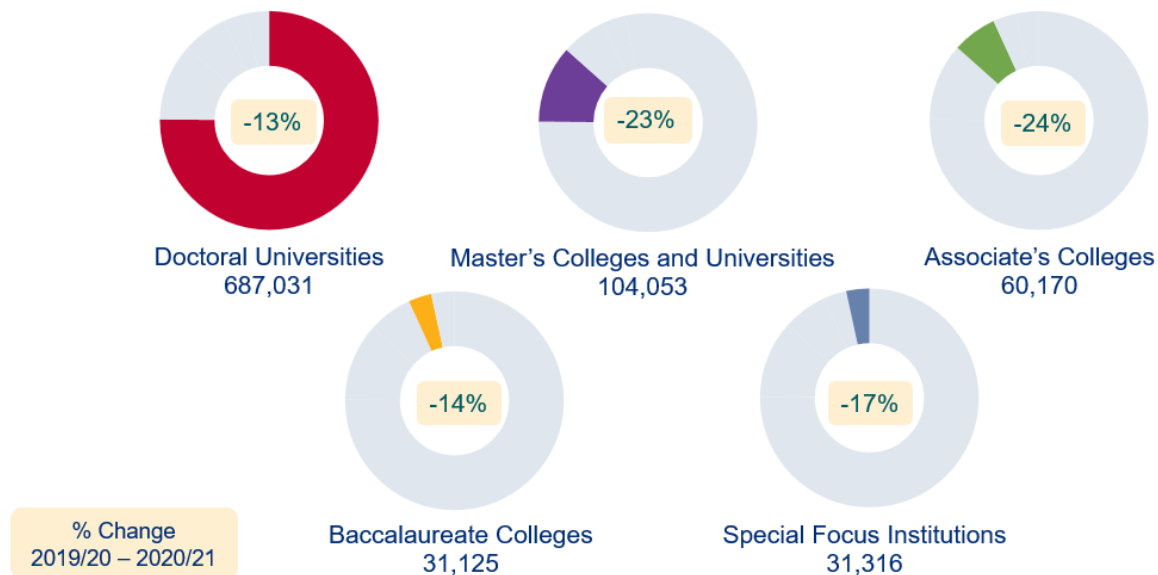
The 2020/21 academic year was unique in that international student application and admissions processes were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and 99 percent of institutions reported hybrid models of instruction in place. *Open Doors* includes data on international students in person on U.S. campuses, online while in the United States, online from abroad, and on Optional Practical Training.

The number of international students at U.S. community colleges was 60,170 international students in the 2020/21 academic year, compared to 914,095 total international students at all U.S. colleges and universities. International students at community colleges made up seven percent of all international students studying in the United States. It should be noted that the total numbers include students studying at the undergraduate, graduate, and non-degree levels and those on Optional Practical Training (OPT).

In the 2020/21 academic year, international student mobility experienced an unprecedented global shock due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Across all student totals, the number of international students at U.S. colleges and universities decreased by 15 percent from the previous year. Among community colleges, the effect was even stronger as the total number of international students fell by 24 percent from 79,187 students to 60,170 (Figure 1). While COVID-19 impacted all U.S. higher education institutions, the declines at community colleges were more significant. This also led to the proportion of

international students at community colleges decreasing among the total international student population, from eight percent before the pandemic to seven percent in 2020/21.

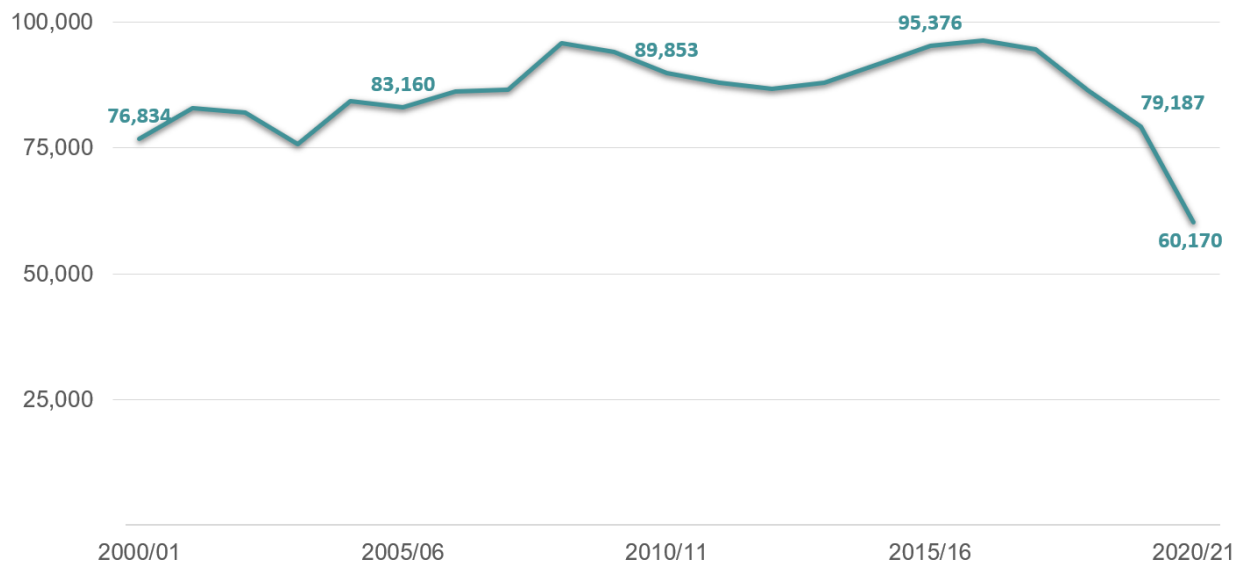
Figure 1 International students by institutional type



Enrollment over time shows that the number of international students at U.S. community colleges rose alongside increases in overall international student enrollment - rising from 75,830 students in 2003/04 to a peak of 96,472 students in 2016/17 before entering a period of decline (Figure 2). Although international student enrollment at community colleges fluctuated throughout this period, the four-year decline in the number of international students at community colleges beginning in 2016/17 mirrors trends in overall community college enrollment totals, international student enrollment totals, and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on all U.S. higher education institutions.

Similarly, at the undergraduate level, new international student enrollments slowed in 2016/17, resulting in a lower total undergraduate enrollment by 2017/18. This number continued to decrease annually and in the 2020/21 academic year, new enrollment at the undergraduate level was down by 34 percent. Students at community colleges are frequently only enrolled for one to two years; thus, new international student enrollment has a more immediate impact on student enrollment figures (Baer, 2022). The national picture for all students enrolled at community colleges has also been trending downwards from a peak of 7.7 million students in fall 2010 to fewer than six million students in fall 2020 (Jenkins & Fink, 2020). These downwards trends were exacerbated by COVID-19 declines. However, IIE's Spring 2022 Snapshot offers a brighter picture for international student enrollment, with 68 percent of community colleges reporting an increase in the number of applications for the 2022/23 academic year.

Figure 2: International students at community colleges, 2000/01-2020/21



Community College Type

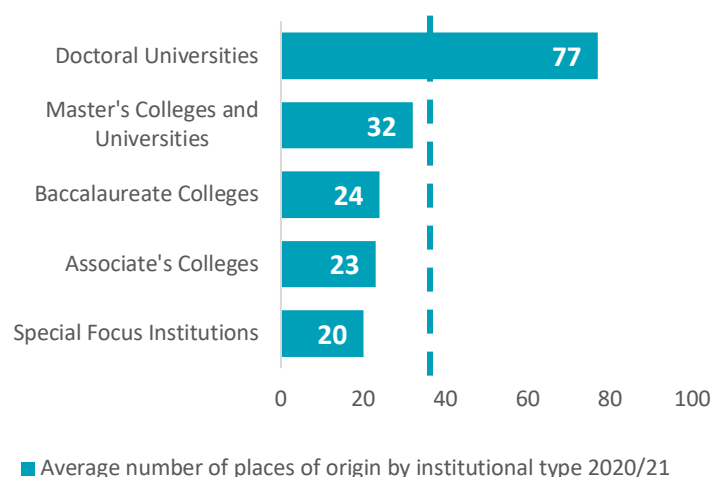
The total number of international students at community colleges can be further broken down into four institutional classifications to provide greater context on the types of institutions hosting international students for their academic study. Half of the international students at community colleges enrolled at high transfer associate's colleges, and an additional 25 percent attended baccalaureate/associate's colleges, which predominately offer associate degrees. In total, 74 percent of international students attended community colleges within these two institutional types. This proportion has remained relatively stable over time. It suggests that international students enroll at community colleges that support pathways to continued studies at four-year institutions through articulation agreements or other partnerships (Baer, 2021). Fewer than 20 percent of international community college students enrolled at mixed transfer/career and technical colleges, and the remaining students (eight percent) attended high career and technical colleges.

International student enrollment trends at community colleges offer critical insight into an enrollment pipeline of transfer students and associate degree graduates interested in continuing their education at U.S. four-year institutions. This represents an opportunity for U.S. universities to recruit from a pool of students who have already been successful on a U.S. campus. IIE's Fall 2021 International Student Enrollment Snapshot survey indicated that 35 percent of responding U.S. higher education institutions were prioritizing recruitment from community colleges. But, the story of how international students find community colleges, navigate through admissions processes, and ultimately enroll at institutions located in parts of the United States they may never have heard of before is an essential step in understanding their long-term impact on international student enrollment trends in the United States.

Places of Origin

International students introduce a broad range of diversity to U.S. community colleges. In the 2020/21 academic year, international students at community colleges hailed from 197 places of origin, with community colleges, on average, hosting students from 23 unique places of origin (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Average number of places of origin by institutional type, 2020/21



Individual institutions have different goals and experiences in attracting students from around the world, and diversification varies by institutional size and location, among other factors (Figure 4). This measure, in combination with the total number of international students from each place of origin, highlights the breadth and depth of the international student body on community college campuses.

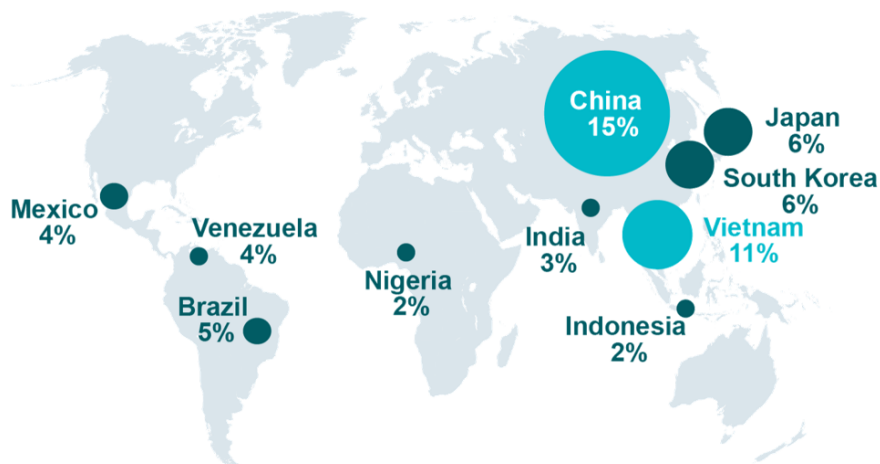
Table 1: Top ten institutions with most places of origin at associate's colleges, 2020/21

Associate's Colleges	Places of Origin
Montgomery College	127
Houston Community College System	125
Northern Virginia Community College	118
Valencia College	107
Dallas College	100
Santa Monica College	95
CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College	91
Bunker Hill Community College	91
Miami-Dade College	87
Central Piedmont Community College	79

The leading places of origin of international students at community colleges (Figure 4) vary considerably from the undergraduate student data. While the undergraduate statistics show that students from China and India made up 42 percent of the total international student population, the top two places of origin of international students at community colleges are China and Vietnam, which comprise only 26 percent of the total international student population. Furthermore, the top five places of origin represent 43

percent of all international students at community colleges, indicating the unique draw community colleges have among students from a wide range of places of origin (Figure 4). Following China and Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, and Brazil round out the top five places of origin. Interestingly, students from South Korea, Japan, and Brazil comprise a higher proportion of international students at community colleges than in the undergraduate statistics.

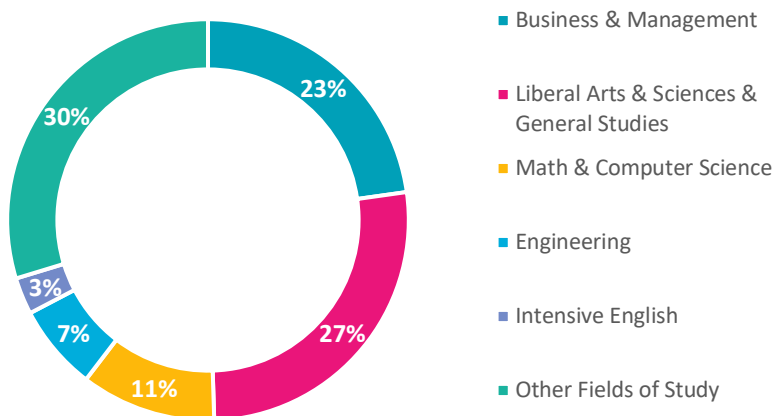
Figure 4: Top 10 places of origin of international students at community colleges, 2020/21



Field of Study

International students at community colleges study a wide range of fields. Similar to international students enrolled at the undergraduate level, the most popular field of study for international students at community colleges remains business and management (23 percent), followed by math and computer science (11 percent) (Figure 5). Fields within the liberal arts and general studies are also popular among international students at community colleges and, combined, account for 27 percent of enrollment. And while international student enrollment in intensive English at community colleges is three percent, among international students at the undergraduate level, enrollment is only at 0.1 percent.

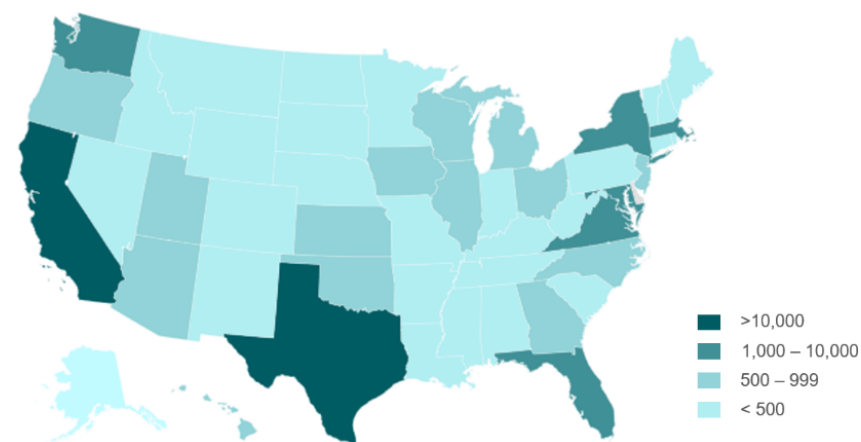
Figure 5: International students' top fields of study at community colleges, 2020/21



Host states

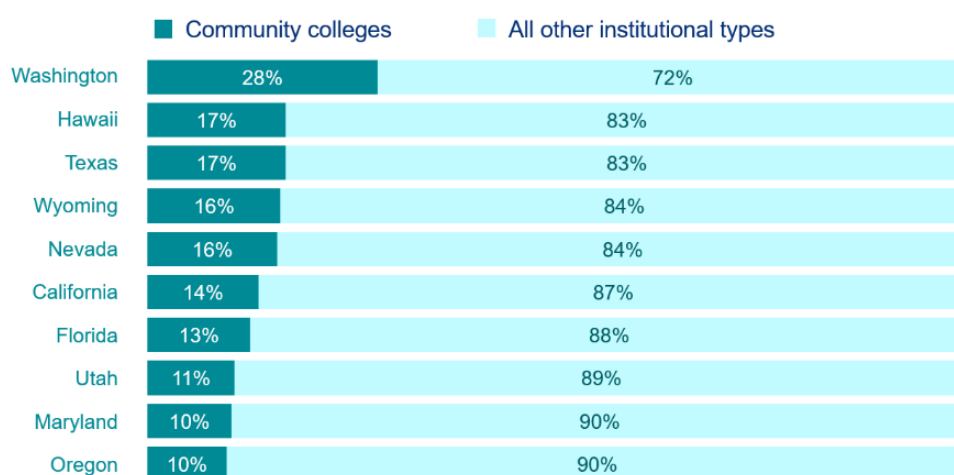
International students attended community colleges across every state in the United States in the 2020/21 academic year (Figure 6). California and Texas hosted the most international students at community colleges, followed by Washington and Florida, likely due to a large number of community colleges in each of these four states. The community college systems in California and Texas also enroll the greatest number of students overall, with one in every three students enrolled at a community college in one of these states (NCES, 2020).

Figure 6: Top host states of international students at community colleges, 2020/21



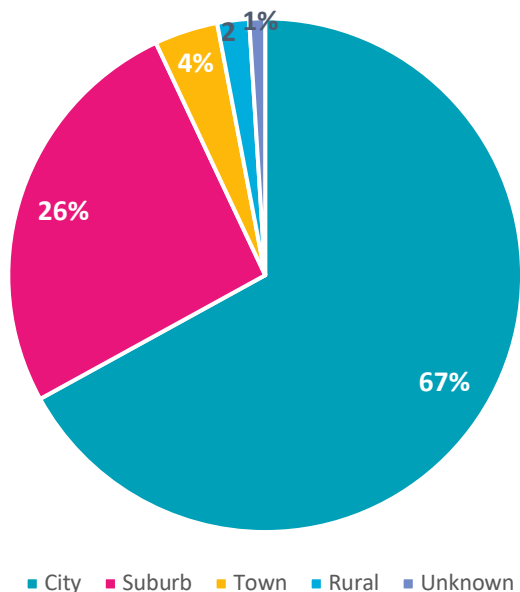
Looking at the data from another angle, it is possible to see U.S. states that host a greater proportion of international students at community colleges than at all other institution types (Figure 7). Nearly one-third of the international students enrolled at an institution in Washington state attended a community college in the 2020/21 academic year. Similarly, 17 percent of international students hosted in Hawaii and Texas are enrolled in community colleges.

Figure 7 Density of international student enrollment at community colleges by state



International students enroll at community colleges in all geographic areas – from dense urban to remote, rural locations. Although two-thirds of international students are enrolled at community colleges in cities, another quarter is at institutions in suburban areas (Figure 8).

Figure 8: International students at community colleges by geographic area, 2020/21



International Student Recruitment Trends


Among community colleges that engage in international student recruitment activities (approximately two-thirds of community colleges), the following recruitment practices have proven useful: leveraging current international students, online recruitment events, agents, social media outreach, and EducationUSA. Current international students can share their experiences, with prospective students on a personal level and serve as a live example that it is possible to pursue study in the United States. The expansion of online recruitment events and the use of social media through the COVID-19 pandemic has created more opportunities for community colleges to reach a global audience and access student populations beyond those traditionally represented at their institution. Finally, community colleges have

leveraged agents and EducationUSA advisors to explain the benefits of attending a U.S. community college and highlight the unique programming and opportunities available at their institution. Interestingly, compared to the national statistics, a higher proportion of community colleges are not actively focused on international student recruitment (Martel & Baer, 2022).

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES


- ★ UCA alumna, received an Associate of Science degree with a 4.0 GPA as an outstanding international student at Garden City Community College
- ★ Served as the Residential Life Assistant, Math and Economics tutor in the College Comprehensive Learning Center during her studies
- ★ Named PTK All-Kansas Academic team along with the 50 other Scholars in the state
- ★ Currently a transfer student who received several scholarships to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Economics with a minor in Computer Science and Mathematics at Mississippi State University

Zarina

Zarina Davletova

Turkmenistan


#EdUSAForum
educationusa.state.gov MA

Considerations for International Student Recruitment at U.S. Community Colleges

International students enroll at U.S. community colleges to realize their higher education dreams. For many students, pursuing an associate's degree is a stepping stone to a bachelor's degree or higher. Community colleges offer students a wealth of support, and international students can benefit from academic preparation, English language training, and life skills learned during their time enrolled at a community college that will support their pursuit of academic programs and a pathway to university study (Malveaux & Bista, 2022). However, they also make significant contributions to their institution and surrounding communities. This section provides an overview of the considerations community college leaders need to be aware of to welcome international students to their campus. It will highlight how international students contribute to the diversity of the campus community.

The Role of Community College Leaders in Internationalization

Hagedorn (2022) posits that U.S. community colleges were designed to meet the business and economic needs of their immediate surrounding area and the population residing there and were not designed with international students in mind. Therefore it is not surprising that only a small number of community colleges actively recruit and host international students, with the vast majority of community colleges maintaining services for international students who arrive on campus but not conducting targeted outreach or recruitment. Our interviews revealed that for many community colleges, there is no direct mandate from their leadership to recruit international students. Without a direct mandate, institutions did not establish a budget or prioritize hiring staff to support international student recruitment, and therefore, a strategy to guide international student recruitment practices simply did not exist. When asked about its recruitment strategy, one institution responded,

The short answer is that we don't do anything specifically for international recruitment. I think, originally, that was by design. The mandate really wasn't to grow the program, it was more so to have it. We really don't market specifically to international students. However, we have been seeking external partnerships and collaboration to figure out how we can start to market more.... we're trying to find low to no cost solutions to where it can be a win for us, as well as a win for our community partners and educational partners.

The institutions we interviewed reported that international students often find their way to a community college through alums, friends, relatives, or heritage ties in the local area. Interviewees emphasized that creative admissions staff who focus on low or no-cost solutions to attract international students to their college can also successfully recruit international students.

Mostly students are coming because of friends and family members, or they know that they'll have a strong community support when they come to Houston.

There are two significant considerations for community colleges interested in recruiting or increasing the number of international students enrolled at their institution. The first relates to sharing with a global audience the unique position of community colleges within the U.S. higher education system, and the second to articulating the benefits to international students of studying at a community college.

Community Colleges in the U.S. Higher Education System

Community colleges enroll two out of every five U.S. undergraduate students (AACC, 2022), yet only 13% of international students enrolled at the undergraduate level attend a community college (*Open Doors*, 2021). This represents a possible missed opportunity for international students to enter the U.S. higher education system in a way similar to many U.S. students. However, there is an overarching lack of understanding outside of the United States about what a community college is and how it fits into a course of studies (Jennings, 2017).

The “2+2” model, whereby students first earn an associate degree at a community college before transferring to a four-year institution to earn their bachelor’s degree, is unique to the U.S. higher education system. International students and their families may not even be aware that this is a potential option for beginning their studies that can still result in a bachelor’s degree from their desired institution. Every institution we spoke with had at least one articulation agreement with a four-year institution, with many community colleges having several agreements for students. In some cases, these agreements give students automatic acceptance to the four-year institution if they complete their studies at the community college.

Our international students, they usually come, and they have a goal to graduate at least with a bachelor's from a university here in the United States. So they come here, they stay with us for two years and I would say that 100% of our international students remain in the United States. They transfer to several schools, not only in the state of New Mexico. One thing that's very interesting a lot of universities come to our campus to recruit our students because they always tell me they're so good; they know when it's time to play when it's time to study because of the structure that we have here at our school.

Understanding University Rankings

International students interested in pursuing a degree in the United States are exploring an overwhelming list of more than 4,000 U.S. institutions located across 50 states in a vast country that students and their families may not be familiar with (Jennings, 2017). The multiple published rankings lists of U.S. colleges and universities, steering students towards the most prestigious and selective U.S. institutions, appear to be a starting point for families aiming to identify an appropriate institution for their child. Community colleges are not represented on these various lists, making them virtually invisible to families, narrowing down a massive list of institutions. However, many community colleges serve as a direct pipeline to highly respected bachelor's degree programs at strong U.S. universities, representing an opportunity for community colleges to more directly promote their articulation agreements.

The Benefits of Community College Study for International Students

The institutions interviewed for this paper shared numerous benefits of studying at community colleges for international students. Benefits range from reaching concrete goals such as transferring to a four-year institution and solidifying academic English language skills to building relationships and understanding of U.S. culture and lifestyle.

The *Open Doors* data indicated that 75 percent of international students at community colleges planned to transfer or continue their studies after completing an associate degree. International students who attend a community college and are successful in their studies may be viewed as a ‘proven concept’ by admissions representatives at four-year institutions. Institutions reviewing applications will consider

these students likely to finish their degree because they have already completed one degree at an associate's institution in the United States and received the linguistic and academic preparation that will support their success in pursuing a bachelor's degree.

We really need to spend time communicating the benefits of a community college and that's typically a really challenging concept globally; just because no other countries have that kind of a system, there might be a technical vocational system than a university system, but there's not really the mixing of those, where in the U.S. pretty much 99% of our international students are planning on continuing at a university.

International students can leverage the transfer value that community colleges present (Jennings, 2017). Community colleges offer international students the time and space to develop their linguistic and academic skills in the U.S. context, acclimating to understanding and expectations of the U.S. higher education system. This goes hand in hand with developing relationships with U.S. students and faculty, and building an understanding of U.S. culture through the mutual exchange of ideas. Several community colleges we interviewed mentioned the value of student groups at their institutions, offering international students the possibility to build strong connections with their peers at the college but also with institutions with whom they have articulation agreements. Finally, international students further benefit from community colleges as an affordable option for commencing their studies, resulting in a lower overall cost for their education.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

- ★ Graduated from Saint Paul College in May 2021
- ★ Transferring to University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Business in Fall 2021

Zhuofan

SAINT PAUL COLLEGE
A Community & Technical College

Zhuofan Zhai
China

educationusa.state.gov

Promising Practices for International Student Recruitment and Retention at U.S. Community Colleges

International student recruitment at U.S. community colleges varies widely across the more than 1,000 associate institutions that host international students. The budget available to support recruitment is among the many competing priorities at colleges which “operate with substantially fewer resources for core academic and student support functions than public four-year institutions” (CCRC, 2022). The ‘right’ approach may look very different from institution to institution as staff account for institutional support, resources, and access to the latest technology. This section will highlight practices implemented by eight U.S. community colleges interviewed for this paper that are promising practices for other institutions interested in beginning or increasing international student recruitment.

You learn how to work on a shoestring. You know that doesn't even pay for one recruiting fair, so we have not focused on the fairs. I think even after COVID, a lot of the fairs have now become either hybrid or virtual fairs. It's always important to get out there and get some name recognition, and to ensure that students see your face and your logo, so we try to do some things like that, but it takes some ingenuity and creativity.

Support from Leadership

The community college representatives interviewed recognized that institutional strategy and priorities affect the resources and support in international student services offices. Among those who host large numbers of international students, their advice to other community colleges interested in increasing international student enrollment is to ensure they have the support from leadership and administration to recruit and retain international students.

*We're one of the few community colleges, especially in the state, who has an office dedicated to bringing in international students and retaining international students. One of the reasons I think we are, is that we have always been fortunate that **our administration sees and values the need for diversifying not just our campus but our community as well.** If you look at the demographics of Wyoming, you see that it's predominantly white. Our students, a lot of times, are almost the only diversity that we bring into this community. And so, as an institution, I think that is something that we really value and understand the needs that you know all our students need to be able to transcend cultural barriers and if they want to be successful, once they leave the state of Wyoming, they have to have that understanding of how to communicate.*

Interviewees shared that educating institutional leadership, particularly new leaders, was key to gaining their support for having international students on campus and considering recruiting international students. For many new community college administrators, marketing the college internationally initially sounds far-fetched when some community colleges only market to their immediate local community. However, interviewees emphasized the value of the diversity that international students bring to their institution, infusing global perspectives within the campus and the local community.

Serving the Whole Person

The interviewees spoke most passionately about serving students once they arrived on campus as the top priority and most important element of recruiting and retaining international students. Community

college leaders take pride in the fact that their institutions are dedicated to educating the whole person, whether that student is domestic or international. Educating the whole person is considered a commitment to supporting their intellectual and academic needs as well as a student's physical, mental, social, and emotional needs (Casalini, 2019). This approach was exemplified by interviewees who shared stories of the ways their institutions sought to support international students on campus:

We spend a lot of time and energy on really good international student services where we take really good care of the students so. In terms of doctor visits, transportation, social security cards, finding jobs on campus, and driver's licenses, all those things that students sometimes have to do on their own, we help quite a bit in our office.

We will always advise them about immigration regulations, but we also know it's important to include the other factors in life, the mental factors. We partner up with our counseling center and we do coffee hours once a month jointly with the counseling center. International students participate as well as U.S. students, so we do a lot of those soft touches, so to speak; we have workshops throughout the Semester, including coffee hours. Workshops some focus on day-to-day nuances, like what's the I20, how to maintain yourself legally in the U.S., how to get employment legally. We also partner up with the advocacy and resource center at key points in time where they do these sessions about, hey, you know, come check us out; we have a food pantry. A lot of our foreign students take advantage of the food pantry. Even during the pandemic, we opened in person to allow students to come on campus by appointment.

We are open admissions, so there is a place for everybody here. We have to test their language proficiency, and if they're not ready, this will be provided by the college. We test them and place them in the right level. If they can prove English proficiency, then they go through another test which is for all students. A test that is about the academic proficiency. This is the place to come because we will help you reaching your goal, even if you still need English because we don't want you to fail.

The interviewees noted that ensuring staff were available to support the whole student was essential for future international student growth. They emphasized retention as the best recruiting tool available to an institution. If an institution can retain an international student, and the student is happy and successful, they will share their positive experience via word of mouth with friends, family, and others.

Developing Partnerships

Partnerships are essential to recruiting international students at community colleges. Every interviewee mentioned the multitude of partners connected to their college that supported international students at some phase in their academic journey – from application to enrollment to transfer. Although each of these partnerships was unique to their local context and position within their state's higher education structure, they can be categorized into groups.

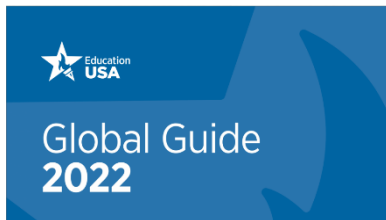
4-year higher education institutions

Articulation agreements with public state universities were mentioned by every college. Many colleges also had articulation agreements with private institutions and institutions outside of their state. Although the details of the articulation agreements can vary by institution, some benefits to international students include the possibility of automatic admission to the four-year institution, advising support throughout their studies at the community college, and a clear pathway planned.

*I think one of the unique things that we have in partnership with Missouri state is that **we have a representative on campus from Missouri State who helps students with transfers.** So, if I have students who come here with the hopes of then going on to Missouri State, when they're here registering for classes on the first day, I can walk them down to talk to the Missouri State representative, and she can tell them, here are the class sequences that I would suggest so that your transition to a four-year school or to Missouri State is a lot easier.*

EducationUSA

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, the [EducationUSA](#) network includes more than 430 international student advising centers worldwide. Among the many resources produced by the EducationUSA network, the following are low to no-cost options that allow community colleges to engage with prospective international students:



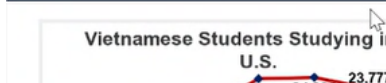
The [EducationUSA Global Guide](#) can be used to plan a recruitment strategy. It highlights potential countries and regions for community college recruitment.



Attend the [Annual EducationUSA Forum and Regional Forums](#) held around the world. These events provide an opportunity to connect with advisors, EducationUSA team members, and other higher education representatives.



[Student Mobility Fact Sheets](#) for every country based on Open Doors data can provide a quick country overview and essential details for consideration in their recruitment planning process.



Reach out to an [Education USA Regional Educational Advising Coordinator](#) in the country or region where your institution is planning recruitment. Advisors are positioned to suggest the best techniques for reaching local schools and students and can help your institution get connected in the country.

Government-sponsored programs

Some of the community colleges interviewed also mentioned strong partnerships with U.S. government-sponsored programs that fund international students to study in the United States. These sponsored programs fill an outreach gap for institutions by reaching students from countries where the college may not have the resources to invest in recruitment.

*We work with a lot of government-sponsored programs. We have students that come from the Gap Year Program, Congress Bundestag Youth Exchange, the year Russian students; this last year, we hosted students from the CCI program, the [Community College Initiative](#), where we had students from nine different countries. Those kinds of **partnership with sponsored programs** are really important for us to help with the diversity.*



The [Community College Initiative](#) is a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State to provide scholarships to students from other countries for up to one academic year of study at a U.S. community college. The program supports development of leadership and professional skills alongside English language proficiency. Since the program was established in 2007, more than 3,000 international students have been hosted by over 75 U.S. community colleges. The program brings a diverse group of students to the United States through its outreach in more than 20 different countries.

Local Partnerships

The community colleges interviewed also acknowledged the resources in their backyards. Several noted the value of the [Study in the USA](#) Network and the support for their Study State. These resources serve to promote the state as a study destination in the United States, helping community colleges to gain visibility and reach a broader audience overseas. Community colleges also mentioned tapping into Sister City connections to promote their institution abroad.

We are doing more armchair recruitment. The time for traveling all over the world and recruiting students in different countries, I believe, is a little bit over, so we are now in the virtual world. But, we established strong relationships with different Department of State embassies. One of our approaches was to contact all of them and the Study in the State programs with materials for community colleges because we wanted to spread the word, the word about community college.

Partnership with third party providers, such as the [American Institute for Foreign Study](#) (AIFS), can offer community colleges with a pipeline of international students who are interested and prepared for study in the United States. In addition to supporting undergraduate students, [AIFS Germany](#) supports Gap Year students¹ from Europe interested in attending a U.S. community college. The one year experience enables

¹ Gap Year students are students who have graduated from high school but are waiting another year before starting their university studies. That year is referred to as a 'Gap Year.'

students to get a taste of academic and social life in the United States before they decide whether a U.S. higher education institution is the right fit for them, or if they will start their tertiary education at their (mostly tuition free) national college or university. Almost 100% of the students would recommend this experience to others.

AIFS, through its office in Germany, sends hundreds of students from Germany, Austria and Switzerland to the United States for such a gap year experience. AIFS established college partners include:

- ❖ Brookdale Community College, Lincroft (NJ)
- ❖ College of the Canyons, Santa Clarita (CA)
- ❖ College of the Desert, Palm Springs (CA)
- ❖ Foothill College, Los Altos Hills (CA)
- ❖ Golden West College, Huntington Beach (CA)
- ❖ Kapiolani Community College, Honolulu (HI)
- ❖ Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale (VA)
- ❖ Olympic College, Bremerton (WA)
- ❖ Santa Barbara City College, Santa Barbara (CA)



Engaging Current Students and Alumni

Word of mouth is a powerful recruitment tool that community colleges can leverage when recruiting international students. All the colleges interviewed used current students or alumni to complement their outreach and recruitment efforts. Several institutions described initiatives that connected current students with prospective students with the intention that current students could share their experience, provide support with navigating the application process and be on campus to greet the new international students upon their arrival in the following school year.

One institution shared how they won a grant to initiate a peer mentorship program for international students using Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok platforms for engagement.

I would connect prospective international students with current international students and have those students serve as mentors for the students. To kind of guide them through the process. I interviewed and hand-selected who those mentors would be and tried to connect them with students, either by nationality, major, or interest. Those students were assigned like a caseload. At orientation week, we hosted events, a series of social events where the students would have the opportunity to connect with their students again. It was successful, then we created a Facebook page where all of these students were friends of that page, and you know, students were able to share information on Facebook. We found that it was a quicker way to disseminate information to the student population.

Embracing Technological Advancements

The COVID-19 pandemic presented all institutions with challenges. A silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic for community colleges is the technological advancements for international student outreach and recruitment. Several colleges shared how they adapted their recruitment practices to leverage the virtual options now available to them that increase communication and connectivity to international

students. Colleges can now answer student questions in real-time and be responsive to the needs of international students through the recruitment and application processes.

*We are utilizing our website a lot, and current students through creating these open houses now with the virtual world because students have to get familiar with zoom lobby and Webex and teams. We're using all these different variations - Webex usually for bigger crowds and zoom for smaller ones, the lobby is on zoom, but most of our outreach and workshops in the open houses are via Webex. **Now we're telling them, hey, we're here in zoom, and you can just pop in and talk to us.***

*One thing we've been working on came out of a meeting with the **Community Colleges for International Development** – the idea of an international mobile APP. We were looking for something that might help us with engagement connections. The challenge of recruiting sometimes is the time zones when our students have available technology, and sometimes runs a problem of bandwidth that students have. **A great way to increase engagement opportunities is post application, download this APP, and all of your communication is going to go through the APP** in terms of status, where you are, and what you need to get done, so we think there's some real upside there.*

Building a Professional Network

Several interviewees shared that building a professional network is key to successful international recruitment and retention. Several professional organizations cater to international education professionals, most notably NAFSA, as well as targeted organizations, such as the Community Colleges for International Development, that focus on international engagement at community colleges. Interviewees discussed the value of having a network of colleagues from across the United States at different types and sizes of community colleges to turn to when solving problems related to international students. They also shared that active engagement in professional networks benefitted their institution by bringing knowledge and resources to the institution.

*I think **professional networking is so important**. Making sure they can branch out and network with other professionals from other areas of the country. Because we get to see all kinds of cases at larger institutions – I mean, we see everything. Then when I'm talking to colleagues at different conferences, they ask how you handle this situation.*



**Community Colleges for
International Development**

Local Access • Global Opportunities

- Improve practices
- Participate in learning communities
- Collaborate to advance global opportunities at the college level


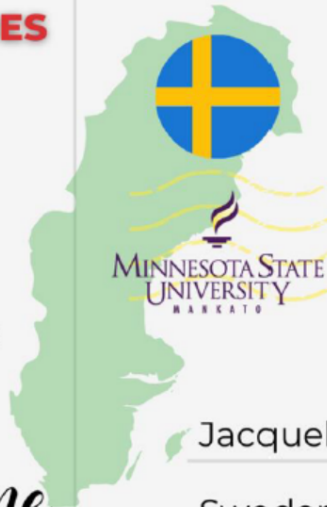
Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented U.S. community colleges with an opportunity to build on their internationalization efforts as they link their mission of preparing students for participation in the global workforce. In this regard, the future for international student enrollment at community colleges is bright. A new set of tools and innovations emerged in the last few years, presenting institutions with more and different recruitment opportunities as well as improved access to international students. Although community colleges have limited financial resources to recruit students, they have enormous assets and value to offer international students who might not otherwise be able to pursue a U.S. higher education.

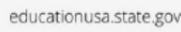


Historically, the voices of international advocates have grown louder when responding to crises as these are times when the need is even greater to continue internationalization efforts (Raby, 2020). One would expect that to be the case following the COVID-19 pandemic too. However, as the institutions interviewed for this report noted, while recruitment is important, retention is the key to building on recruitment efforts. If your institution plans to bring international students on campus, it is essential to serve their needs well through to graduation.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

- ★ International student from Sweden Transferred to Minnesota State
- ★ University, Mankato from Foothill College
- ★ Graduated from MNSU in May 2021 with Manufacturing Engineering, BS
- ★ Currently employed as a manufacturing engineer on OPT in Minnesota



Jacqueline Asplund
Sweden



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