



Spring 2023 Snapshot

ON INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

Julie Baer and Mirka Martel, Ph.D.
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Julie Baer

Mirka Martel, Ph.D.

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About IIE

As an independent, 501(c)(3) not-for-profit founded in 1919, the mission of the Institute of International Education (IIE) is to help people and organizations leverage the power of international education to thrive in today's interconnected world. IIE's work focuses on advancing scholarship, building economies, and promoting access to opportunity. IIE publications and white papers can be found at <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Publications>.

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Introduction

The *Spring 2023 Snapshot on International Educational Exchange* continues the Institute of International Education's (IIE's) commitment to mapping the current state of international educational exchange to and from the United States. Since 2005, we have released a snapshot report each fall to understand the most up-to-date enrollment trends at the start of each academic year.ⁱ During the COVID-19 pandemic, we expanded our analysis with the *COVID-19 Snapshot Survey Series*, which provided additional analysis in the spring. Now in its second year, the *Spring Snapshot on International Educational Exchange* series has been expanded to include insights on international students, study abroad, and emerging trends affecting student mobility as of the spring semester.

As we approach the end of the 2022/23 academic year, academic mobility at most U.S. colleges and universities continues to rebound from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. With increasing levels of international student and faculty mobility, our report analyzes the effects of reopening on international students studying at U.S. institutions and on U.S. students traveling abroad. We also include special analyses on diverse populations of students participating in global exchange that have not traditionally been collected at the national level.

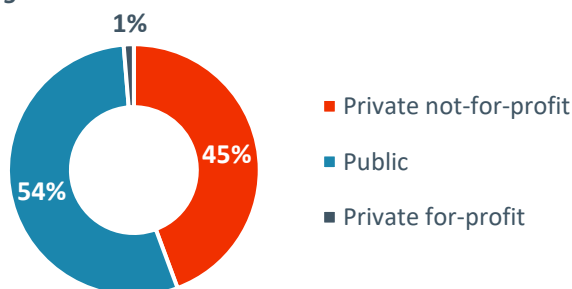
This report presents data from 527 U.S. higher education institutions in two sections: (1) current trends in international students studying at U.S. institutions in spring 2023 and the recruitment patterns for prospective students and (2) the realities of U.S. study abroad in summer 2023 and academic year 2023/24.

Each section is supplemented with special analyses of underrepresented populations participating in international educational exchange. On inbound mobility, we present data on refugees and students who have been displaced. The study abroad section includes insights on data collection and support for underrepresented populations participating in study abroad programs, including students with high financial need, first-generation students, and other populations.

Survey Respondent Institutions

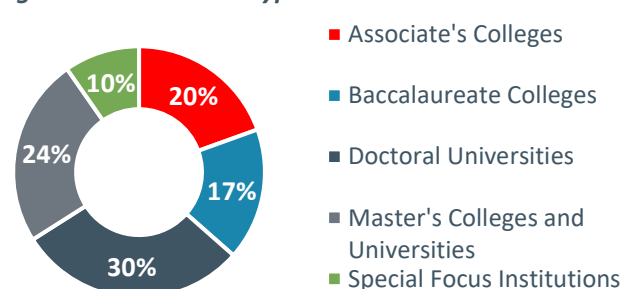
IIE administered the Spring 2023 Snapshot Survey to U.S. higher education institutions from April 27 to May 19, 2023. We sent the survey to more than 2,700 U.S. higher education institutions, and 527 institutions completed the survey (Figures 1 and 2). Most of these U.S. colleges and universities (94%) also completed the most recent *Open Doors* surveys.ⁱⁱ The respondent institutions enrolled 45% of all international students at U.S. institutions in 2021/22 and 51% of U.S. students studying abroad in 2020/21.

Figure 1: Institutional sector



Note: Percent distribution may not total 100 due to rounding

Figure 2: Institutional type



Key Findings

The *Spring 2023 Snapshot on International Educational Exchange* focuses on the current state of in-person student mobility to and from the U.S. and supporting the diverse population of students participating in global exchange.

Most International Students Are Studying in Person on U.S. Campuses

- The vast majority of institutions (99%) indicated that international students attended classes on campus, with 66% citing that all international students attended classes in person.
- Only 20% of institutions noted that international students faced difficulties regarding visa status and availability of in-person classes.

International Student Applications Continue to Increase

- 89% of U.S. colleges and universities indicated that 2023/24 applications are up or have stayed the same compared with the previous year.
- Institutions are prioritizing undergraduate outreach in India (57%), Vietnam (48%), South Korea (41%), and Brazil (40%) and graduate recruitment in India (77%), China (42%), Nigeria (37%), and Vietnam (35%).
- Most institutions are focusing on engaging current international students to support the recruitment of prospective students. Other popular methods of outreach include international partnerships, alumni outreach, and online recruitment.

U.S. Institutions Are Supporting Refugees and Displaced International Students

- Many institutions provide resources to students from areas of conflict, including

academic support, tuition waivers, scholarships, and enrollment extensions due to visa delays.

- Data collection on refugees and students who have experienced displacement remains challenging. The majority of institutions (60%) noted that they do not have readily available program enrollment data on refugees or people who have been displaced, which indicates a need for more data collection in this area.

In-Person Study Abroad Rebounds

- In summer 2023, 98% of reporting institutions offered only in-person study abroad or a combination of in-person and online options.
- 96% of U.S. colleges and universities reported increased or stable student participation in study abroad compared with the past year.
- More than half (55%) of the reported study abroad students in 2021/22 participated in faculty-led programs.
- Institutions are beginning to consider how to incorporate sustainability into study abroad offices; 40% of reporting colleges and universities noted sustainability initiatives.
- As institutions seek to serve diverse student populations, U.S. higher education institutions are working to strengthen data collection. 63% of institutions currently collect or plan to collect study abroad data on financial need and first-generation students.

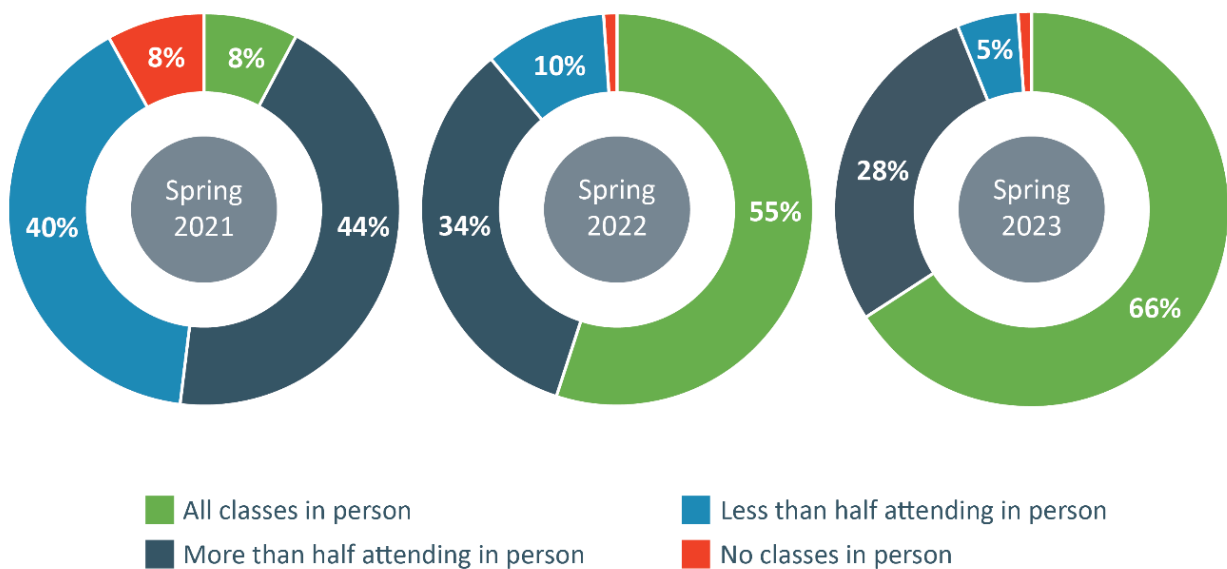
International Students at U.S. Colleges and Universities

International student application numbers continue to reflect a rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic, with **89% of U.S. colleges and universities indicating that 2023/24 applications are up or have stayed the same compared with the previous year.**

In the 2022/23 academic year, U.S. colleges and universities have prioritized in-person classes for enrolled international students. Of the 387 institutions that responded to the mode of study question, only 1% of institutions indicated that no international students took classes in person. The vast majority of institutions (99%) indicated that their international students were attending classes on campus, with 66% noting that all of their international students were attending classes in person. This represents a further shift back from the COVID-19 pandemic realities regarding online learning, as just two years ago in spring 2021, institutions indicated that nearly half of their international students were primarily taking classes online (Figure 3).

The decisive return to in-person learning among international students is in line with the most recent guidance from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) that announced the termination of the COVID-19 flexibilities for international students on May 11, 2023.ⁱⁱⁱ First issued in 2020, SEVP provided flexibilities for international students to “engage in distance learning in excess of regulatory limits due to the continuing public health concerns created by COVID-19.”^{iv} The most recent guidance, in line with the U.S. government’s termination of the COVID-19 National Emergency, indicates that international students may have flexibility in hybrid study through summer 2023 only. Beginning with the 2023/24 academic year,

Figure 3: International students and mode of study, spring 2021–spring 2023



international students will be under the same restrictions for in-person study as prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

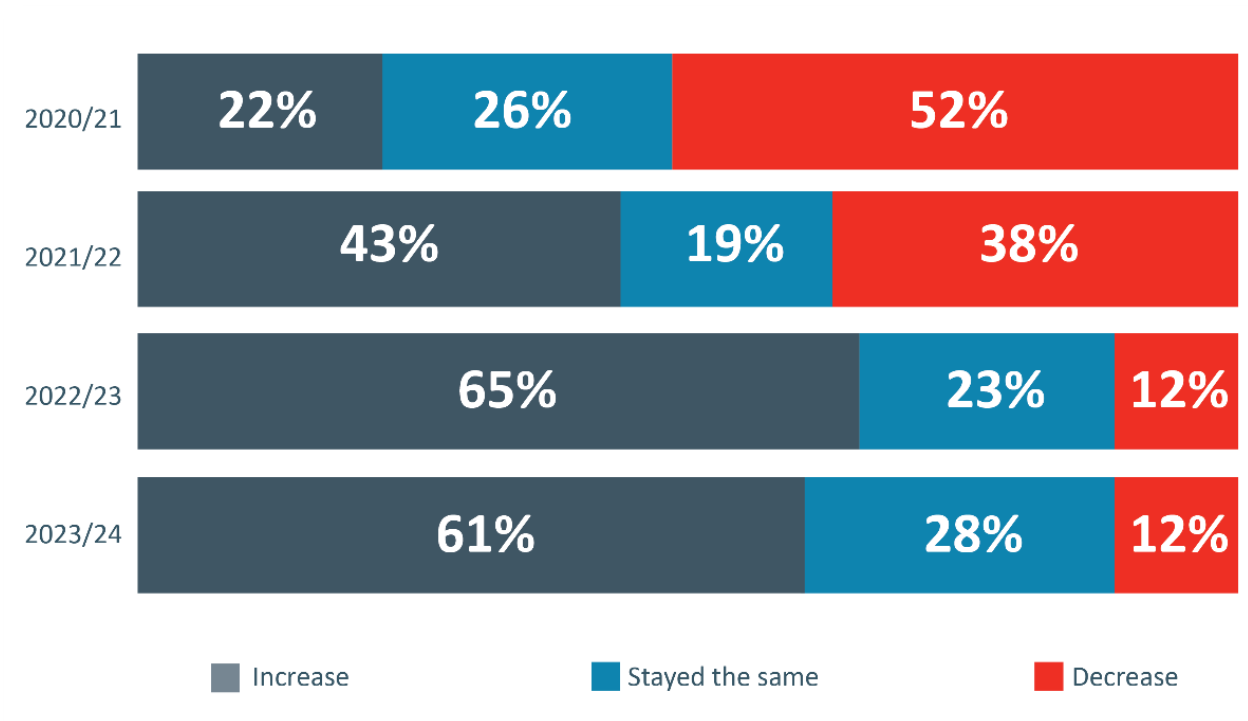
Since the COVID-19 pandemic, more colleges and universities have begun to offer online courses and whole programs to increase flexibility for students and faculty. This has complicated in-person study requirements for international students. **One in five respondents, or 20% of institutions, indicated that international students faced difficulties regarding their visa status and the availability of in-person classes.** The majority of these institutions reported that degree-required classes for some international students were not available in person and that some departments and degree programs have not returned to enough in-person classes to satisfy visa requirements. At least one institution also noted that the mode of study for classes changed after the start of the semester, which

negatively impacted international students' visa status. Finally, as one respondent noted, "Many programs (and professors within them) have found productive ways to teach classes online and would like to keep those classes online. This is particularly the case for highly specialized courses, which might be taught by a professor in another city."

Applications for 2023/24 Continue to Increase

International student applications for the 2023/24 academic year have continued to increase, signifying a sustained interest in the United States as an international education destination. Just two years ago, applications had decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Continuing a surge in applications over the last two years, this year, 89% of institutions noted that their application numbers were higher or the same compared with the previous year. Importantly, this is a compound increase,

Figure 4: International student applications, 2020/21 – 2023/24



building on the rebounds from a year ago (Figure 4). We found this to be the case across all types of institutions, including doctoral universities, master’s institutions, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges.

Outreach and Recruitment of Prospective International Students

International students continue to be a priority for the U.S. higher education sector, contributing \$32 billion to the U.S. economy in 2022. As institutions prepare for future years and a demographic decline in U.S. domestic higher education enrollment, many colleges and universities are strategically focusing on international student enrollment. As such, institutions are diversifying their outreach and recruitment strategies to attract international students from around the world.

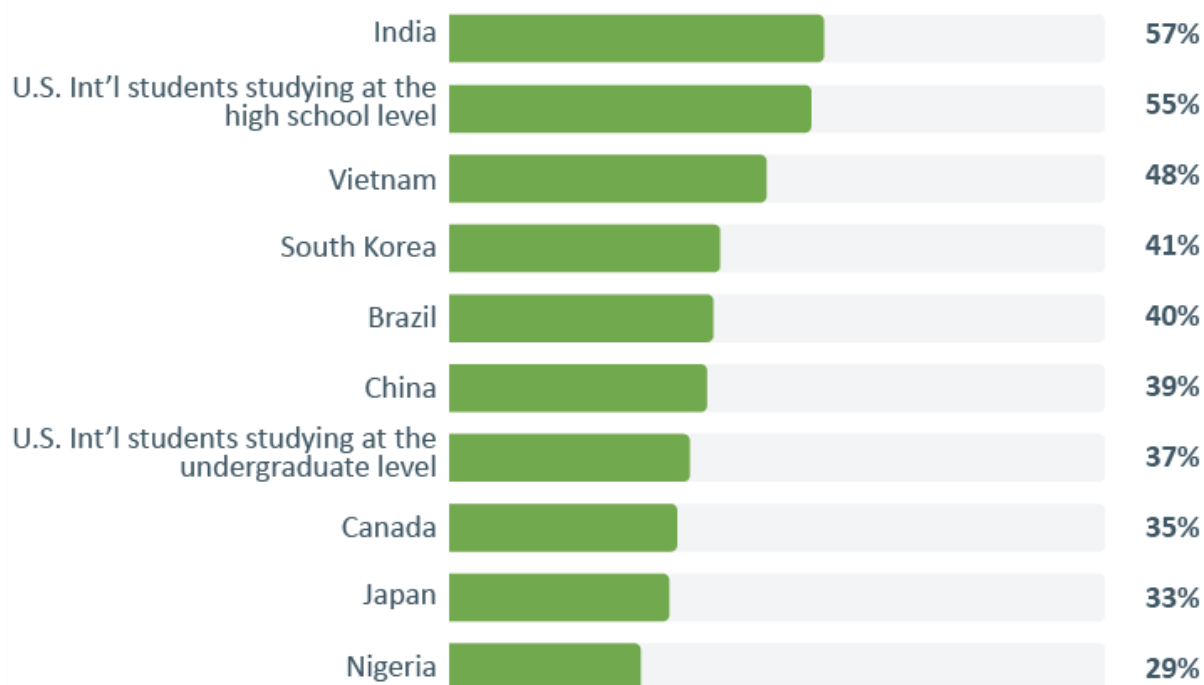
For the first time, we divided the analysis on the outreach and recruitment of prospective students by academic level. *Open Doors 2022* reported that in the 2021/22 academic year, for

the first time in a decade, there were more graduate students than undergraduates studying in the United States. Approximately 41% of international students were graduate students, and 36% were undergraduates. As many institutions recruit students at both academic levels, colleges and universities are catering their recruitment methods to both types of students.

Undergraduate Students

In spring 2023, institutions reported prioritizing efforts to recruit undergraduate students from India, Vietnam, South Korea, and Brazil (Figure 5). This is in line with some of the largest senders of undergraduate students to the United States, though it is interesting to note that the largest sender, China, is listed in sixth place. This could indicate that institutions are looking to diversify their strategies for undergraduate markets beyond China. More than half of the institutions (55%) are also focusing efforts on international students already studying at U.S. high schools.

Figure 5: Undergraduate recruitment priorities



Most institutions are focusing on engaging current international students to support prospective student recruitment, which is similar to previous reports. It is interesting to note that when focusing only on undergraduate student recruitment, more institutions indicated leveraging international partnerships (63%) and alumni (51%) than reported previously (Figure 7 on page 9). Given incoming cohorts' familiarity with technology and travel costs, the majority of institutions cited relying on online recruitment events (61%) and social media (60%) for undergraduate recruitment.

As undergraduate students may also need personal guidance as they navigate the U.S. higher education system's application process, there are a number of ways that institutions also engage with students in person. Approximately 54% of institutions held in-person events where they traveled to fairs or regional expos in a student's home country, and 53% noted utilizing agents as part of the undergraduate recruitment process. In addition,

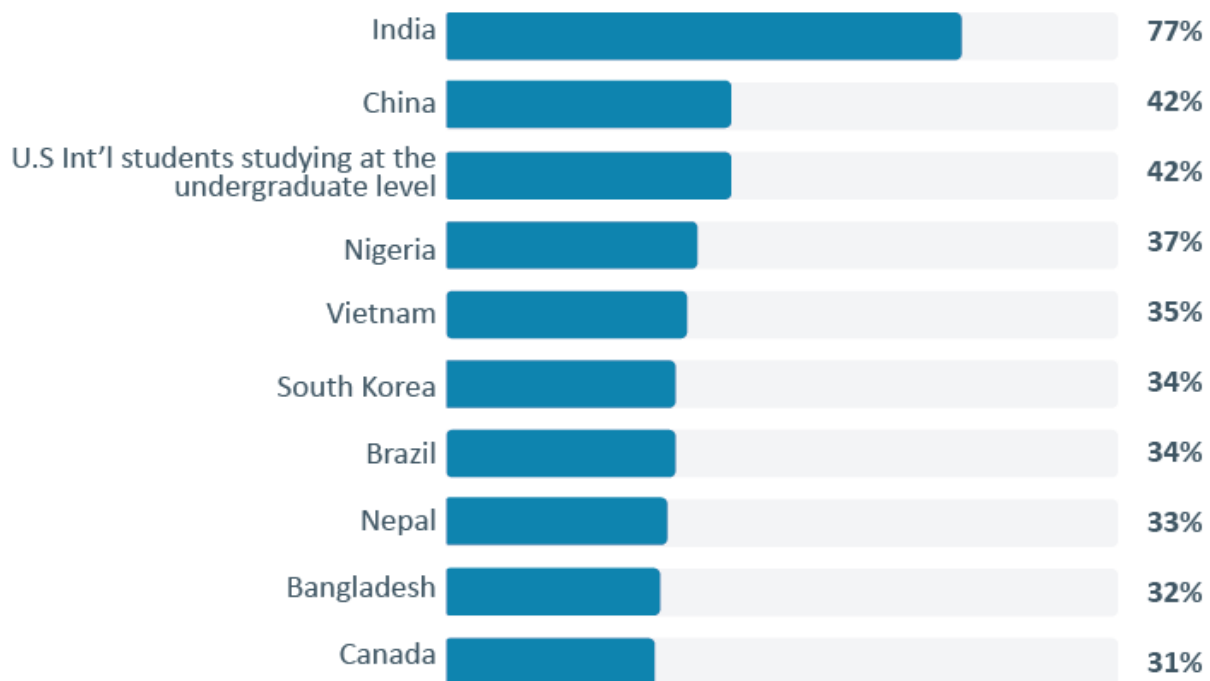
nearly half of all institutions (48%) cited leveraging resources from [EducationUSA](#), which is a U.S. Department of State network of more than 430 international student advising centers in more than 175 countries and territories. EducationUSA provides students around the world with information about how to study at colleges and universities and offers services to the U.S. higher education community to help institutions reach their recruitment goals.

Graduate Students

The vast majority of institutions are focusing on India for graduate student recruitment (77%), far outpacing recruitment in all other places of origin (Figure 6). China, Nigeria, and Vietnam, are also strong markets where colleges and universities are conducting outreach to prospective graduate international students.

The focus on Indian student recruitment aligns with the *Open Doors* data, which found that the majority of Indian students who came to the United States in 2021/22 were graduate

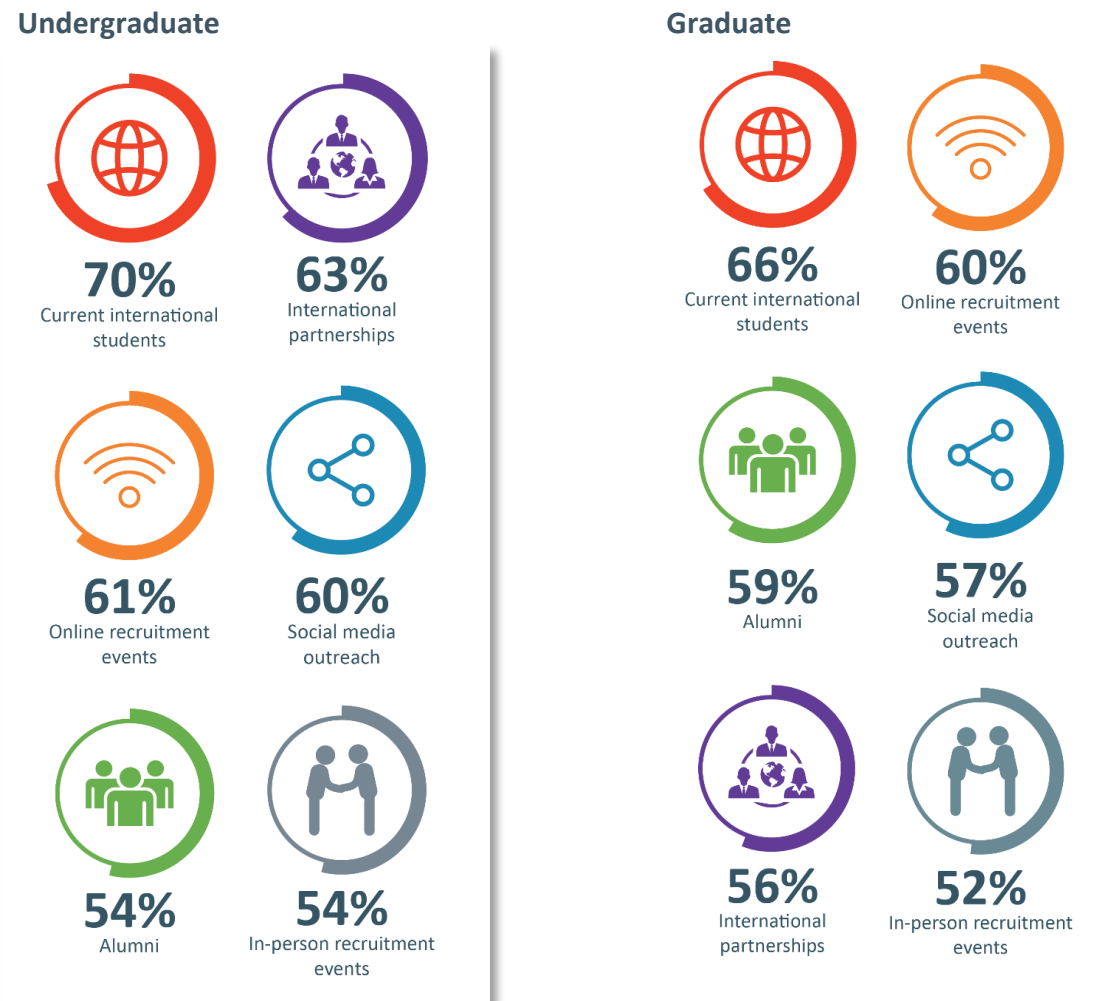
Figure 6: Graduate recruitment priorities



students. With the prospect of continued growth in mobility from India, many institutions are focusing on recruitment there. Similarly, *Open Doors* noted an increase in the number of Chinese graduate students in 2021/22. Whether this was due to COVID-19 restrictions or personal choice, institutions reported a larger proportion of Chinese graduate students and, as a result, are focusing recruitment on this population as well. Finally, many institutions (45%) are conducting outreach to international students already in the United States in undergraduate programs for continued graduate study, as this is a natural pipeline for students to remain in the U.S. higher education system for further academic opportunities.

Outreach and recruitment strategies for international graduate students mirror those used for undergraduate recruitment, though with some interesting differences. While institutions do focus on recruiting prospective graduate students from current international students, they also leverage alumni at a higher rate in graduate recruitment than in undergraduate recruitment. Both graduate and undergraduate recruitment continues to prioritize online recruitment events, though in-person events have made a comeback after two years. As institutions have opportunities to resume travel, they are leveraging these activities to recruit both undergraduate and graduate students.

Figure 7: Recruitment approaches



Data Collection on Refugees and Displaced People

Our analysis of data collection efforts regarding refugees and displaced students seeks to understand how U.S. colleges and universities are supporting this population of individuals participating in global education opportunities.

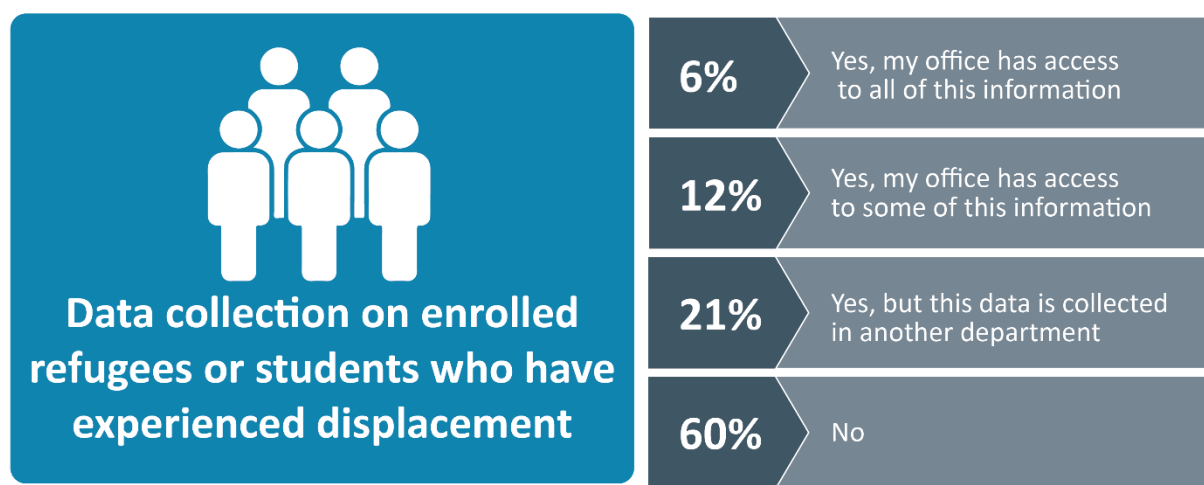
Data from the United Nations Human Right Commission (UNHCR) indicates that more than 100 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide due to war and political conflict, economic strife, or climate disasters.^v Millions of individuals who are displaced are also seeking opportunities to begin or continue their tertiary education. UNHCR estimates only 6% of refugees have access to higher education.^{vi} In comparison, more than 40% of non-refugees have access to tertiary education.

U.S. colleges and universities provide support to refugees and displaced people each academic year; nevertheless, the data collection related to this subpopulation is limited.

As indicated in our Snapshot survey, the majority of institutions (60%) indicate that they do not have readily available enrollment data on refugees or people who are displaced (Figure

8). This may be due to this population's documentation or registration status, which differs from that of international students here on student visas. There is also less organization and data collection related to this population at institutions due to a lack of resources and centralized efforts to capture data on this population. Of the institutions that reported having data on refugees or displaced people, one in five (21%) indicated that the data was stored in another department than the department completing the survey, which was focused on international mobility. Additional forthcoming research on refugees at U.S. colleges and universities may inform future efforts to understand how this population of global citizens participating in U.S. higher education could be captured.

Figure 8: Data collection on enrolled refugees or students who experienced displacement



There is evidence that U.S. colleges and universities are providing extensive support services for prospective international students who originate from areas in conflict. Building on our analysis regarding Ukrainian and Russian international students last year, we broadened our analysis to include support services for all prospective students coming from areas of conflict. We found that most institutions are providing academic support, waiving tuition or providing scholarships, and providing enrollment extensions due to visa delays for many students from these areas. In addition to financial hurdles, students from areas in conflict often have significant challenges regarding higher education enrollment in that they are often missing documentation for admission, they may not have met sufficient academic requirements for admission, or they have

trouble navigating the application process. U.S. colleges and universities can provide support to these students to enable their higher education enrollment. IIE is providing scholarships for hundreds of refugee and displaced students to study at U.S. universities, most notably through the [Qatar Scholarship for Afghan Students Program](#) and our [Odyssey Scholarship](#). In this work, we have found that U.S. universities are prepared to open their doors to host refugee students and provide this with generous financial aid. Nevertheless, there remains significant work ahead to connect all refugee students with higher education opportunities.

U.S. Study Abroad

U.S. study abroad will likely continue to rebound, as **96%** of responding institutions anticipate **study abroad numbers will stabilize or increase** in 2023/24 compared with the previous year.

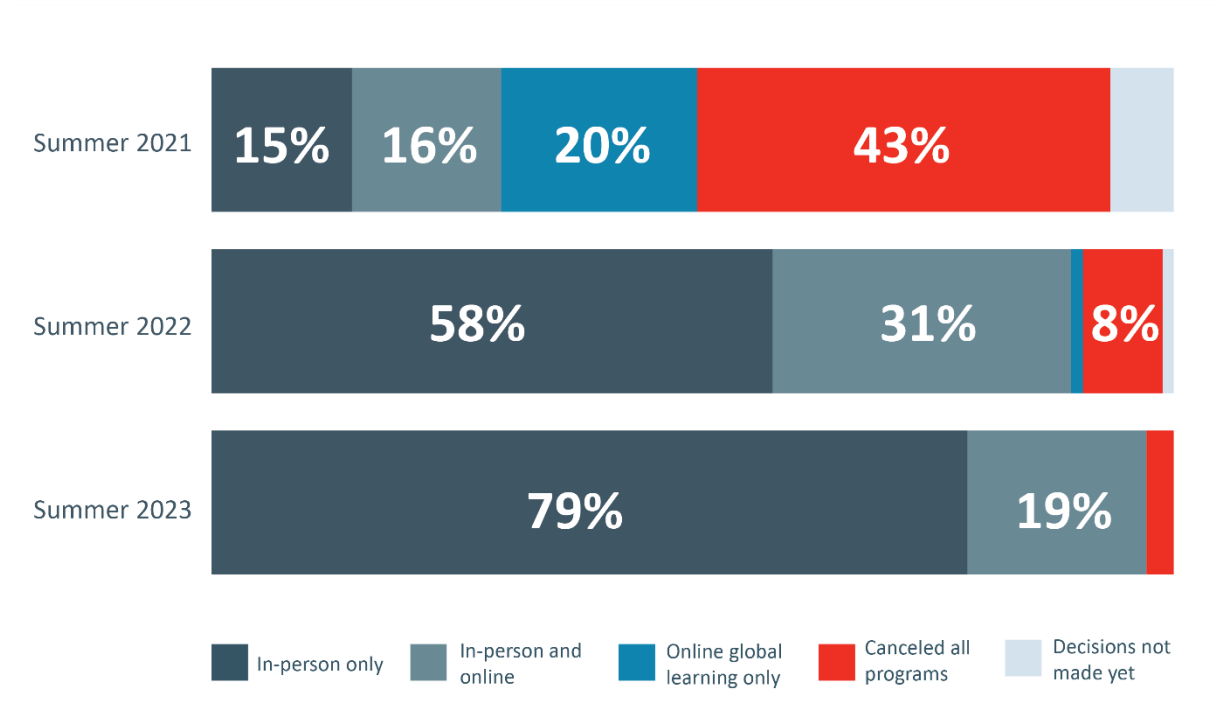
Institutions Have Returned to In-Person Study Abroad

Almost all reporting institutions have returned to or anticipate returning to in-person study abroad in the 2023/24 academic year. As of summer 2023, 98% of reporting institutions offered only in-person study abroad or a combination of in-person and online options (Figure 9). This indicates the strong commitment of U.S. colleges and universities to study abroad programs and the bounce back of in-person programs following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given this return to in-person study abroad, we have subsequently noted a dramatic decline in institutions reporting study abroad cancellations. In summer 2021, nearly half (43%) of colleges and universities reported study abroad cancellations, whereas in summer 2023, only 2% of institutions indicated cancellations of study abroad programs. As institutions anticipated study abroad for spring 2024, no institutions reported study abroad cancellations, which illustrates a robust return to study abroad.

Amid the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions pivoted to offering online

Figure 9: Study abroad program modality, summer 2021–summer 2023



global learning programs, with over 30% of institutions providing these opportunities in 2021 and 2022. With the return of in-person study abroad, a smaller proportion of institutions (19%) reported offering virtual programs along with in-person programs in summer 2023, and there were no reporting institutions that offered only virtual programs. This indicates that many institutions are not viewing online virtual exchanges as a replacement for traditional in-person study abroad opportunities but rather as an additional opportunity for students to gain global insights and perspectives.

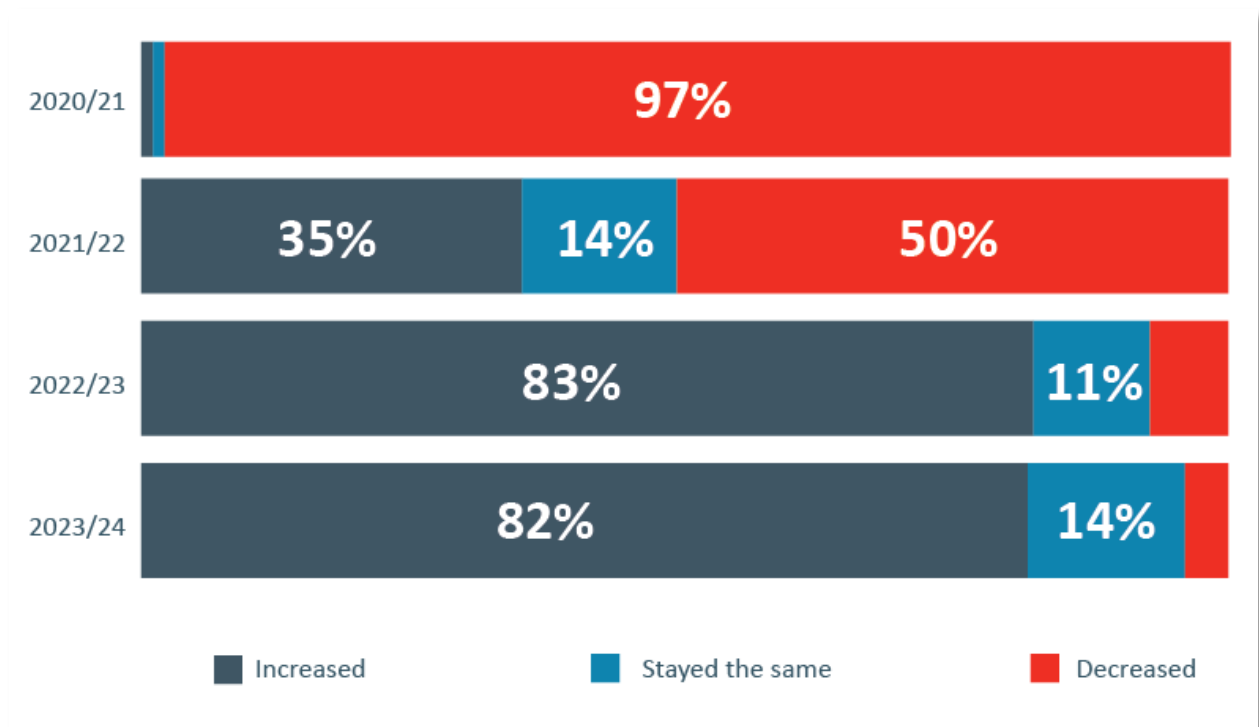
More Students Anticipated to Study Abroad in 2023/24

The vast majority (96%) of U.S. colleges and universities reported anticipating increased or stable student participation in study abroad in

the forthcoming 2023/24 academic year. Approximately 82% of institutions expected growth in study abroad numbers in 2023/24 compared with the prior year (Figure 10). This continued growth in study abroad builds upon the growth noted in 2022/23 following the significant declines amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This expected growth of study abroad participation was reported across all institutional types.

One of the big questions in the study abroad industry is when will study abroad numbers rebound to pre-COVID-19 levels? In the 2022/23 academic year, just over half of institutions (52%) noted that the numbers had yet to rebound fully and were still lower than before the pandemic. As such, the continued anticipated growth in 2023/24 is promising as colleges and universities work to rebuild their study abroad programs.

Figure 10: Anticipated study abroad numbers, 2021/22 – 2023/24



Study Abroad Destinations

Europe has long been the predominant destination for U.S. study abroad, and data from this year's Snapshot indicates that this trend will continue in 2023/24.^{vii} When asked where institutions are planning in-person study abroad in 2023/24, the most popular destinations were the traditional European study abroad locations of Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, with over 70% of respondents intending to offer programs in each destination.

Prior to the pandemic, study abroad options to destinations had grown to include destinations outside of Europe. Institutions, sponsors of study abroad scholarships, and providers had made extensive efforts to diversify destinations and provide opportunities for students to have engaging learning experiences in other regions. At the height of the pandemic, study abroad options to many less traditional destinations declined. Several factors led to this decline, including study abroad providers that ceased operations altogether, strict travel restrictions in countries, and concerns over healthcare facilities or low COVID-19 vaccination rates.^{viii}

We are beginning to see a return to increased study in nontraditional destinations. In last year's Snapshot, only 8 of the top 20 program destinations were outside Europe. As of 2023/24, half the leading program destinations were outside Europe: Japan, South Korea, Australia, Costa Rica, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, and Ecuador. It may continue to take previously popular destinations, especially those with strict COVID-19 policies, longer to experience a study abroad rebound. For example, China was the seventh most popular destination before the COVID-19 pandemic, but as of 2023/24, less than 30% of

institutions noted plans to send students to China.

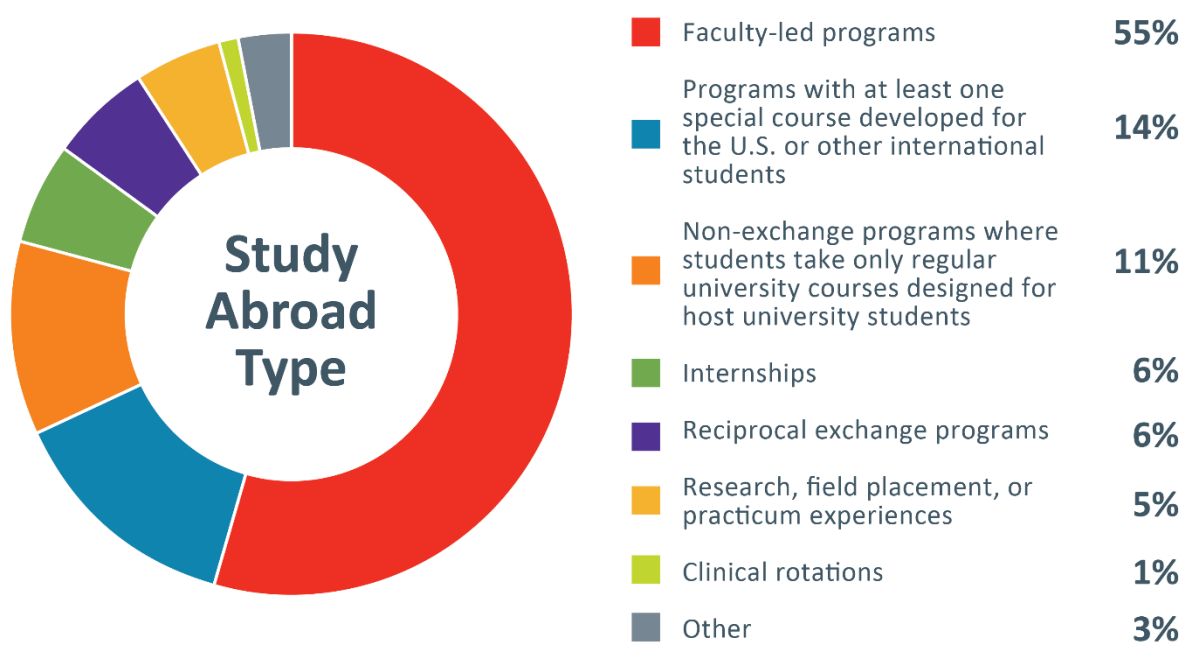
Study Abroad Program Types

As institutions begin to offer in-person study abroad programs again, many colleges and universities are embracing different program options for students who want to study abroad (Figure 11). The Forum on Education Abroad's *State of the Field* and last year's *Spring 2022 Snapshot* have documented that institutions offer many different types of study abroad experiences. This year's research builds upon this knowledge by recording how many students partook in each type of opportunity.

The most popular way for U.S. students to study abroad is through faculty-led programs. More than half (55%) of the reported study abroad students participated in faculty-led programs. In looking at differences between institutional types, one particularly notable difference was that reporting community colleges had a much higher proportion of students studying abroad on faculty-led experiences (92%)

Approximately 14% of students were on programs with at least one special course developed for the U.S. or other international students on the program. This can include courses at overseas branch campuses, "island" programs, or language-focused programs with classes designed for nonnative speakers of the local language. Another 10% of students pursued non-exchange programs where students take only regular university courses designed for host university students. These students may be on an integrated university study or directly enrolled at the host university for the term. There was a smaller but still notable population of students who participated in internships (6%); reciprocal

Figure 11: Students studying abroad by program type, 2021/22



exchange programs (6%); research programs, field placement, or practicum experiences (5%); or clinical rotations (1%).

In examining this information further, it is evident that not only are institutions offering multiple types of study abroad experiences but that students are availing themselves of these opportunities. Among responding institutions, 83% noted that students participated in multiple types of study abroad programs.

In addition to study abroad programs for enrolled students, institutions have also increasingly facilitated study abroad programs for incoming first-year students who have not yet matriculated to their institution. Among responding institutions, approximately 9 percent of colleges and universities noted offering these types of programs. Institutions indicated differing designs for these types of programs. Some institutions noted providing cohort-based models of taking students abroad for short-term classes in the summer before

their freshman fall semester starts. Other colleges and universities cited providing options for students to spend their first semester abroad with programs designed for students that have been conditionally admitted to the institution and will receive academic credit for their coursework abroad once they matriculate. Institutions noted both developing these programs themselves with partner institutions and working with organizations, such as Verto Education.

Study Abroad Sustainability Initiatives

In recent years, institutions have increasingly focused their work to better align and support the United Nations’ [Sustainability Development Goals](#) (SDGs).^{ix} For example, the *IIE Networker* magazine’s fall 2022 issue focused on [International Ed + Sustainable Development Goals](#), the Forum on Education Abroad published guidelines on [Advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals through Education Abroad](#), and NAFSA published a

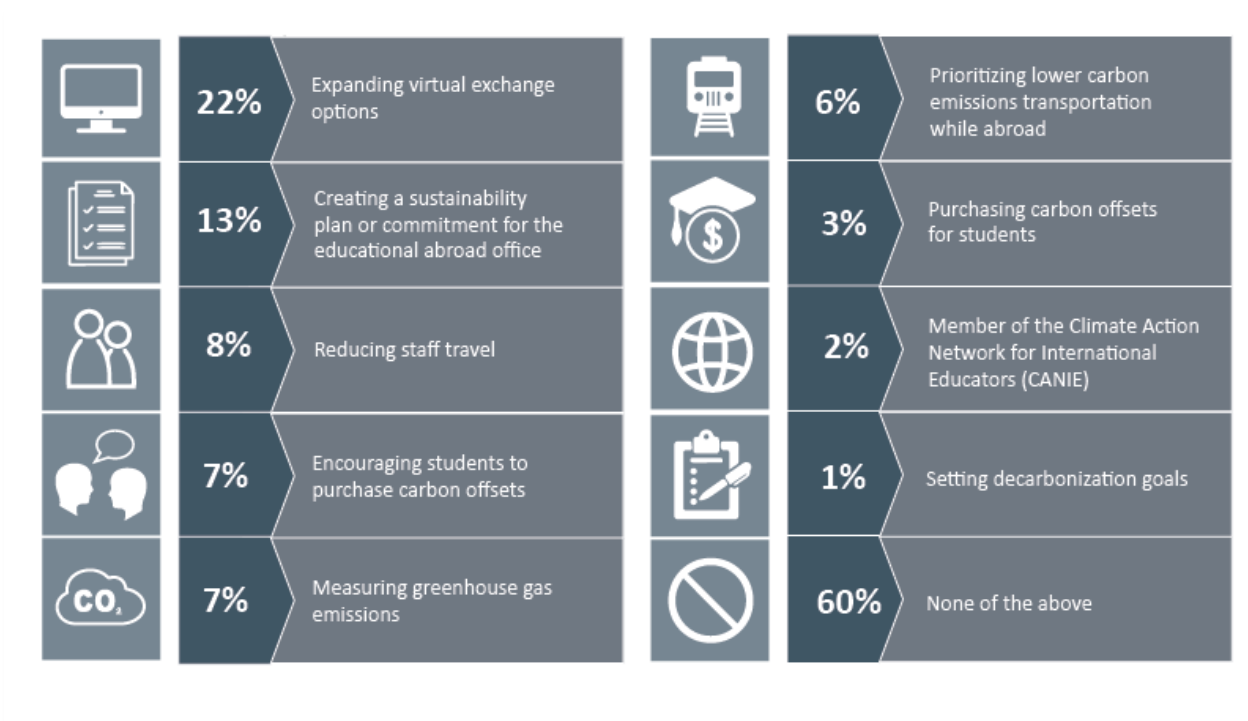
resource page of information on [Sustainability in Study Abroad](#).^{x,xii} There has been an increasing awareness of not only how international education can contribute to many of the SDGs but also the ramifications of international travel’s carbon footprint on the SDG’s Goal 13: Climate Action. As such, some in the field have called for greater awareness of the climate effects of studying abroad and additional research to showcase how U.S. higher education institutions are addressing these issues.^{xiii}

This year’s Snapshot collected information on whether U.S. higher education institutions engaged in any sustainability initiatives related to study abroad (Figure 12). Among survey participants, approximately 40% noted implementing study abroad sustainability initiatives. While many institutions are not currently implementing many of these initiatives, some noted that this will be an area of focus for the coming academic year.

One way to increase the sustainability of study abroad is to modify program design. Approximately 22% of institutions noted the expansion of virtual exchange options that would allow students to gain global competencies without incurring the costs or carbon footprint of traveling abroad. Another programmatic design area institutions can prioritize is to choose lower carbon emissions transportation while students are abroad, a priority that 6% of reporting institutions noted currently undertaking. With many students studying abroad in Europe, train travel rather than flights between countries is one way of decreasing a program’s carbon footprint. As institutions seek ways to make programs more sustainable, it will also be interesting to note whether short-term programs will continue to rise in popularity and whether there will be any changes in the proportion of students who go on multi-destination trips abroad.

Institutions also reported approaching sustainability through change study abroad

Figure 12: Study abroad sustainability initiatives



office measures. Approximately 13% of reporting institutions cited creating sustainability plans or commitments for the education abroad office, and 8% of institutions noted reducing staff travel. To understand how best to improve their future study abroad carbon footprint, 7% of offices are working to measure their greenhouse gas emissions. To address the direct effects of travel, 7% of institutions encouraged students to purchase their own offsets, and 3% noted purchasing offsets directly for the students, which could be incorporated directly into the study abroad costs. As institutions look to the future of measuring and offsetting emissions, there are several websites offices can use to calculate

flight emissions and purchase carbon offsets, such as [atmosfair](#), [terrapass](#), [Sustainable Travel International](#), and [Cool Effect](#).

Another key data collection point explored whether institutions planned to reduce student travel on study abroad experiences. Of all reporting institutions, none reported plans to reduce student travel. This indicates that many study abroad offices still see immense benefits in traveling abroad and thus may seek innovative solutions that address the climate impact of studying abroad. We look forward to tracking this information over time to see if there are any changes in these initiatives in the coming decade.

Data Collection on Underrepresented Students Studying Abroad

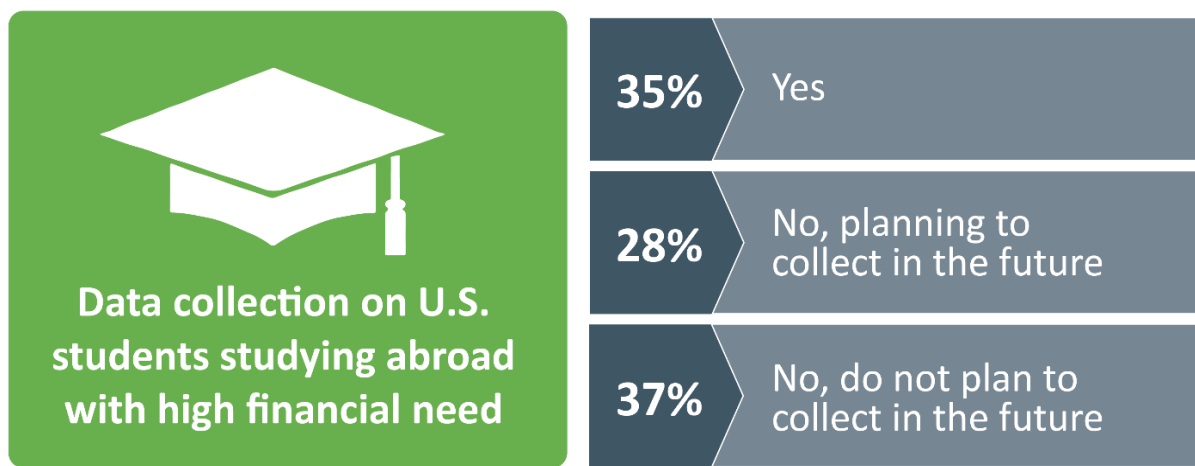
By focusing this year's data collection on diverse populations of students participating in global exchange that have not traditionally been collected at the national level, this section highlights the level of data known about students with high financial need and first-generation students studying abroad. Currently, **63%** of institutions collect or plan to collect data on these two populations of students. Additionally, it provides insights from institutions about how the field supports these students.

To understand the diversity profile of students studying abroad, more information is needed at the national level on classifications that can be used to measure the diversity of students who are being served and to identify areas for improvement. While *Open Doors* collects data on gender, race and ethnicity, and disability status, the inclusion of other data could improve how we understand students who access study abroad opportunities. This section focuses on creating a national understanding of terms and how institutions are currently collecting data, which could inform future research on underserved students studying abroad.

Study Abroad for Students with Financial Need

One of the widely cited barriers to studying abroad is the financial cost of these experiences. While estimates vary widely by type of program, destination, and home institution, GoAbroad conducted an analysis showcasing that the average cost of studying abroad for a semester was just over \$14,000, which may be prohibitive for college students with high financial need.^{xiv} As institutions look to provide opportunities for all students, not just those who have the means to afford study abroad, it is important to understand whether students with high financial needs are taking advantage of study abroad programs.

Figure 13: Data collection on U.S. students studying abroad with high financial need



When asked if institutions are collecting data on the metrics of student financial need, only 35% of responding institutions noted that they were tracking this information (Figure 13). An additional 28% noted the intent to collect this data, but a robust 37% of respondents indicated no plans to collect this information. There were differences by institutional type, with 56% of responding community colleges not planning to collect this information in the future.

Among the institutions that already collect or plan to collect data on students with high financial need, we asked about the metrics used to identify these students (Figure 14). More than three-quarters of institutions (76%) noted using multiple metrics to understand their student population.

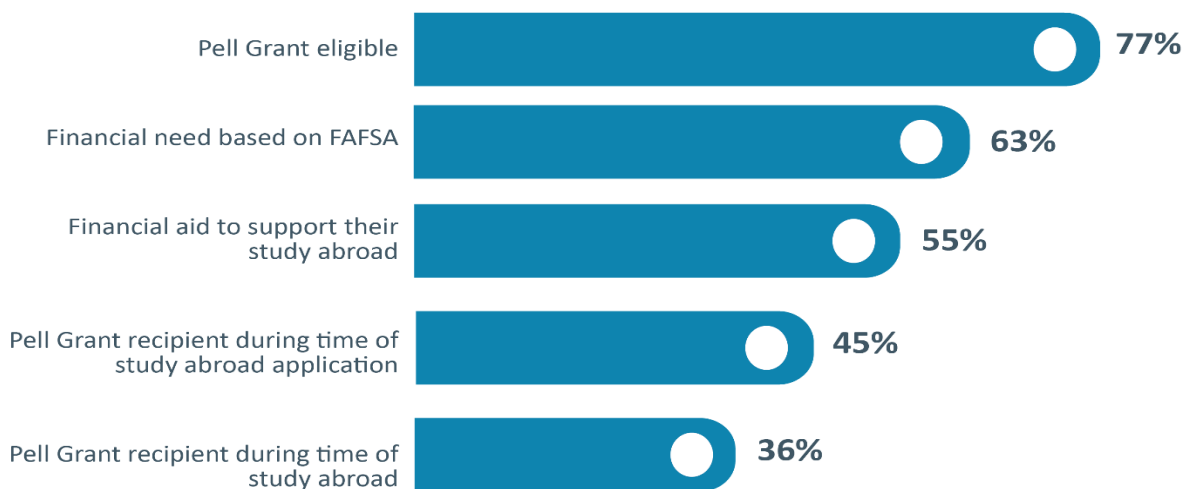
The most popular indicator of financial need was whether a student was Pell Grant eligible, with 77% of institutions using this metric. This was much higher than the proportion of institutions tracking whether students were Pell Grant recipients either when they applied to study abroad (45%) or during their time abroad (36%). Institutions also cited measuring a

student's financial need through documentation from FAFSA (63%) and institutional financial aid information (55%). To collect this information, institutions noted that they worked closely with institutional financial aid and scholarship offices.

Institutions reported several ways they use this data to support students with high financial need, which includes the creation of communications campaigns and targeted workshops to support students with limited financial means. For example, one institution highlighted how populating a student's financial need data at the beginning of the advising process greatly benefitted the advising team. It allowed them to give specific information about program costs and to advise on available aid, which led to reduced attrition among students with high financial need.

Colleges and universities also use this information to direct students to resources that can help fund study abroad experiences. Many institutions cited developing scholarship programs internally as well as working with students to apply for external scholarships.

Figure 14: Metrics used for collecting data on study abroad students with high financial need



Internally, institutions created scholarship programs to support students through initiatives, such as implementing a student fee that funds scholarships and seeking grants from donors and alumni. Externally, many institutions noted scholarships, most notably the U.S. Department of State’s [Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship](#), which has awarded more than 38,000 scholarships since 2001 to students with limited financial means to study or intern abroad. Institutions also cited scholarships from the [Fund for Education Abroad](#), [Bridging Scholarships](#) for study in Japan, [FreemanAsia](#), and the [Frederick Douglass Global Fellowship](#). Several other colleges and universities noted the development of passport grants or scholarships either from institutional funding or organizational grants, such as the [IIE American Passport Project](#).

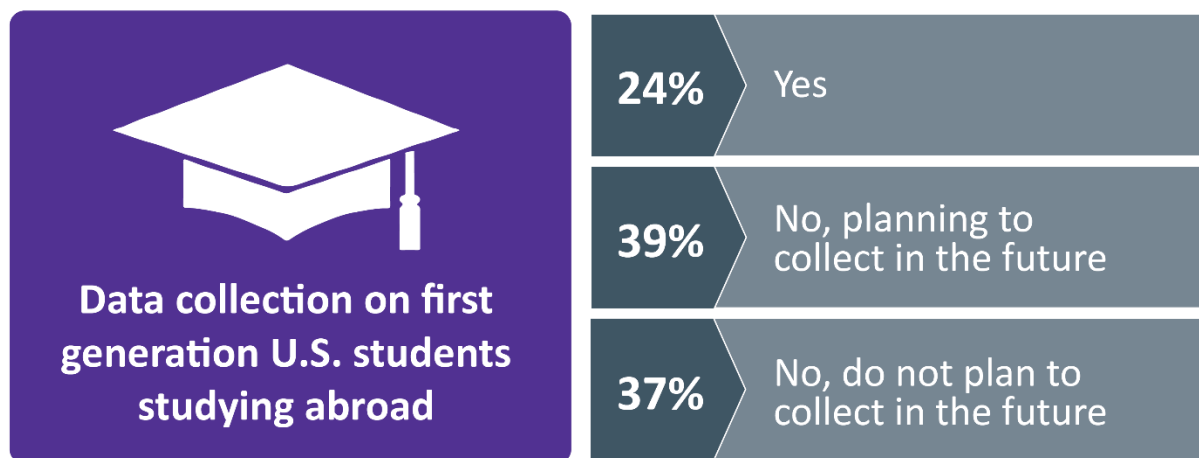
Study Abroad for First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students are a unique group within the U.S. higher education system, as they are both a growing segment of the student population and have experienced consistent underrepresentation in study abroad opportunities.^{xv}

To better understand how to best serve these students, IIE and the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) recently published a report on [Supporting Pathways for First-Generation Students to Study Abroad](#). The report provides key insights on the benefits of studying abroad for first-generation students, the limitations they may encounter when pursuing these opportunities, and the promising practices that may increase their access to study abroad programs.

Because these students may face unique challenges in pursuing a study abroad experience, we asked reporting institutions if they were currently collecting data on this population (Figure 15). Less than a quarter (24%) of responding institutions reported already tracking this information. This appears to be changing in the field, however, as an additional 39% of colleges and universities noted that they intend to collect this information in the future. For example, one commented that they are currently building a dashboard in collaboration with their institutional research office to gain insights into first-generation students, among other demographic indicators. They commented that “Data allows us to start the conversation,

Figure 15: Data collection on first-generation U.S. students studying abroad



strategy follows.” By collecting this information, they can use it to inform practices that encourage first-generation students to study abroad.

There is, however, still a significant proportion of respondents (37%) who indicated no plans to collect this type of data. One institution noted no plans to collect this data given a lack of system integrations across campus and budget constraints, meaning that they would not have a way to operationalize this information through scholarships or dedicated campaigns. Nevertheless, they noted that including this question in future *Open Doors* reports would lead them to consider adding this type of question into their applicant system.

In trying to understand this population of students, one of the acknowledged challenges is the definition of a first-generation college student.

One of the most widely documented definitions of a first-generation college student comes from an amendment to the U.S. Higher Education Act of 1965. This amendment defines a first-generation college student for the Federal TRIO Programs as “an individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree” or “in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree.” While this is the definition for one federal program, institutions have also adapted this definition to serve different populations over time. Variations can include differences by attendance and degree completion, biological parents and guardians, degree completion at a four- or two-year institution, whether the parental degree was completed in the United States, or extended family members’ college attendance.^{xvi} While there are many definitions, a study by the Center for First-Generation

Student Success found that many U.S. colleges and universities adopted the TRIO definition to receive funding and facilitate related data reporting.^{xvii}

To better understand the adoption of this definition within the study abroad field, we asked the offices that were collecting or planning to track this information what definition they used. Notably, nearly half of the respondents (43%) did not know what definition their program used to judge criteria. Among those that knew the definition, the TRIO definition was the most widely cited, with 80% of institutions confirming the adoption of this definition. The 20% who did not use this definition provided an array of different definitions, including criteria like students whose parents or legal guardians had not completed a four-year degree in the United States (which would include international students), students who were the first to attend college, and students who were the first in their family to complete either a two- or four-year degree. Several others noted that their intake forms ask students to self-disclose whether they are first-generation students.

Many colleges and universities are undertaking a number of initiatives that support and encourage first-generation students to study abroad and align with the promising practices noted in greater detail in [Supporting Pathways for First-Generation Students to Study Abroad](#).

Several institutions cited working across campus with other offices that serve these students, including first-generation departments or TRIO offices. One institution commented on working more closely with their campus’s first-generation office to collaborate on events and initiatives, such as content for predeparture orientations and resources that they could host on their website or offer in advising sessions with students. Several institutions also noted going directly to TRIO

classrooms to give presentations to students about opportunities to study or intern abroad.

As finances may be a barrier for these students, institutions noted the importance of developing scholarship opportunities for these students. Some indicated dedicated scholarships specifically for first-generation students, which may be housed within the study abroad office or the first-generation office. Others used first-generation status as a consideration in awarding scholarships. One institution emphasized encouraging first-generation students to apply for external scholarships or programs, such as the Council for Opportunity in Education's [Keith Sherin Global Leaders Program](#). Other institutions also noted grants or scholarships that first-generation students can use to gain a passport.

Representation among colleagues and advisors can also make a significant difference in showing first-generation students that studying abroad is an option for them. One institution commented about the benefits of hiring an advisor who was a first-generation student. Another institution noted how they use an appreciative advising framework that emphasizes how the skills and experiences these students already possess make them especially successful in study abroad programs.

Many colleges and universities noted the creation of dedicated information sessions and resources for first-generation students. One element that several institutions noted was to provide greater details about the study abroad process, such as traveler checklists that lend insight into the basics of travel. In addition, multiple institutions commented on incorporating family support into the process. For example, one institution allows students to include a family member or friend in their predeparture orientation.

Another way to integrate first-generation students into study abroad programs is to develop programming that is specifically designed for these students. Several institutions have built study abroad experiences specifically for these students, often through taking cohorts of first-generation students abroad on a faculty-led program.

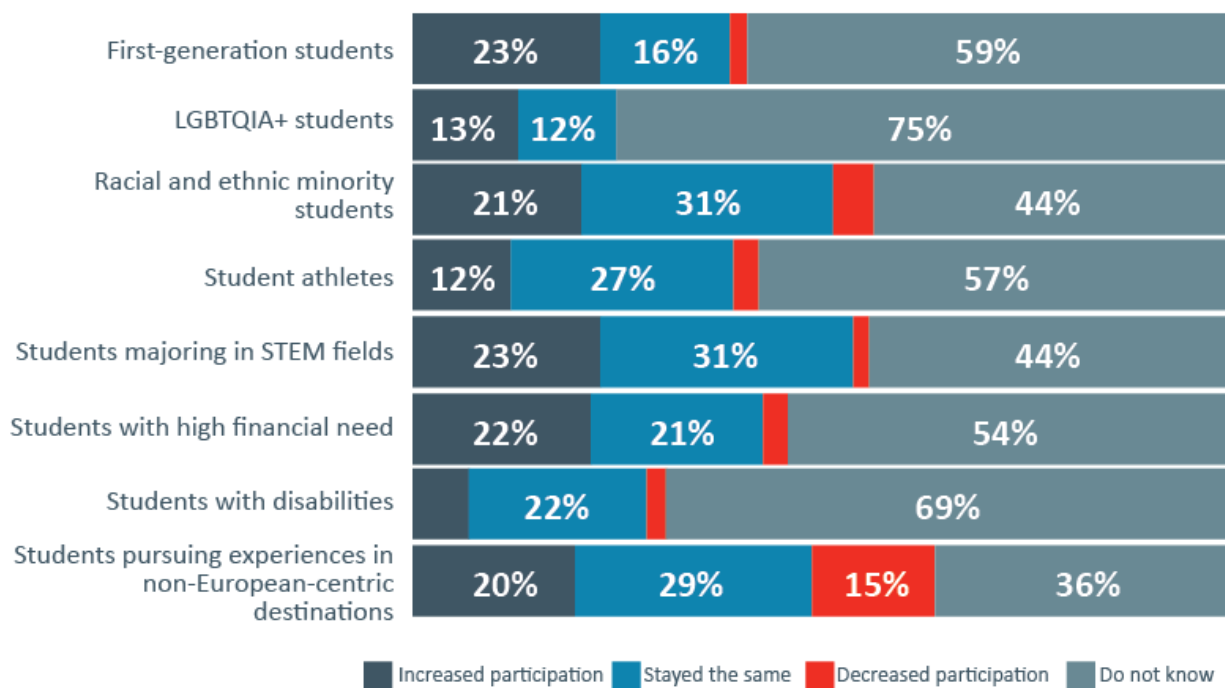
Study Abroad Participation among Underrepresented Students

As institutions return to in-person study abroad opportunities for students following the pandemic, they have an opportunity to more closely monitor how well these programs are working to increase participation in study abroad among traditionally underrepresented students. Offices can use the collected study abroad participation statistics to benchmark information against institutional profiles. This can highlight study abroad successes or areas for improvement that can result in adjustments to campaigns or outreach to specific populations on campus.

Across many of the classifications listed in Figure 16, institutions are seeing notable increases in the type of students participating in study abroad experiences: first-generation students (23%), students majoring in the STEM fields (23%), and students with high financial need (22%). There are also fields where participation has remained on the same level as prior years, particularly for racial and ethnic minority students (31%). Given our section about destination diversity (p. 14), it is unsurprising to see that 15% of institutions noted a decrease in students pursuing experiences in non-European-centric destinations.

For all categories, however, a significant proportion of respondents could not easily report data on changes in study abroad participation. Part of this may be due to the

Figure 16: Study abroad participation among underrepresented students



nature of a snapshot survey, but the lack of data could also indicate gaps in data collection, particularly in regard to information on the participation of LGBTQIA+ and students with disabilities. As institutions seek to expand students' access to study abroad opportunities

of all types, it is important to understand the profiles of those who are currently participating in study abroad and whether programs are making strides to improve accessibility across campus.

Conclusion

The *Spring 2023 Snapshot on International Educational Exchange* continues IIE's commitment to providing a snapshot of the current state of international educational exchange programs to and from the United States. We are pleased to report that participating institutions indicate a continued rebound in levels of international educational exchange for both international students and U.S. students studying abroad.

In looking to the future of international students studying in the United States, we are excited by the potential for growth. IIE's CEO Allan Goodman and other higher education leaders have proposed a moonshot goal of reaching 2 million international students by the end of this decade due to the United States' capacity to host students, unparalleled options at colleges and universities, and opportunities for international students to gain practical work experience.^{xviii} It is promising to note that institutions are continuing their return to in-person study and that international student applications to study in the United States have increased. We acknowledge the work that is required to achieve a rebound to pre-pandemic international student numbers and to reach this moonshot goal. As such, it is notable that institutions are developing specialized plans to recruit students across emerging markets and are providing prospective students with information through numerous outreach channels.

Participation in study abroad programs continues to return after facing an unprecedented decline of approximately 15,000

students amid the pandemic. As programs resume operations, the insights in this report indicate that student numbers are rebounding as students are eager to experience the benefits of traveling to another country. In the years to come, we will continue to monitor whether this uptick in participation will continue to be to European destinations or if more diverse locations will begin to rebound. We will look to further analyze the types of study abroad programs students choose and how sustainability is built into study abroad programs.

By focusing this year's data collection on diverse populations of students participating in global exchange that have not traditionally been collected at the national level, we wanted to showcase the level of data known about these students and how the field supports these students. As we look to the future, there is potential for expanded research on refugees and displaced persons to better understand how institutions collect data on these students and where these students come from. Likewise, in study abroad, acknowledging the frameworks and definitions most commonly used to classify students of high financial need or first-generation students provides us an opportunity to ask future questions about the number of students engaged in study abroad.

We thank the 527 U.S. higher education institutions who generously took the time to respond to this survey. Your responses allow us to provide these insights and continue the discussion on the future of international educational exchange.

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