

WANTED: FOREIGN STUDENTS

State colleges and universities are increasing their efforts to attract students from abroad.



BY SUZANNE WEISS

Bright, adventurous and fluent in three languages, 18-year-old Chelsea Tan came to the United States last fall to begin a rigorous course of study leading to a degree in health physics—an opportunity she wouldn't have had in her native Malaysia.

“Back home, Malays are given preference in admission to universities,” says Tan, who is half-Chinese. “And even if I had been accepted, there are hardly any advanced programs in physics, which is what I wanted to study.”

So Tan, whose parents are footing the bill for her college education, selected Colorado State University from among several schools that appealed to her. She is learning how to ski, planning to visit New York and Los Angeles, and enjoying participating in a new school program called “Global Village,” designed specifically for international students.

Typically the best and brightest of their countries' young people, foreign students like Tan bring entrepreneurial energy and talent to American colleges and universities—particularly in the fields of science, math and engineering. Their presence on campuses and in communities can enrich the culture and further

Chelsea Tan, far right, came from Malaysia to study health physics at Colorado State.

the increasingly vital goal of improving cross-cultural fluency and understanding.

One of the biggest benefits many see in attracting foreign students, however, has to do with economics. They contribute \$20.2 billion a year to the U.S. economy—in tuition, fees, rent, transportation, food and other living expenses, according to the Association of International Educators.

With revenues lethargic and national student populations tapering off, a growing number of states are working hard to enlarge their share of this booming international higher-education market. Legislators in at least 23 states have passed joint resolutions calling attention to the importance of either attracting foreign students to study in America or sending American students to study abroad.



*Senator
Bob Plymale (D)
West Virginia*

“The world is really shrinking, and so we know that we've got to do more to attract top students from other countries, and give our own kids the chance to interact with other cultures,” says West Virginia Senator Bob Plymale (D), chairman of the Senate Education Committee. “We want to be a leader in internationalizing our colleges and universities.”

Suzanne Weiss is a freelance writer in Denver who contributes frequently to State Legislatures.

A Joint Effort

Postsecondary institutions are working together under various states’ banners—Destination Indiana, Study Texas, Education USA Vermont and so on—to develop marketing campaigns to recruit foreign students to their states.

These state consortia, which include both public and private and two- and four-year institutions, are designed to heighten the profile of a state’s entire higher-education portfolio, from flagship state universities to community colleges to small, liberal arts institutions.

These groups typically are involved in marketing their schools through websites and social media; collaborating with state economic development, tourism and foreign-trade agencies; and sending representatives to higher-education fairs sponsored by the U.S. State Department throughout the world.

Over the past several years, postsecondary institutions in 24 states—Alabama, California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin—have formed consortia focused on recruiting greater numbers of “internationally mobile” students, and Florida, Montana and North Carolina are looking at doing so. Several states have regional initiatives under way: Campus Philly and Global Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, Study Western Massachusetts in Massachusetts, and Metro NY in New York.

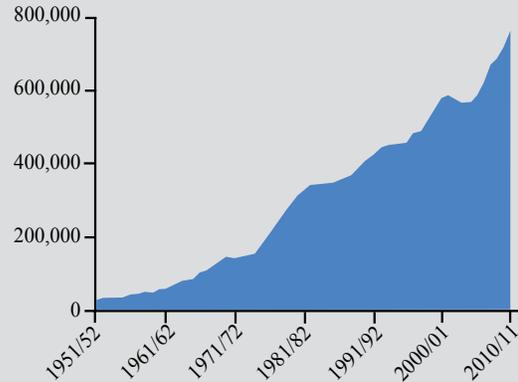
Although these groups enjoy the backing of a wide range of political, business and education leaders, support from legislators can make the difference. Plymale’s enthusiasm helped establish the Study West Virginia consortium in 2008. He and other legislative leaders “really got the ball rolling,” says Clark Egnor, director of international education at Marshall University. They boosted the budget of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission by \$120,000 a year to fund the consortium’s activities.

The newest state consortium, Study Colorado, was launched last July. As in other states, cash-strapped colleges and universities were the driving force behind efforts to step up overseas recruiting.

“As someone who has worked in international education for a

Coming to America

The number of international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities has increased over the last 12 years from 547,867 in 2000-01 to 764,495 in 2011-12.



Source: Data from the National Center for Education Statistics in *Fast Facts in the Open Doors Report* by the Institute of International Education, 2012.

long time, I hate to say it, but it’s pretty much revenue-driven,” says Lawrence H. Bell, director of international education at the University of Colorado Boulder. “The domestic market is just not as large as the international market.”

Global Attraction

With American colleges and universities recognized and respected globally for their excellence, diversity, research capacity, teaching quality, modern facilities and resources, the United States has long been the premier destination for foreign students.

“Potent and converging trends” are fueling demand for world-class postsecondary education and training, says Marty Bennett, outreach and marketing coordinator for the State

It’s a Small World

Asia is home for many of The Top 10 countries that send students to American colleges.

Country	2011/12	% of total
China	194,029	25.4
India	100,270	13.1
South Korea	72,295	9.5
Saudi Arabia	34,139	4.5
Canada	26,821	3.5
Taiwan	23,250	3.0
Japan	19,966	2.6
Vietnam	15,572	2.0
Mexico	13,893	1.8
Turkey	11,973	1.6

Source: *Fast Facts in the Open Doors Report* by the Institute of International Education, 2012.

Top 10 Host States

The states with the most foreign students also are home to the institutions with the most. Last year, those were the University of Southern California with 9,269 students, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign with 8,997 and New York University with 8,660.

State	# of Students 2011/12	% Change from 2010/11
California	102,789	+6.5
New York	82,436	+4.5
Texas	61,511	-0.2
Massachusetts	41,258	+6.6
Illinois	35,920	+6.4
Pennsylvania	33,398	+9.5
Florida	32,567	+9.6
Ohio	26,427	+7.0
Michigan	25,551	+3.6
Indiana	22,194	+10.4

Source: *Fast Facts in the Open Doors Report* by the Institute of International Education, 2012.

Department-sponsored EducationUSA program. Among them are a rapidly growing middle class, booming economies and increased political stability in countries around the globe.

“China, India and other countries are scrambling to expand their higher-education capacity, but there are still limited opportunities for students,” Bennett says.

Over the past several years, Australia, Canada, France, Japan and the United Kingdom have all launched aggressive initiatives to capture a larger share of the international market for higher education. And now, similar initiatives are under way in roughly half of the 50 states.

Filling the Funding Gap

Nationwide, higher education financing has undergone a profound shift in recent years. As state and local funding has gone down, tuition has gone up. In 2011, state and local support for higher education fell to an average of \$6,290 per student, the lowest level in more than two decades, according to the State Higher Education Executive Officers’ latest annual report. At the same time, net tuition revenues per student reached \$4,774, an all-time high.

Many public institutions that used to get a large portion of their revenue from state governments now must rely on tuition for almost half their budgets. The percentage of educational revenues that come from tuition has climbed steadily over the past 25 years, from 23 percent in 1986 to 43.3 percent in 2011.

Another recent report, issued by the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University, showed that state appropriations for higher education fell by 7.6 percent in 2011-12, the largest annual decline in at least five decades.

Because international students, like out-of-state students, pay about three times as much in tuition as state residents, they effectively subsidize in-state students, and help schools meet their bottom line. Foreign students are also less likely to require substantial financial aid from institutions because the cost of their education is borne largely by their families and, in some countries, their governments.

Saudi Arabia, for example, provides generous scholarships—covering tuition, travel and living expenses—to young people who study abroad. And Brazil recently launched a program that will pick up the tab for 100,000 science, engineering and math students to study at universities in the United States and other countries over the next four years.

Currently, the 765,000 foreign students who

study in America constitute just 3.7 percent of total U.S. higher education enrollment. But those numbers are certain to grow steadily over the next few years, giving rise to several critical issues.

The Concerns

Some lawmakers are worried that a growing influx of foreign students might limit opportunities for “homegrown” students. California Senator Michael J. Rubio (D) is concerned that if more and more slots at public institutions are reserved for full-paying foreign and out-of-state students, there might not be enough for local kids. He introduced legislation last year aimed at limiting the number of out-of-state and international students who can enroll at Berkeley, UCLA and other University of California campuses. His California Students First Act would have prohibited schools from enrolling more than 10 percent of non-Californians in future freshmen classes.

Rubio’s bill drew stiff opposition from higher education officials, and died in committee. He hasn’t yet decided whether to reintroduce it this session.



Senator
Michael J.
Rubio (D)
California

Resources for States

NCSL’s International Relations Task explores the important role states can play in global affairs. Members have studied tourism, trade, education and foreign investment, as well as how to coordinate international activities among state legislatures. The group has a variety of resources to promote cooperation among legislators, staff and their counterparts around the world. www.ncsl.org/magazine.

The U.S. State Department’s EducationUSA assists state officials to increase their international student enrollment with a variety of services for foreign students interested in studying in the United States. It operates more than 400 centers throughout the world and sponsors higher-education fairs in countries ranging from Algeria to Zimbabwe. www.educationusa.info

The Institute of International Education tracks state-by-state information on foreign students studying in America and American students studying abroad. This includes the number of students, their home countries, and their estimated spending on tuition and fees, rent, transportation and other living expenses. www.iese.org

“I do think that California students should get a fair shot at attending our University of California system—and not be turned away simply because a wealthy student from the East Coast or abroad shows up with a checkbook in hand,” Rubio said in a recent interview.

Rising international enrollment has also brought renewed attention to another longstanding issue: Roughly 85 percent of foreign students who receive postsecondary education and

training in the United States return to their home countries after graduating—primarily because they are unable to obtain a green card.

Global demand for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) graduates is soaring and competition is stiff. Canada, Britain and Australia have all structured their immigration rules to favor their job markets. They have created a “points-based system” of work permits that is tied to immigrants’ skills, credentials and employment potential. China is offering cash and other incentives to lure Chinese scientists home after they have trained overseas.

Meanwhile, the U.S. system remains tilted in favor of foreign relatives of citizens and permanent residents. Those who believe their talent and contributions would benefit the states support a congressional bill, the Startup Act 2.0, to make available an additional 55,000 green cards a year for foreign-born STEM graduates.

As for Tan, the student from Malaysia who is studying health physics, she’s glad she’s been given the chance to embark on what she calls “my great adventure.” She plans to volunteer at a hospital in her hometown of Penang this summer and prepare for her sophomore year at Colorado State. That’s the next step on her path to not only becoming the first person in her family to earn a college degree, but also to becoming a nuclear research scientist. With her determination and skills, who knows the places she’ll go. 



The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign attracts more foreign students than any other public university.

SL ONLINE

Discover more resources on international students, including links to several state consortia websites at www.ncsl.org/magazine.