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Institutional Relevance

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III. Institutional Relevance

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Since World War II, U.S. institutions of higher education have welcomed and educated millions of students from all over the world, with many going on to become world leaders and some of our closest friends and allies. U.S. foreign policy leaders from Madeleine Albright to Robert Gates agree that our openness to international students helps strengthen ties with countries across the globe and enhances our own national security.

Current Enrollment Trends

Nearly one million international students are studying in the United States today: double the number here in the late 1990s, yet only 5 percent of the overall enrollment total in U.S. higher education. Of the international students in this country, 64 percent come from Asia, with students from China, India, and South Korea representing more than half a million students combined. This is not entirely surprising given that 61 percent of the world's population is located in Asia, a region with growing economies and middle-class populations.

In contrast, just 4 percent of international students in the United States are from Africa—even though the continent makes up to 16 percent of the world's population, has seven of the ten fastest growing economies, and will see its population share grow by 10 percent over the next 35 years, more than any other world region. Africa's future growth and success has significant global implications, yet absent a proactive strategy, the United States is missing a strategic opportunity to contribute to the education of its future leaders and allies. Meanwhile, the Chinese government recently announced it will provide 30,000 government scholarships to African students recognizing the importance of building ties there.

Proactive Approach to Recruitment

To better position the United States to face future global challenges as well as shifts in the global education marketplace, it is imperative that we take a more proactive approach to international student recruitment. We must adopt policies that not only articulate the value of

attracting international students from around the world to study in the United States, but also identify ways to better balance the diversity of students we engage and educate.

A National Policy Initiative

A proactive, national, public–private policy initiative is imperative for generating a better understanding of global trends, increasing diversity of students (by gender, country of origin, ethnicity, socioeconomic status), and better preparing all students to collaborate and cooperate in a globalized world. Such an initiative would:

- articulate the importance of welcoming and educating international students;
- coordinate government and higher-education efforts toward attracting a more diverse pool of international students, especially undergraduate students from critical areas of the world;
- establish targets and invest in scholarships to enroll economically disadvantaged students and students from developing countries, particularly women and girls;
- address existing U.S. government policies and regulations that impede students coming from developing countries or countries in conflict;
- engage the private sector, as international students will contribute to a future workforce and consumer base.

To better defend U.S. interests and more effectively address global unrest, we must foster greater mutual understanding. Educating international students is one of the most effective ways to do that. Rather than allow shifts in the global education marketplace to determine who studies here, the United States must proactively seek to educate a more globally and economically diverse population.

Source

Banks, Rachel. "Bringing Global Diversity to U.S. Campuses: An Economic and National Security Imperative." NAFSA, Jan 2016,
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