

SIT Graduate Institute/SIT Study Abroad

## SIT Digital Collections

---

Capstone Collection

SIT Graduate Institute

---

August 2020

# STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS PROFESSIONALS TO ADAPT TO THE RECENT DROP IN FOREIGN STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT US UNIVERSITIES

Peter Plass

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [International and Comparative Education Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Plass, Peter, "STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS PROFESSIONALS TO ADAPT TO THE RECENT DROP IN FOREIGN STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT US UNIVERSITIES" (2020). *Capstone Collection*. 3215.

<https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones/3215>

This Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS PROFESSIONALS TO ADAPT TO  
THE RECENT DROP IN FOREIGN  
STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT US UNIVERSITIES

Peter Plass

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in  
International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA

10 July 2019

Adviser: Dr. Alla Korzh

STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

Table of Contents

**ABSTRACT ..... 3**

**LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 6**

**RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY ..... 13**

    PARTICIPANTS DESCRIPTION AND SAMPLING ..... 14

**METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT, AND ANALYSIS..... 15**

    ETHICS ..... 16

    POSITIONALITY ..... 16

    CREDIBILITY OF FINDINGS ..... 17

    LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF STUDY..... 17

**FINDINGS ..... 18**

    UNDERGRADUATE VS GRADUATE ADMISSIONS ROLES ..... 19

    STRATEGIES FOR ATTRACTING MORE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ..... 23

*Financing education in the US.* ..... 23

*Overcoming violence and bigotry.* ..... 29

*Visas and immigration.* ..... 33

*Serving the graduate student community.* ..... 37

**CONCLUSIONS ..... 40**

    FINAL THOUGHTS AND FURTHER STUDY ..... 43

**REFERENCES..... 46**

**PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR DELIVERY ..... 50**

**APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCRIPT FOR PARTICIPANTS..... 51**

**APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM..... 53**

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

**Abstract**

The purpose of this capstone is to explore strategies employed by graduate level admissions professionals to counteract the recent fall in international student enrollment as reported by the US Department of State in November of 2018. The US depends heavily on foreign students for economic gains nationally and financial stability at the institutional level. Through the semi-structured interviews with five international admissions professions, this qualitative research study examined the factors that may drive international students away from the US. The findings of this study demonstrate that the cost of education, violence, bigotry on campus, the national anti-immigrant discourse, and the inability for some international graduate students to access services on campus are major factors deterring international students from enrolling in US universities. This paper explores each challenge and strategies to counteract or minimize the impact that a loss of international students can bring to an institution.

*Key words: International students, admissions, recruitment, economy, financial, strategy, graduate studies, bigotry, violence, services, higher education*

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

### Introduction

Recent reports from universities across the US have presented a worrying trend. Foreign student enrollment<sup>1</sup> has fallen between the 2016 and 2018 academic years despite a steady rise that had been the trend since 2006 (NFAP, 2017). Up until 2016, there had been a precipitous rise in international student enrollment at US universities which seemed to be accelerating, so much so that the number of international students studying in STEM fields at the graduate level increased by 50% between 2012 and 2016. To put that into context, beginning in 2006, the total number of new foreign student enrollments in US higher education was 526,670 (Open Doors, 2018). By 2012 that number jumped to 724,725; and in 2016 it was 903,127 (Open Doors, 2018). As a result of this, many university campuses that have traditionally welcomed a diverse and international student body now have departments where international students regularly outnumber domestic students. For example, 79% of all graduate students in the field of computer science come from overseas (NFAP, 2017). Over the last decade, many research institutions adopted plans for their various departments around the reliability of foreign enrollment numbers continuing to increase steadily.

While the total number of international students still remains high, the enrollment numbers in aggregate across all US universities remain concerning. International student enrollment dropped nationally by 6.6% from 2017 to 2018, which seems to be an acceleration of the 3.2% drop the year before (NFAP, 2017). The largest concentrated drop in graduate student enrollment can be attributed to a 21% decrease in students from India studying computer science

---

<sup>1</sup>When discussing this enrollment, I would like to acknowledge that this paper was written in the United States and that it often refers to the university system within the United States. All references to “international” simply refer to students or systems that originate from outside the United States. Similarly, the word “domestic” refers to students, systems or institutions that originate from the United States.

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

and engineering. Saudi Arabia also saw declines in enrollment at US universities, with 1,930 fewer students enrolled at the graduate level and a staggering 6,220 fewer at the undergraduate level, bringing the Saudi Arabian Kingdom's student population in the US down by 15.5% (Open Doors, 2018).

This drop in foreign student enrollment numbers is something that concerns me greatly as someone who has been working in the field of international education for most of my professional life. It is also a complex topic that shifted with current events, even as I was researching it. Research institutions rely greatly on graduate students to conduct research which is often critical for institutional funding. I further explored how institutions have reacted to meet their admissions requirements and retain the financial benefits that these students offer. As such I have asked the question 'How are admissions professionals adapting to the decline in foreign student enrollments at the graduate level?'

I focused on the perspectives of five admissions counselors in their respective departments responsible for reversing falling enrollment at the institutional level. As federal policy is largely outside the influence of individual universities, much less their individual departments, I was curious to understand what immediate steps are being taken to help stem the tide of what appears to be a much larger trend. As the recent drop in foreign graduate school is a fairly new development, this particular topic of research remains largely unexamined. In what follows, I will present the challenges admissions professionals are facing in a United States where foreign student enrollment is dropping. I will do this by first laying the groundwork that the enrollment decline amongst international students is of real concern in the higher education community. Once the background of the situation has been established, I will describe the design and methodology of this research study. Following this, I will present the findings by defining

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

the role and scope of an international admissions professional working in the world of graduate level education. Finally, I will present the challenges and potential solutions as reported by five such professionals in order to draw conclusions as to what strategies are being implemented at those institutions.

### **Literature Review**

Falling student enrollment numbers is something that institutions have faced in the past, such as the drops after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001 and after the economic downturn in 2008, however the current situation is a new one (Open Doors, 2017). The built-up reliance on foreign students, followed by the threat of a precipitous fall in the tuition they bring in, has many alarmed. As such, much of the literature on the subject is new, and I have been eagerly incorporating new pieces on the topic as they come out. Existing literature is more helpful in understanding the fundamental relationship between foreign students and modern research programs, how their funding structures have been set up, and the vulnerabilities therein. One thing is for certain, though: this is a multi-faceted and developing situation and I am excited to follow each new study as it emerges.

To illustrate the many factors at play here, declines illustrated in the 2017 Open Doors report seem to coincide with President Donald Trump's Executive Order 13769 (titled Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States), yet the drop in student enrollments from one of the most targeted countries of that legislation, Iran, was relatively light (NFAP, 2017). Clearly, there is more going on here than a simple cause and effect relationship. As Allan E. Goodman, IIE's President, stated: "It really is much too soon for us yet to tell what is the definitive factor" (Watanabe, 2017, p. 1).

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

The importance of all international students studying in the US should be emphasized not only because of the “softer” benefits of cultural exchange and the richness in diversity that they bring to university campuses, but in their impact on the US economy. The US Department of Commerce reports that foreign students in the US bring about \$42 billion into the US economy and that much of that money is coming from overseas as it comes from families, foreign governments or other foreign sponsors such as corporations (US Department of State, 2018). Between 1995 and 2015, the number of full-time, US graduate students studying computer science hit a high of 12,539. In the same period, the number of foreign students in the same field more than tripled, reaching 45,790 (Open Doors, 2018). Similar trends can be seen in many STEM fields. The numbers of foreign students studying STEM subjects in the U. S. are interesting in their own right, but the side-by-side comparisons of international to U. S. student populations in certain fields is staggering. International students make up 81% of full-time graduate students studying electrical engineering in the US, 79% in computer science, 75% in industrial engineering, 69% in statistics, and 63% in economics (NFAP, 2017).

Over the last decade, US institutions appear to have increasingly been relying on foreign students to fill their MA and Ph.D. programs (McKenna, 2015). Professor Stuart Cooper, chair of chemical and biomolecular engineering at Ohio State University, stated that “To get tenure and perform research, professors require a significant number of graduate students and there are not enough domestic students alone in certain fields” (Anderson, 2014, p. 6). Speculating on this further, National Science Foundation’s President, Stuart Anderson stated:

International students help many universities have enough graduate students to support research programs that help attract top faculty and that also thereby help U.S. students by having a higher-quality program than they otherwise would



## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

have... (without them) you'd see a shrinking across the board where you'd have just certain schools that are able to support good programs. That would lead to a shrinking of U.S. leadership in education and technology if you have many fewer programs with high-quality research and top-level professors. (Redden, 2013)

This causes one to wonder if a decrease in foreign students would simply result in an increase in domestic students to take their place, resulting in little net change. The research does not bear this out. In fact, it has been surmised that a decrease in foreign students would likely lead to the financial instability and contraction of several graduate programs (Anderson, 2014). Foreign students, after all, pay higher tuition rates and often receive little in the way of scholarship money (McKenna, 2015). In 2016, 28% of all tuition revenue at public universities came from foreign students with many of those universities charging nearly three times their in-state tuition rates for international students (Loudenback, 2016). This steady tuition cash flow from foreign students actually helps to cross-subsidize the tuitions of their domestic colleagues (NFAP, 2017).

The worth of foreign students, however, goes far beyond the financial benefits. The majority of international enrollments are at large research institutions such as NYU and UC Berkeley (NFAP, 2017). These institutions gain additional benefits simply from having more students operating at the graduate level. Tenured professors overseeing large research departments with high numbers of graduate students can take on larger and more ambitious research projects. As the efficacy of a department scales up, it creates a positive feedback loop that allows the department or university the resources necessary to take on more students (Anderson, 2014). It stands to reason that the opposite would be true as student numbers wane in a department.

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

Upon better understanding this relationship between foreign students and research institute stability, it becomes clear that suddenly losing just a small number of graduate students can present a large problem for even well-established universities. As concluded by a NFAP policy brief, “At many US universities, both majors and graduate programs could not be maintained without international students” (NFAP, 2017, p. 2).

The US already projects an arguably exploitative message to its foreign students. It requires international students to maintain its current academic research programs and benefits greatly from the tax dollars they spend, but seems to resist allowing them to contribute to the economy upon graduating. Currently, most academic visas require students to leave the country immediately after graduating, though students can apply for one year of Optional Practical Training (OPT), which can extend their stay in the US. If they are in a STEM field, their OPT can extend their stay for two additional years, or three years total (Zaveri, 2018). This is a critical time when students have the most professional connections and are most likely to pursue their chosen field of study with gusto. Absent a policy that makes it easy for foreign students to remain in the US contributing to its economy, it is possible the US is missing out on a large number of potential entrepreneurs that will keep America as a global center for technology and innovation. This exact issue was examined in *The Economist* when Santiago, Chile and other cities that are home to start-up centers were emerging around the world, largely through siphoning off talent educated at US universities. The magazine referred to immigration specifically as it referenced a system that seemed to work against the US even at the time the 2012 article was written:

Many countries have sought to create their own versions of Silicon Valley. Nearly all have failed. Yet Chile’s attempt is interesting because it exploits the original

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

Silicon Valley's weak spot—America's awful immigration system. When the home of free enterprise turns away entrepreneurs, Chile welcomes them. (The Economist, p. 2)

The US has suffered setbacks in international student enrollment before. For example, after 9/11/01, student enrollment slowed for several years as visas were more heavily scrutinized in the shadow of the World Trade Center terror attack in New York City. That call to protect the country from foreign visitors, however misguided, seemed more justified in the wake of the event that triggered it. The long wait times coupled with additional screenings and paperwork may have turned many away, but the attitudes of the world towards the US likely saw this as a typical bureaucratic consequence of the events that had just taken place.

This most recent call to show hostility to non-native born individuals in the country seems to have been triggered not by an event, but by an ideology that has recently come back into the spotlight due to policy and political shifts in the country. Policy changes that include travel bans, immigration restriction and advocacy for a US-Mexico border wall are examples of this shift (Anderson & Svrluga, 2018). Nationalist rhetoric seems to have taken hold of the conversation when recruiting foreign students and could be contributing significantly to the drop in enrollment numbers (Dennis, 2017). If the more recent shift towards nationalist rhetoric at the federal level is part of the cause for the drop in foreign student enrollment, this could present a vulnerability that has been building for a while. As mentioned before, it would be difficult to attribute a drop in student enrollment to any single factor, but as Angel Cabrera, president of George Mason University, stated in a Washington Post article in November of 2018, "The causes of this worrisome decline are likely multifaceted. But what is clear is that the Trump

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

administration's tough talk on immigration, walls and travel bans is not helping" (Cabrera, 2018, p. 1).

It does seem that, outside of the university system, many policy makers are unaware of the major financial contributions that international students bring just by being at an institution. The US "exports" far more education than it "imports." In other words, foreign students spend vastly more money in the US than US students do abroad. This trade surplus came to \$34 billion in 2017 (Rampell, 2018). The money spent by foreign student on US education rivals the combined exports of commodities such as coal, soybeans and natural gas (Rampell, 2018).

By seeing education as an "export" to those foreign students that come here, the argument for recruiting foreign students becomes far more economic and, in my opinion, far clearer. The US has been dominating the field of education exports for so long that the vulnerability of its market share may catch some off guard. Angel Cabrera again stated recently in response to the latest enrollment numbers that, "While other countries are working hard to attract international students, we are managing to send a message that talented foreigners are not welcome here, just when we most need them" (Anderson & Svrluga, 2018, p. 1). Many colleges are reporting increased instances of prospective students expressing that they simply are not welcome in the US This is echoed by the President of Texas Tech University, Lawrence Schovanec who stated, "They see the headlines and they think they're no longer wanted in the United States" (Rampell, 2018, p. 1). This trend has led to the realization for many that education as an export will also fall subject to something all other commodity exports face: competition.

More and more often, students are being drawn to destinations other than the US for their studies. Some are not all international. For example, the current investment in China's own domestic university system could have been one of the factors that caused the University of

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to pay \$424,000 annually to insure against damages caused by a drop in Chinese student enrollment which could cost the university a projected \$60 million (Bothwell, 2018). Students have more choice and many of them are not only being dissuaded from the US but also lured in by institutions in other nations that have gone to great effort to attract them there. As a rather theatrical example, France's president Emmanuel Macron has been famously encouraging students from the US to come study in France. This is both a political dig at the US and a policy reality as France struggles to compete with Germany for international students as a source of revenue and future innovation (Pennetier, Rose & Fenton, 2018). Once thing seems clear: competition for foreign students at an international level is becoming more intense.

Nationally, it is clear as to why these students are something to fight for. Real economic numbers are at stake, an estimated 455,000 jobs are supported by the presence of international students. Professor of Economics, Dick Startz, estimated that international students could realistically bring in up to \$50 billion into the US economy (Startz, 2017). Speaking on this, he stated:

Education ... particularly higher education ... is a major American export ....

When we provide a service that leads to foreigners sending money into the U.S., that's an export with exactly the same economic effects as when we sell soybeans or coal abroad... The value of education exports is not a small number. According to the government's Bureau of Economic Analysis, education accounts for 5 percent of the entire national export sector. (Startz, 2017)

Australia is currently sounding alarm bells about a similar vulnerability. The dependence on foreign students to support domestic learning centers has caused some to believe that this is

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

an issue for the country's educational institutions. In Australia's case, it is particularly concerned with the vast majority of its students coming from a single nation, China (Bolton, 2018). The concentrated origin of these students potentially opens up a political vulnerability for Australia as China can use the vast monetary value associated with the export of education when making political demands. For example, there have been fears that a change in how many students China allows to study abroad in Australia could result in economic hardships for the university system there (Bolton, 2018).

This is not dissimilar to the US, that receives over 300,000 students annually from China, the largest contributor of foreign students to the US of any other country by far (NFAP, 2018). Clearly, this is a relationship that could suffer if the political tensions continue between the two nations. This vulnerability is thrown into sharp relief in light of some of the hostile rhetoric going back and forth between government representatives from each country. Recently, the American President referred to "every" Chinese foreign student as a "spy" (Karni, 2018).

From the reviewed literature, two patterns jump out. The first is that foreign students are clearly valued by those pursuing them, and that the US has been far from a united front in attempting to lure foreign students to its shores. The second is that many seem to argue that the US has been enjoying a rather unchallenged lion's share of the market for the past two decades and that this unrivaled supremacy is coming to an end. To avoid being dramatic, it should be noted that the US is still the top destination for foreign students, but a loss for the US is a gain for other countries.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

Much of the research for this topic was accomplished through the reading of existing studies and delving into the economics of the current decline. To better understand how

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

admissions professionals are adapting to the decline in foreign student enrollments at the graduate level, I spoke with individuals who interact directly with the situation that the numbers describe. This qualitative approach focused on how individuals are interacting with a shifting professional landscape, and how their methods and processes may be changing to accommodate that shifting landscape. Qualitative research lent itself well to answer the question of ‘How are admissions professionals adapting to the decline in foreign student enrollments at the graduate level?’ because it invites views and insights of professionals working in the field and encountering a new and emerging trend that affects their field. As Flick (2009) argues, “Most phenomena cannot be explained in isolation, which is a result of their complexity in reality” (p. 15). Given the subject of international graduate level admissions is a complex one, any study that simply reduced all admission professionals’ behaviors to a single, statistics driven factor would exclude the complex underlying reality of their experiences (Flick, 2009).

### **Participants Description and Sampling**

To better understand how admissions professionals are adapting to drops in foreign enrollment numbers, I spoke to five admissions professionals from graduate level programs. Due to my location in Los Angeles and accessibility of large research institutions in my area, I targeted the University of California system and the University of Southern California, though I found myself speaking to professionals from all over the country. From the population of individuals who work in the admissions department, I adopted judgement sampling to specifically target those with the experience and skill set required to grant insight to the topics being explored in this paper (Marshall, 1996). Specifically, I reached out to individuals who have experience in the international admissions process of STEM programs in large research

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

institutions. Participants were contacted through email and asked to participate in a recorded Skype or in-person discussion regarding the recruitment of foreign students to US graduate programs. I have included a sample questionnaire in Appendix A.

### **Methods of Data Collection, Management, and Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews with admissions professionals were conducted to better understand how they are adapting to the decline in international student enrollment at the graduate level, in particular measures that they have taken to assure that they meet their admissions goals. I wanted to know whether or not their recruitment practices had changed at all. If they had changed, how so? Also, I was curious to find out how the Open Doors report of the latest numbers had resonated with them or their institutions, and if it had affected their practices while the drop in international student enrollment had been written off as a statistical curiosity? Interviews were between 45-60 minutes in duration and conducted either over Skype or WhatsApp.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Answers that were consistent across multiple individuals were given added weight when considering the validity of accounts. John Creswell sets out how to effectively and ethically collect qualitative data in his 2009 book *Designing Research*. Specifically, I used his section on data collection procedures from his chapter Qualitative Procedures (Creswell, 2009, pp. 178-183). Once transcribed, the interviews were collected along with any other interview notes and relevant literature to be organized and coded. I looked at patterns such as frequency, similarity, correspondence and causation, and wrote analytic memos as laid out by Johnny Saldana (2012) in his book, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Patterns and analysis were backed up with in-context evidence from transcripts. Responses were information-dense and there was great deal of material to pull from.



## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

Additionally, public, quantitative data was gathered from large reports such as Open Doors and aggregated statistics from organizations such as the Institute for International Education to complement data analysis and help contextualize the answers of participants and further the understanding of current international graduate admissions trends in STEM.

### **Ethics**

As with all studies involving human participants, ethics were taken seriously. Questions were centered on the professional experiences of those interviewed and each interviewee was informed of the nature and purpose of the interview before it began. As an ethical guide, I took note of W. Lawrence Neuman's (2011) section titled 'Informed Consent and Anonymity' in his chapter How to Review the Literature Review and Conduct Ethical Studies from the book *Social Research Methods*. When being documented, answers and transcripts remained separate from the identities of the individuals' interviews and interviewees were assigned pseudonyms to further protect their anonymity. All interviewees were informed of visual/audio recording beforehand. Transcripts and audio files were transferred to and stored on a password protected file on a computer that is not open for public use. Once the paper was completed, all unredacted records were destroyed.

### **Positionality**

Qualitative research can be taken as merely the stance of turning subjective observation into objective evidence. I attempted to do the same while focusing on an additional quality of qualitative research, and that is the ability to glean new insights from experts or participants who have first-hand knowledge of a subject. In this case, that would be the admissions professionals I spoke with during interviews. I was careful to remain aware of my own biases through which I viewed this topic. I already had a firm belief in the economic and cultural benefits of

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

international education, as evidenced by my seeking a degree in that field. I also believed that making foreign students feel unwelcome is a moral failing, and one that is committed at the US's economic peril.

My own experience in the international admissions field lent me a degree of credibility with participants and encouraged them to open up to me when answering questions. I also acknowledge that I have a business and economics background and sometimes can get lost in the economics of thing. It remains important to me to express, through this paper that there are real students behind these otherwise fascinating numbers.

### **Credibility of Findings**

Although my sample size was small, I corroborated my findings with the Open Doors data. In particular, I shared statistics with participants in each interview in order to allow them to react to it (see Appendix A). When analyzing interview results, I was able to compare individual experiences against statistical data that is widely available.

I practiced self-reflexivity by considering my own biases when asking questions and interpreting data. I reflected on the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews to make sure that I remained objective in the face of unexpected answers or opinions I did not agree with.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of Study**

This study focused on reactions to admissions numbers and trends as seen through the eyes of five admissions professionals. This means that I looked at individuals who work for graduate programs at larger, research-based institutions. I spoke with admissions professionals to gain their perspective on the evolving situation with foreign graduate student enrollment. This is not a study on undergraduate enrollment, nor is it a study on domestic graduate student enrollment, unless directly affected by foreign graduate student enrollment.

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

Based on the nature of the study and questions, participants often had concerns regarding the recent decline in foreign student enrollments. Potential participants who did not see the decline as an issue, saw the decline as a positive, or even refused to acknowledge the decline as a trend, they may simply have failed to respond to my emails and phone calls. I attempted to counter this by using objective language simply looking at trends, public numbers and whether or not these numbers have altered the admissions practices of the participants.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling has about 15,000 members, so the five admissions professionals I spoke with was limited, as was their perspective. This was further limited as I reached out to the admissions counselors electronically and may have unintentionally excluded those who were less comfortable with technology and remote interviews.

### **Findings**

By interviewing five admissions counselors, I hoped to get a better idea of how international education professionals adapt to a drop in foreign student enrollment numbers throughout the US. This research relied on two primary sources: interviews and statistics, specifically nationally published statistics from US Department of State Open Doors report. The interviews were conducted with five participants, all of whom are admissions professionals who work at the graduate level and with international students. Additionally, all work for public institutions that derive at least a portion of their income from post-graduate level research.

Each participant was selected for their experience with international graduate admissions. Using pseudonyms for anonymity and clarity, Alison, Tyron, and Jenna all have the perspective of large, coastal universities whereas Ryan and Melissa have the perspectives of living away from the coasts, with Melissa working at a smaller university than the others.

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

### **Undergraduate vs Graduate Admissions Roles**

Though the professions of the participants might seem nearly identical at first sight through the narrowness of the professional experience required to be selected for this research, there is a surprising amount of variety in their roles within their various organizations. One of the first things I noted through my interviews was that there was no standardized graduate level admissions role as it exists in undergraduate admissions. To illustrate this, I will define undergraduate admissions as it was described to me by three of my five participants during the course of interviews.

To better understand how graduate admissions professionals differ from their counterparts who predominantly work with undergraduates, it is helpful to understand what it means to be an undergraduate admission professional. The role of an undergraduate admissions professional has become a rather standardized in modern university parlance. At the undergraduate level, admissions professionals attend college fairs, speak at high schools, get in contact with applicants and families, and host online or live questions and answer seminars. As prospective student deadlines get closer, undergraduate admissions professionals send out reminders and help prospective students meet deadlines and fill out all university and financial aid paperwork. Once students have met deadlines, admissions professionals evaluate the worthiness of candidates, read applications and essays, help determine financial aid packages and work with accepted candidates to prepare them for new students orientation. Some undergraduate admissions staff work with students through orientation, but many hand those students off to a residential life and academic advisement staff who specialize in orienting the incoming students to the next phase of their academic careers.

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

Often international undergraduate admissions are relegated to specialists in this area. These are professionals who may hold International Education degrees, potentially are bilingual or multilingual and are proficient at navigating student visa paperwork and SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System). These professionals often do all the tasks mentioned above while also attempting to foster community amongst an international student cohort.

In contrast, graduate level admissions professionals have had to adapt to fill a variety of roles based on their institution's need. The result of this is a role that almost never looks the same at two universities, even if those universities largely occupy the same institutional niche. All participants spoke about their roles in reading application paperwork and speaking with students and their families. However, that's where many of the similarities end. Participants described having to evolve in their roles and become experts in areas they were unfamiliar with before entering the world of graduate admissions. Before a student is admitted, the admissions professional working with them may have to act as an academic advisor, financial planner, realtor, State department liaison, community organizer, therapist, mentor and possibly more.

The first major difference between graduate and undergraduate admissions that I noticed when talking to the participants is how none of them had a role where their admissions cycle began and ended with a student's admissions process. At the graduate level, participants reported that admissions roles are often also merged with the roles of residential life, student advisement, life coach and activity coordination. Alison, for example, stated, "...no one at the graduate level really does just one thing. Our job isn't over once the student has matriculated. While students are arriving, I find a good amount of my time is spent helping international students with housing" (personal communication, April 13, 2019).

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

All five participants interviewed expressed that they did some form of work outside of what could be traditionally thought of as the ‘admissions process.’ Activities that were commonly claimed as routine by at least two or more participants were helping students secure housing, advising them on where and when they could work, aiding students to find additional English as a Second Language (ESL) training, navigating institutional bureaucracy on behalf of students, and working with students to file municipal paperwork such as police reports, drivers’ licenses, traffic tickets or housing disputes.

The big commonality between all participants was their aiding students with securing funding to start, continue, or finish their degrees. The concern of education costs is omnipresent at the graduate level, which will be discussed in further detail in the *Financing Education in the US* section.

Admissions professionals also reported that their role in admitting students was much more collaborative than their undergraduate admissions colleagues. Tyron put it succinctly when they stated,

...sometimes these [international students] are writing proposals that just go way over my head...They are basically scientists and I wouldn’t consider myself qualified to evaluate their proposals on any academic level. The heads of those programs usually weigh in to ensure the best chance of any one applicant graduating. (personal communication, April 27, 2019)

Four of the five participants commented that they are involved in admissions committees that give a high level of scrutiny to the applications they encounter. Often the traditional personal statements and CVs can be hampered by a lack of English skills on the part of some international applicants. Alison commented on this scenario by stating,

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

... it is really the concepts and level of study we're after, skills such as their English level, their concepts of academic rigor, such as how to avoid plagiarism... these are challenges that can be overcome when they get here. Of course, learning English and, especially, English to the level of writing a PhD dissertation can remain large obstacles for some students once they have arrived. (personal communication, April 13, 2019)

All of the five participants I talked with also mentioned that the ability to pay their tuition in full was something they regularly worked with prospective students on. Graduate students often have difficulty securing financial aid once they are in a program, so consideration is given to whether or not the ability to pay for their studies is a hindrance to them completing the degree they are pursuing. Participants were uniform as well in their determination to make sure that any prospective student had the resources to finish a program before admitting them. Jenna stated,

... it is easier when [prospective students] don't require financial aid coming in. It's a whole step we can skip. Our selection committee is almost entirely focused on academic merit, but the ability to pay for the program does come up. (personal communication, May 5, 2019)

Ryan stated, "...at [my university], applications aren't even considered complete until a student has proved that they can finance at least one year of expenses" (personal communication, May 19, 2019). Making sure that a student can both afford a full year of expenses and, crucially, prove that they can afford a full year of expenses can be something that takes up a significant amount of an admission professional's time and is a topic all participants were familiar with.

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

### **Strategies for Attracting More International Students**

To better understand why certain changes are being made to graduate admissions counselor's roles and strategies they employ in graduate admission, it is important to first understand the challenges those strategies are attempting to address. Some of the challenges that students faced as expressed by participants are simply continuations of trends that existed before 2016. This year is, again, chosen as a marker year because it is the first year that saw a decline in international student enrollment. Participants stated that while there has been a worrying rise in US nationalism, bigotry, and gun violence in the past few years, almost all other factors have been constant.

Concerns of international students and their families, as noted by all participants, fell into five commonly cited issues and classified by the amount of time each participant spent talking about each one. Financing of a US education was mentioned often by all participants as the primary deterrent for foreign students coming to the US. After financing, the remaining issues were fears of violence and bigotry in the US, followed by visa processing issues, concerns about students' ability to immigrate or gain citizenship after the completion of their degree and, lastly, student's ability to access services once they were on campus. All participants spoke with some degree of familiarity with all five of these concerns and their attempts to combat each one.

#### ***Financing education in the US.***

When asked about concerns that international students and their families had, the overwhelming response was financial. Each participant mentioned the I-20 form as a major hurdle for students. The I-20 is the Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status for Academic and Language Students. This form is issued by the United States Department of Homeland Security and contains a section that requires an applicant to prove that



## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

they can afford all first-year expenses for living and studying in the United States. This can be a challenge as most graduate level programs have significantly less funding for scholarships than undergraduate programs have. Melissa additionally stated that, “in [my institution] there is no separation between graduate level scholarships for domestic and international students. So, basically, all students are competing for the same money whether they are from the US or from Vietnam” (personal communication, May 25, 2019).

The admissions professionals I spoke with spent a good deal of time working with students coming from wealthy backgrounds in their home countries. Tyron stated that “[my institution] is supposed to be ‘need-blind’ so it is hard to justify why we look at [a prospective student’s] ability to pay before ever reviewing their academic work... if they are international and require financial aid, they are often not considered” (personal communication, April 27, 2019). Finances were also a big concern as many students could not count on being eligible to work in the United States once they arrived. International graduate students are also not able to participate in work-study programs at any of the institutions represented by my participants. It should be noted that this is not unusual for international students to be disqualified from federally funded work-study programs. However, at the Master’s level, the corporation HTIR Work-Study USA does provide a privately funded work-study option for international students that is sometimes confused for the more familiar undergraduate federal work-study option for domestic students.

For graduate students, jobs on campus can be more complicated than for their undergraduate counterparts. While many international students do not qualify for federal assistance through a federal work-study program, they may still be employed, for example, by the department in which they study through jobs linked to their academics. It is not unusual for

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

international graduate students to act as teaching or research assistants and some even teach entire undergraduate courses under the supervision of a professor. This can present other challenges to students as those who may have the knowledge to advance in their field may not possess the public speaking skills or English language skills to get one of these jobs during their first years of graduate study.

The university represented by Ryan operates as a ‘sanctuary space’ for DACA students. This presents an interesting problem as the university does not use E-Verify, a government program that checks eligibility for workers to seek employment within the United States. This protects students with undocumented immigration status but can have consequences for international students attempting to claim the optional practical training extension for science, technology, engineering or mathematics students, also known as ‘OPT STEM extension’ visa status extensions after graduation. Particularly, this affects post-doctoral researchers and fellows who require their employer to disclose the identities of OPT applicants. In the case of this particular university, post-doctoral researchers are unable to claim OPT because their employer (the university) is not able to disclose that they are working there.

With the cost of US education rising, all participants stated that the question of financing education is the one they spend the most time discussing with students. Melissa stated,

Sometimes, it’s like, why would they come here when they could go to a university in their home country for free? Or Germany? We definitely lost a lot of Chinese students last year to new universities in China... it’s just too expensive for most people. (personal communication, May 25, 2019)

It seems that many students who would normally travel abroad are gravitating towards university systems in their home countries, as it was mentioned by Alison, Tyron and Ryan as

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

something they are noticing in their recruiting practices. India and China seemed to be the most conspicuous, likely because these countries supply a disproportionate number of students to the US. South Korea also has seen its application numbers decline over the last few years, possibly due to the improvements in its domestic degree programs (Redden, 2018). Ryan added, “it’s a negotiation, which school will offer the most money is usually the deciding factor” (personal communication, May 19, 2019).

Cost is an issue associated with higher education in the US for both international and domestic students alike. Competition for scholarships is fierce, but often there just are not any scholarships exclusively available for international students. Scholarships that do exist for international students often come from a student’s home government, which can be subject to political whims. For example, Saudi Arabia, the fourth largest source of international students studying in the US, has seen a 15% drop in students across all levels of education as it has scaled back its international scholarship programs (Redden, 2018).

All participants demonstrated an awareness in declining numbers of foreign student enrollments as expressed through the Open Doors report. The participants recognized the declining numbers, but the effects of those numbers were uneven across the universities they represented. The large coastal, research, and STEM-based universities represented have not seen declines reflected in their numbers while smaller liberal arts universities farther from major cities in the middle of the United States seemed to have been hit hardest by the decline. This is corroborated by the Open Doors report data from 2018, as international students concentrate in greater numbers at coastal universities while thinning out particularly in the south and middle of the country. This includes university-heavy states such as Texas (Redden, 2018).

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

While the south and middle of the country are seeing more challenges, large, STEM-focused coastal universities represented by the five participants actually saw international student enrollments grow. This was attributed to, in Alison's opinion, the move to "quality of life" improvements over traditional marketing and scholarship funding over the past two years. As Alison's university has limited resources, coming up with a vast amount of additional scholarship money was unrealistic. Instead, the university used existing staff and relatively few resources to provide additional ESL classes, as early as an entire semester before the graduate students' study start date. These ESL classes focus on preparing international graduate students with a level of English they will need for taking on roles such as teaching and research assistants and for doing post-graduate level writing. Additional quality of life improvements included assigning international student advisors to assist with housing searches and job placements. For an incoming student, knowing that there is someone in their destination country aiding in preparations for their arrival can dramatically improve their admissions experience.

Offering non-monetary perks in the form of ESL training was actually a fairly significant incentive for international students as noted by other two participants. One participant even reported that post graduates would come and take preparatory ESL classes and then move on to another post graduate studies program afterwards. Ryan stated, "Sometimes it didn't even seem like [international students] cared about the location, they wanted the English [classes] and we had them, so our numbers went up" (personal communication, May 19, 2019).

Melissa faced a different issue at the university they represented in that their international admissions programs had been largely dissolved over the last few years. While international students are seen as profit sources for the university, it is in one of the geographic areas suffering the effects of losing an international student market share. Additionally, the university does not

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

have a large STEM program that is largely supported by international students. This sets it apart from some of the other universities represented by the participants. With this being the case, the administration has taken to cutting back on some of the programs that support international students with an attempt to redouble efforts at attracting domestic students. Notably, ESL programs dedicated to both graduate and undergraduate students have been scaled back. Melissa also mentioned that many of the social programs that would normally be reserved for international students had their funding reallocated to a more general fund for all student activities and residential life. Again, this is being seen at all degree levels. Melissa stated that all of this really is not due to any coordinated effort. She elucidated this as follows,

The strategy at [my university] is simply ‘Get More International Students’... [we have] grown our admission numbers year over year ... though [international students] are still a smaller percentage than we want them to be...but overall numbers trump specifically international student numbers. So, as long as the overall [admissions] number was higher than we were projected... we all look good. (personal communication, May 25, 2019)

To summarize, where costs are the issue for international students, universities seem to be heading in two opposite directions. The first is to lean on existing international communities and the programs that support them to provide non-monetary perks that give students the skills necessary to obtain jobs on campus. This essentially makes the education more valuable rather than increasing scholarship funding to make it cheaper. The second is to lean away from international students entirely unless they present themselves as self-funded students. In this scenario, the universities are largely courting larger populations of domestic students while defunding programs that would otherwise attract or accommodate international students. In the

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

face of a potential decline in international student enrollment, some of these institutions seem to be moving to put more funding into general student programs at the expense of ones aimed specifically at international students.

### *Overcoming violence and bigotry.*

The five participants I interviewed reported that concerns about violence were common among prospective international students. Aside from violence towards minorities or international students of varying religions, it is clear that there are many people in the world who simply view the United States as a violent country. Each participant had multiple anecdotes of potential students who had considered coming to the US and either hesitated or dropped out of the enrollment process entirely due to perceptions that the US is an unsafe country.

For example, Ryan stated,

We are definitely not the most dangerous country in the world, but almost everything we put out internationally advertises crime or mass shootings. [The major urban area where my university is located] is almost always in the news for either gang violence or mass shootings. I have to tell every student who applies here ‘we’re not the place you see on TV’. (personal communication, May 19, 2019)

Some of these concerns seem to derive from dubious sources. Families of students can be a bit more concerned than the students themselves according to Tyron. Two of the participants mentioned students’ families picturing the US through the lenses of crime procedurals such as “CSI” and “Law and Order” or action movies. Movies and shows that revolve around large metropolitan areas can draw unrealistic scrutiny to that area. The issue is, of course, that many of these major urban areas also contain universities that would like to draw in international

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

students. Admissions professionals are often able to overcome these objections and reassure students and their families by pointing to the fact that these shows are fiction.

What becomes more difficult, is overcoming actual crime statistics and international press over real violence in the US. Students that the participants have spoken with, who raise concerns about violence, often refer to mass shootings. It is common knowledge at this point that mass shootings are a problem in the United States. What may be less known, is how this affects classrooms at all levels and that admissions professionals find themselves having to discuss mass shootings in a higher education setting. The Center for Homeland Defense and Security reports 97 school shootings in 2018 alone, just short of one every four days. Regardless of how one counts mass shootings or what one believes their cause to be, the fact that admissions professionals are talking about it while trying to sell the idea of an advanced degree in the United States is an issue.

To compound concerns about violence on campus, there has been a rise in actual and perceived incidents of nationalistic demonstrations and hate crimes on campuses across the US (Bauman, 2018). Though this is not something that specifically targets international students, many international students feel they might be unwelcomed or endangered by being on US campuses. Even when not engaging, propaganda for white nationalism has been on the rise nation-wide (Bauman, 2018). Admissions professionals can warn students against engaging in risky activities, like walking alone at night, while also working in tandem with campus security, but how students feel will invariably guide their behavior. As Melissa stated, "...students want to feel like the community wants them here..." (personal communication, May 25, 2019).

Feeling unwelcome in the US was a unifying topic of discussion amongst all participants. All participants stated that not feeling welcome went beyond actual campus incidents and could

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

be attributed to the current US president or his administration and some attributed it more towards a perceived rise of white nationalism amongst the population. Four of the participants referred to “The Trump Effect” as an issue that they had to take some action to overcome.

Melissa stated:

...it can be hard when I'm having a great conversation with some students, I calm them down about a concern and get them excited about coming here and then they turn on the TV and hear [our president] say something demeaning about their country... (personal communication, May 25, 2019)

The concern of not being able to make students feel welcome at a national level was clearly one that the five interviews kept circling back to. Often it came up before I even asked the question. This is just something that participants talked about at great length. Over the course of my interviews, references to the name “Trump” or “the President (of the United States of America”) came up 19 times, or nearly four times per interview.

The other unifying subject surrounding how welcome students feel on campus was the subject of either “nationalism”, “racism” or “bigotry” on or around campus. Of the five universities represented by the participants, four of them could point to incidents involving international students that involved violence or harassment during the 2018 – 2019 school year. The participants expressed great frustration with the issue of having to help international students feel safe on campus. Many had taken steps to help their universities feel more inclusive in the past two years.

All five participants have had their admissions departments take part in the online campaign titled “#YouAreWelcomeHere”. The campaign, started in November 2016, is promoted predominantly by institutions of higher learning to show their solidarity with their



## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

international students and advance the concept of inclusivity. The campaign has spread around the United States and many institutions continue to host events with #YouAreWelcomeHere as a theme or sponsor. Participation in #YouAreWelcomeHere has generally remained a student and faculty led endeavor at many universities. Nearly 60 universities have gone further by pledging at least two dedicated scholarships reserved for international students ("Scholarship — #YouAreWelcomeHere", 2019). Universities that participate often produce a video that is specifically directed at international students in the spirit of #YouAreWelcomeHere. All five of the participants mentioned having some level of involvement with the production of a #YouAreWelcomeHere video or campaign.

From speaking with participants, it is clear that the use of high-profile social media campaigns and even the funding of additional scholarships that encourage international student attendance and campus diversity are the most accessible strategies for admissions professionals when it comes to overcoming objections of violence and bigotry on campus. Ultimately, institutions need to work to make their campuses as safe as possible through a combination of working with their security staff, providing students with information that keeps them out of high-risk situations and informational campaigns that shift the culture of their campuses towards inclusion. The reach of a university only extends so far, however, and graduate students do not live on campus at many institutions. The best efforts of working towards the safety of all students, international and domestic, will be unifying the campus community towards creating a space that is safe.

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

*Visas and immigration.*

It is difficult for a student to study in the US if they cannot physically get there in the first place. Even when an international student arrives in the US, they may face issues with whether or not they can stay for as long as they intend, much less desire. Student visa issues, as in delays, complications or denials, were less discussed by participants, but seems to be a rather significant recent factor complicating international students' experiences. International students are increasingly seeing the effect of more restrictive visa guidelines and an increasing delay in the student visa application process from the US government. Participants brought up changes in visa laws and processes as something they would change to bring more international students into the US. Again, this has been corroborated by news as recent as the writing of this paper. Princeton's president, Christopher L. Eisgruber, led a group of New Jersey college leaders in penning a letter that pointed out a "disturbing increase in the number – and length – of impediments put in the path of our international students, faculty and staff" (Eisgruber, 2019, p. 1).

While the country most affected by high-impact legislation such as the 'Muslim travel ban' is Iran, international students from all countries are feeling an increased logjam of visa processing for graduate and undergraduate students alike. The delays, which have grown steadily since 2018, seem to be a direct result of a policy memorandum from US Citizenship and Immigration Services which seeks to impose harsher restrictions on foreigners in the student visa and exchange program (Department of Homeland Security, 2018).

Some universities have moved to combat the bureaucratic slowdown by reclassifying summer internships as classes in order to keep students on the right side of immigration laws. At Princeton, along with some other schools, students have been forced to unexpectedly return

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

home for the summer, as visa processes that would normally take 60 days are taking up to 5 months to complete (Green, 2019). Melissa briefly mentioned the issue when commenting on recruiting foreign students,

...once we've gone through all the work to convince someone to come here, they can get denied for seemingly no reason. It can be very frustrating for me as a recruiter, but it can be absolutely devastating for the student... I have had at least one student drop out of the application process this year because they didn't want to take a chance on the US visa process. (personal communication, May 25, 2019)

As stories of students losing rent and travel expenses spread through the current applicant pools, it will undoubtedly depress future student applicant numbers. Often, this will hit post-graduate students harder as it often affects their internships for research fellowships, legal summer associates or students looking to continue their post-doctoral work with OPT (Redden, 2019). Visa denial has become such an issue that the government of China has warned its citizens against travel to the United States for academic purposes. Specifically, it alerted its citizens to the increased rate of visa refusal (over 15%) and urged its students and scholars to “strengthen risk assessment before going abroad to study” (Redden, 2019, p. 1).

Much of the additional paperwork and security screening is political and contributes to the sense of unwelcomeness expressed by the participants that their students feel. Language coming from the United States executive branch has not been helping matters. In an official national security strategy, The White House called out Russia and China as countries that may have students stealing technologies from the United states and calls for additional scrutiny when granting students from those countries clearance before allowing them to work on STEM research (The White House, 2017).

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

While increasing numbers of university leaders are politically pushing back against the detrimental effects visa delays are having on international student populations, combatting this at the admissions level is a much smaller and more banal affair. Simply put, admissions professionals are attempting to take away any excuse for a government agency to reject a visa. Participants reported aggressively perusing paperwork with applicants to make sure it was complete. Tyron stated that visa deadlines were largely fabricated in all timelines to be at least a month early, where possible. Combatting increased scrutiny of government agencies resides in making sure that all paperwork is reviewed thoroughly and multiple times. Melissa also added that it may be possible to organize groups of international students or even local international alumni into “study groups for visa paperwork” (personal communication, May, 25 2019). Collectively, the strategy has been putting all document packages under the scrutiny of as many people as possible to ensure that applications are not denied.

There does seem to be a breaking point here. I believe that increased scrutiny on the part of admissions professionals can be done in short bursts, but I do not believe that it can go on indefinitely. Eventually, institutions will decide whether or not they want certain students to take a significant amount of their staff’s time compared to others. Additionally, there have already been examples within the visa system where getting paperwork submitted early is not sufficient, even when it is bureaucratically perfect. The most recent delays for 2019 summer internship authorization extends beyond the window for application acceptance. Students can apply only 90 days before the start of an OTP internship, yet the current delay on processing those applications can be up to five months.

Related to the visa issue is the desire for some international students to get a job and immigrate to the US either during or after their studies. Each of the participants mentioned that

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

they had been requested to aid a student or multiple students with immigration paperwork in some capacity with every incoming cohort. To be clear, immigration paperwork refers to paperwork that assists a student in gaining permanent residency or citizenship to the US, not simply the ability to move and study here.

The hurdle of immigration is not new for international students, though it has new context in light of many of the other visa complications that have been mentioned above. The US immigration system is vast and complex. It is generally a good idea for admissions professionals to keep students who plan to seek citizenship informed of the challenges that go along with the pursuit of immigration. A best practice among the participants seems to be to not wander into the realm of immigration law, but to help students with OPT and other such opportunities that are within the realm of international education.

Alison illustrated this relationship by stating, “it is not a make-or-break factor for most of the students, but it is very important for some of them...My job is just to let them know there is no guarantee and we’ll do all we can... most students will still come even though there is no guarantee of citizenship.” Ryan however, had a different perspective, “if [international students] are going to spend almost a decade studying microbiology, many students would rather study in a place they can raise a family or build a business during or after their studies are complete”. The participants were unevenly split on this. Two participants thought that students would rather study in the US because of the prestige and a small chance of staying here rather than no chance of staying here. The other three participants cited the inability to permanently remain in the US as a good case for students either staying domestic or going to a country that would take them after they were done studying. Canada, France and Germany were the most often cited countries

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

for citizens to immigrate to, while China and India were the countries referenced as having competitive domestic university programs. Melissa also had the divergent perspective of,

... if [European students] have their choice, Europe would be a better bet. They will be able to travel to more countries and have all the same freedoms the US offers with more social programs... Why would they want to give up their citizenship? (personal communication, May 25, 2019)

Tyron and Alison expressed similar views about both European and Asian nations. One strategy to overcoming international competition for foreign students is to leverage the prestige of US university programs. Ryan expressed that students are often attracted to programs that have made recent breakthroughs in their fields, and especially when they have famous and noteworthy professors. Two participants spoke at some length about “rockstar” professors and how their PhD candidates often cited their initial draw to the university was to study under a particularly prominent faculty member. Making sure students pick US universities over those in other countries might be as simple as keeping the celebrity appeal and academic prominence of their programs well publicized.

***Serving the graduate student community.***

In the course of my interviews I stumbled across many surprising insights into the lives of graduate level admissions professionals. What surprised me most was the struggle that a lot of international graduate students face when trying to access student services. Four of the five participants I interviewed, answered “lack of access to student services” as something they need to help their students overcome.

Three of the five participants I spoke with described a scenario in which, as Alison put it “...there is a funding wall between graduate and undergraduate students. In most cases, one

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

cannot access the services of the other (personal communication, April 13, 2019).” This was a trend where services that are often widely available to undergraduate students are off-limits to graduate level students according to participants.

Student services can be described as any services that are ancillary to education in a university setting. Notably, these can include student mental health services, tutoring services, writing labs, ESL classes, problem solving workshops, and employment opportunities.

Despite the fact that graduate students in some disciplines can make up over 80% of the population, many of the services targeted towards international students are reserved for undergraduates. Graduate level international students, however, can often benefit from additional services, particularly ESL classes and writing workshops. Withholding these basic services from a student can feel needlessly exclusionary. Ryan reported that these services can sometimes even include clubs and social events. The example was given of a Philippine student who was unable to participate in some undergraduate club events targeted towards Philippine undergraduates. The justification for this was that food and transportation were funded by undergraduate tuition, however the graduate student was able to attend certain events if they provided their own food and transportation, or if the event was considered to be unfunded.

Providing student services for graduate level students, and particularly international graduate students can be a challenge. This was illustrated again by Ryan who stated that,

the same activity that seems really engaging at 19 can be very tedious when you're 27 or 35.... What students ask for is not always what they want. Every survey we get back states that international graduate students want 'more activities', but when we have them no one shows up. It would be much easier if

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

the ones who wanted more activities could just utilize the ones for undergrads.  
(personal communication, May 19, 2019).

All five participants mentioned that graduate level students can be a tough group to design events and community building campaigns around due to their demographic diversity. Interestingly, this is not because students come from different countries with various beliefs and customs, it is usually simply due to age. Tyron, for example, stated that,

some of [the international graduate students] are fresh out of college and ready to do college ‘round 2’ and some are so serious about studying that they rarely socialize. It can be a challenge to go out around campus, especially if you are pursuing your graduate degree in your 30s. (personal communication, April 27, 2019)

Ensuring that students have the tools to make them successful is crucial in setting them up for success and making them feel welcome. Participants acknowledged that just inviting graduate students to undergraduate international events can boost engagement even if the graduate students rarely attend. Alison acknowledged that making sure students have access to services that aid them in paper writing, research and ESL classes in particular make graduate students more valuable to the university as a whole, as these students can contribute more through their research and teaching (personal communication, April 13, 2019). Though institutions are often slow to move in the realm of funding in particular, providing opportunities for graduate students to be able to access all resources that a university has to offer would be a mutually beneficial endeavor.



## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

### Conclusions

I would like to re-assert that this paper does not attribute the drop in foreign student enrollment to any single person, event, or policy. The causes of why people choose or do not choose to study in the US are as varied as the applicants themselves. There are, however, trends. The reaction of international admissions professionals in higher education in the US clearly varies from institution to institution, but the linking factor is that they are all reacting to similar challenges. All admissions professionals are endeavoring to overcome the great financial burden that a US degree places on students, the perceptions of violence and bigotry that the US projects, and an increasingly impractical student visa process.

The admissions professionals I spoke with employed a variety of strategies to overcome these difficulties in an effort to continue to attract international students to their various institutions. Before even considering the admissions process, however, any student with ambitions to study in the US, international or domestic, must overcome the cost. US higher education has become prohibitively expensive for many domestic students and even more so for international ones. This is exacerbated by the lack of scholarships offered to international students and the challenges of having to provide proof of a full year's expenses upfront for any international applicant. Adding the limitation of work opportunities to international students and often a lack of housing for post-graduate students, the expenses can be insurmountable if not coming from a family with considerable wealth or with a foreign government's financial support. Universities can offer more scholarships, but admissions professionals must work with the resources currently available to prospective students. For some, this means aiding students with securing funding from scholarships and through loans but also making sure that graduate level international students have the opportunity to work on campus. The additional funds or tuition

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

relief that a teaching assistant position can give might make the difference for a student considering an institution. For some, an effective but unfortunate strategy is favoring self-funded students over students who may be struggling financially. Some students may have to be turned away with the expectation that they will be able to pursue a degree at some point in the future when their finances improve. If the numbers for international students wane, they can be propped up with domestic students.

Once students are on campus, they must be made to feel safe. Racism, white nationalism, and gun violence are highly visible issues for the US right now. Addressing the concerns of prospective students who are wary of bigotry and violence on and off campus is crucial for admissions departments. While writing this capstone paper, the number of articles on this topic exploded in numbers with new ones coming out every week. NAFSA in 2018 had several workshops on admissions and overcoming “The Trump Effect.” In this context “The Trump Effect” refers to policies and rhetoric that appears hostile or adverse to the arrival of international students studying in the US, particularly to those students of color or minority religions within the US. From my research into this topic, drawing a direct causality between the election of the current US president and the decline in foreign student enrollments is an oversimplification. While it is possible or even likely that policies and rhetoric from the current US government have projected an unwelcoming image of the US to prospective international students, it likely only underscores the difficulties of studying in the US as a foreign student as a far more systemic and persistent issue.

All university staff must do everything in their power to make students feel safe on campus. For admissions professionals, this means knowing enough about campus safety and crime statistics to help advise international students feel that they will be safe if they come to the

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

US. Campus security will not suffice for most individuals. Foreign students often feel safe when there is a community around them that welcomes them. Admissions professionals who work with international students should work to tap into existing communities or work to build new ones. All participants both worked with existing communities and took part in at least one highly visible online campaign to help attract students at a distance. In most cases, these online campaigns were best bolstered by matching campaigns on campus.

Another major consideration for students considering the US is any number of growing countries that offer state-funded education and much more relaxed visa processing systems. Some countries, such as Germany and France, are actively recruiting students at the government level and working with students to get their visas approved. It seems that the US will very soon find that it is competing with other countries for a pool of students that it has taken for granted for years.

Admissions professionals can work with students to get all applications in as early as possible and with as few errors as possible, though this is not always enough. When confronted with governmental failings that encumber visa processes, individual admissions staff have little they can do. Institutions as a whole can get politically active in an effort to change visa policies in the long term. In the medium to short term, universities can provide exceptional programs and faculty that are extremely visible in their various fields. All admissions professionals I spoke with currently pursue this as their strategy. If the value is great enough, students will continue to brave the US visa system, despite its myriad problems.

In that same vein of continuing to improve the university as a whole, abandoning direct campaigns for international student recruitment may be a strategy on its own. For institutions that see investment in international students as a net loss when weighed against resources that

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

could be used to attract more domestic students, this can be an attractive option. If cutting such programs is being employed as a strategy around the country, as participants postulate, it could explain the high concentration of international students at certain universities as compared to others. Coastal, research-based universities are seeing the drop in international students as an academic exercise that occurs outside of their sphere of influence. Meanwhile, non-coastal liberal arts schools are seeing the sharpest decline. If this trend goes on for any length of time, we could see a further divide with coastal institutions having vibrant international populations that are absent from a majority of institutions. While this trend may not continue indefinitely, and international students may continue to choose the US as the top destination for post-graduate studies, it is possible that trends set today could continue on as administrations adjust programs to the student population they believe they can attract. For example, a university that eliminates its ESL classes for international students will be unlikely to attract enough international students to justify restarting that program in the future. Without services for international students a university may attract fewer of them, and with fewer international students universities will be less inclined to support services that attract them. The cycle could very quickly drive international students to increasingly few universities that specialize in receiving them. Taken to its extreme, without external intervention, or a government initiative, it is possible that the US could wind up with a dearth of international student networks, alumni, and prospective students in the majority of its universities.

### **Final Thoughts and Further Study**

Education is a noble endeavor that seeks to answer great questions and advance our civilization through research and enlightenment. It is also a very big business. More than

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

anything, researching this paper and speaking with industry professionals has made it profoundly clear that research capital and tuition dollars are all part of a great economic machine that drives our higher education system. It has also become clear that the US is currently not acting like there is a crisis in one of its larger industries. If exports from the US agricultural or manufacturing sectors were suddenly threatened by policies of our government or a foreign one, there is a good chance we would see action on the part of the US government to intercede. In fact, we have seen this exact scenario play out recently with the US providing subsidies to farmers for a loss in foreign export profits (Swanson, 2019). At \$16 billion, this bailout is expected to protect US farmers from the economic losses they will incur. That same amount represents about 38% of what international students contributed to the US economy in the 2016-2017 academic year.

This needs to be seen as an economic problem and a trade problem. The spirit of education and the doors it opens are often not determining factors of where funding goes in a world where education is a business. The individual admissions professionals are only able to appeal to their individual administrations, but the programs that universities offer always come down to costs and resources. Universities will always ensure that they can aid the greatest number of students and they can ensure that by staying open and financially viable.

In the future, I would like to do additional research into how much economic development the US is losing out on by ejecting so many recent Master's and Doctoral recipients from the country by limiting OPT. Perhaps recent graduates would have gone on to start businesses of their own, if conditions were right. Certainly, there are a number of potential students in the world for whom the ability to come study in the US, earn a degree, and pursue an enterprise would be a great draw. I imagine it would be in the best interest of any country to keep

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

talented individuals on its soil so that the opportunities they create can further benefit the country that invested in that talent.

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

## References

- Anderson, S. (2014, June). International students are vital to U.S. higher education. *International Educator*.
- Anderson, N., & Svrluga, S. (2018, November 13). What's the Trump effect on international enrollment? Report finds new foreign students are dwindling. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/report-finds-new-foreign-students-are-dwindling-renewing-questions-about-possible-trump-effect-on-enrollment/2018/11/12/7b1bac92-e68b-11e8-a939-9469f1166f9d\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.d99fd031762a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/report-finds-new-foreign-students-are-dwindling-renewing-questions-about-possible-trump-effect-on-enrollment/2018/11/12/7b1bac92-e68b-11e8-a939-9469f1166f9d_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d99fd031762a)
- Bolton, R. (2018, February 16). Universities are too reliant on income from China say experts. Retrieved from <https://www.afr.com/news/policy/education/universities-are-too-reliant-on-income-from-china-experts-say-20180215-h0w6vn>
- Bothwell, E. (2018, November 29). Insuring against drop in Chinese students. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/11/29/university-illinois-insures-itself-against-possible-drop-chinese-enrollments>
- Bauman, D. (2018, November 14). Hate crimes on campuses are rising, new FBI data show. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Hate-Crimes-on-Campuses-Are/245093>
- Cabrera, A. (2018, November 13). Make America welcoming to international students again. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2018/11/13/make-america-welcoming-international-students-again/?utm\\_term=.cd96095d792f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2018/11/13/make-america-welcoming-international-students-again/?utm_term=.cd96095d792f)
- Creswell, J. W. (2009) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.) London: Sage Publications.
- Dennis, M. (2017, October 06). Luring overseas students in a more nationalist world - University World News. Retrieved December 2, 2018, from <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170926141238242>
- Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2018, May 10). *Accrual of unlawful presence and F, J, and M nonimmigrants*[Policy Memorandum]. Retrieved June 16, 2019, from [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Outreach/Draft Memorandum for Comment/AccrualofUnlawfulPresenceFJMNonimmigrantsMEMO\\_v2.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Outreach/Draft%20Memorandum%20for%20Comment/AccrualofUnlawfulPresenceFJMNonimmigrantsMEMO_v2.pdf)
- Donnelly, G. (2017, June 29). Google's 2017 Diversity report shows progress hiring women, little change for minority workers. Retrieved November 25, 2018, from <http://fortune.com/2017/06/29/google-2017-diversity-report/>

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

- Eisgruber, Christopher L. (2019, May 2). Letter from President Eisgruber and other leaders of New Jersey colleges and universities to New Jersey congressional delegation regarding immigration. Retrieved from <http://www.princeton.edu/president/eisgruber/speeches-writings/archive/?id=18693>
- Federal Work-Study (FWS) Program. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/fws/index.html>
- Flick, U. (2009). *An Introduction to qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Green, E. (2019, June 16) New York Times. Visa delays at backlogged immigration service strand international students. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/16/us/politics/visas-international-students.html?register=email&auth=register-email>
- Karni, A. (2018, August 08). Trump rants behind closed doors with CEOs. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/08/08/trump-executive-dinner-bedminster-china-766609>
- Loudenback, T. (2016, September 16). Public colleges in the US are becoming dependent on foreign students, who pay up to three times as much for tuition – Business Insider. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.in/Public-colleges-in-the-US-are-becoming-dependent-on-foreign-students-who-pay-up-to-3-times-as-much-for-tuition/articleshow/54368659.cms>
- Marshall, M. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13(6), 522-525.
- McKenna, L. (2015, November 18). The globalization of America's colleges. The Atlantic. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/11/globalization-american-higher-ed/416502/>
- National Foundation for American Policy. (2017). *Declining international student enrollment*.
- National Foundation for American Policy. (2017). *The importance of international students to American science and engineering*.
- Naval Post Graduate School. Center for Homeland Defense and Security. (2019, June 16). K-12 school shooting database. Retrieved from <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/incidents-by-year/>
- Neuman, W. Lawrence. (2011). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Essex: Pearson Education Limited
- Open Doors. (2018, November 13). Retrieved from <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors>



## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

- Pennetier, M., & Rose, M. (2018, November 19). French universities to offer more courses in English to attract foreign students (S. Fenton, Ed.). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-education-idUSKCN1NO26T>
- Rampell, C. (2018, December 13). One of America's most successful exports is in trouble. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/one-of-americas-most-successful-exports-is-in-trouble/2018/12/13/f7234e8c-ff1b-11e8-83c0-b06139e540e5\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.1737a46da6dd](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/one-of-americas-most-successful-exports-is-in-trouble/2018/12/13/f7234e8c-ff1b-11e8-83c0-b06139e540e5_story.html?utm_term=.1737a46da6dd)
- Redden, E. (2013, July 12). Inside Higher Ed. Foreign student dependence. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/07/12/new-report-shows-dependence-us-graduate-programs-foreign-students>
- Redden, E. (2018, November 13) Inside Higher Ed. New international enrollments decline again. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/11/13/new-international-student-enrollments-continue-decline-us-universities>
- Richards, L. (2005). *Handling qualitative data: A practical guide*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Saldana, J. (2012, November 19). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London: SAGE Publications
- Scholarship — #YouAreWelcomeHere. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.youarewelcomehereusa.org/scholarship>
- Startz, D. (2017, January 31). Brookings. Sealing the border could block one of America's crucial exports: Education. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/01/31/sealing-the-border-could-block-one-of-americas-crucial-exports-education/>
- Swanson, A. (2019, May 23) New York Times. Trump gives farmers \$16 billion in aid amid prolonged China trade war. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/23/us/politics/farm-aid-package.html>
- Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate* (2018) (testimony of Jill Welch, deputy executive director for public policy NAFSA: Association of International Educators).
- The Lure of Chilecon Valley. (2012, October 13). *The Economist*. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/business/2012/10/13/the-lure-of-chilecon-valley>
- The White House. (2017, December) National security strategy of the United States of America. Retrieved <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

US Department of State. Education USA. (2018). *Global guide 2018*. Washington, D.C.: Education USA

Watanabe, T. (2017, November 13). Enrollment of first-time foreign students dips in the U.S., but California is still No. 1. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-international-students-20171113-htmlstory.html>

Zaveri, P., & Roy, A. (2018, September 10). Big American tech companies are snapping up foreign-worker visas, replacing Indian outsourcing firms. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/20/big-american-tech-companies-are-snapping-up-h1-b-visas.html>

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

**Proposed Timeline for Delivery**

The following is a detailed schedule for the completion of my capstone, portfolio, and ultimately, Master's Degree in International Education.

**March 2019**

- March 21 Submit Capstone proposal
- March 21-28: Edit and submit subsequent drafts of capstone proposal
- Feb 28: Submit HSR documents

**April 2019**

- April 1 (approx.): Be cleared for research
- April 10 - 30: Conduct interviews with admissions contacts
- April 10 - 31: Transcribe interviews as administered

**May 2019**

- May 20: Submit final portfolio
- May 27: Submit first draft of capstone paper
- Register for August 2019 Capstone Seminar

**June 2019**

- June 1- 31: Edit and submit subsequent drafts of capstone paper and portfolio

**July 2019**

- July 5: Submit final capstone paper and portfolio.

**August 2020**

- Attend, and present program design at, SIT capstone week
- Graduate

### **Appendix A: Interview Script for Participants**

“Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I wanted to again make sure that you are comfortable with this interview being recorded.”

1. Tell me about your experience as an admissions professional at your institution working with international students.
2. What are the most common concerns you encounter regarding students or parents of students considering the United States as a destination for graduate studies?
3. What percentage of graduate students are international? What percentage would you say are in STEM departments?
4. Have the answers to any of these concerns changed since 2016? How?
5. Are you aware that the US Department of State tracked a decline in foreign student enrollments since 2016? Have you seen this reflected in your own admissions work?
6. What do you think has contributed to the international student decline in the US the past few years?
7. Do you think this trend will continue to/begin to impact your institution? If so, how?
8. In your opinion, how has this affected the STEM departments within your institution?
9. How has your institution reacted to the decline?
10. How has your day-to-day changed (if at all) to adapt to the decline?
11. If you could change one thing to bring more foreign students to the US, what would it be and why?

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

“Thank you for your time and insights. I will be taking your answers, transcribing them and comparing them with other interviews that will be conducted in the same manner. Ultimately, this interview will inform the capstone paper that I am writing and will be referenced in my capstone paper without disclosing your name or identity and corresponding seminar. You will also be invited to read the work when it is concluded.”

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

**Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form****Participant Informed Consent**

**TITLE OF THE STUDY: Reaction of Higher Education Admissions Professionals to the Recent Drop in Foreign Student Enrollment at U.S. Universities**

RESEARCHER NAME: Peter Plass

My name is Peter Plass I am a student with SIT Graduate Institute.

I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for fulfilment of my MA in International Education. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy of this form.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into any professional adaptations that admissions professionals or their institutions have made to combat a falling international student enrolment trend in the US. Specifically, I will be looking at how this is effecting recruitment in STEM graduate level programs.

**STUDY PROCEDURES**

Your participation will consist of an audio recorded interview on the subject, conducted over Skype, discussing your work and observations with international student enrollment as a whole and at the graduate level. If you do not wish to be recorded, I will be able to accommodate by taking notes of your answers during the interview. This interview will require 40-60 minutes of your time.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There could be a potential risk of seeming critical of your field and/or profession. Appearing critical in an interview regarding your profession could lead to professional consequences such as trouble seeking employment in the future or the termination of your current position. For these purposes, your identity will remain anonymous and all identifying information you provide such as job title and institution name, will be redacted from the transcripts. There are no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the interview you have the right not to answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

It is possible that you will gain some benefits from the opportunity to reflect on the current trends in the industry and externally process your work.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

As stated before, your name, title and other such identifying information will not be collected and redacted from any transcript created from the interview. Your audio recording will be stored in a

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

password protected file on a secured device until it is transcribed and destroyed and formatted. Audio recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed and all identifying data will be redacted. Audio recording participants will be given pseudonyms (fake names) for the purposes of publishing quotes or discussing interview details.

### **Consent to Quote from Interview**

I may wish to quote from the interview with you either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym (fake name) will be used in order to protect your identity.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to consent to quote from an interview

\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to consent to quote from an interview

### **Consent to Audio-Record Interview**

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to consent to audio record an interview

\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to consent to audio record an interview

### **RESEARCHER'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at [pplass@gmail.com](mailto:pplass@gmail.com) or my advisor at [alla.korz@sit.edu](mailto:alla.korz@sit.edu).

### **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by an SIT Study Abroad Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at: School for International Training, Institutional Review Board, 1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676, Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676, USA [irb@sit.edu](mailto:irb@sit.edu), 802-258-3132

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

“I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.”

## STRATEGIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION PROFESSIONALS

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_