



**NAFSA**  
Association of  
International Educators

## Educating Students for Success in the Global Economy A Public Opinion Survey on the Importance of International Education

**T**he single biggest issue on the minds of Americans today, and likely well into the future, is the state of the economy. How long will a recovery take? What will be needed to ensure that a future of economic vitality, innovation, and competitiveness on the global stage is possible for the United States when the current crisis subsides? Even amid the most dismal financial circumstances in decades and a political environment in which disagreements about the way forward appear to outweigh common ground, *Americans remain committed to the principle that in order to thrive in the future, we must prepare students today by giving them the skills necessary to navigate life and careers in an age of global connectedness and global competition.*

In November 2010, on the eve of the midterm elections, a NAFSA-commissioned survey<sup>1</sup> polled a broad cross-section of Americans on their views about the value of international education—particularly the issues of foreign language learning, study abroad, and the recruitment of talent to fuel excellence in higher education. By strong margins, *Americans were clear: international education is critically important. Without it, the graduates of the future will be at a disadvantage in their careers and will find themselves lacking the skills to thrive in the global workplace.*

<sup>1</sup>Lake Research Partners designed and administered this pre- and election night omnibus survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached a total of 1,200 likely-registered voters nationwide. The survey was conducted October 31 through November 2, 2010. The sample was stratified geographically based on the proportion of likely voters in each region. Data were weighted to reflect the aggregated “national” Congressional vote as reported in the 2010 exit polls, as well as by gender, party identification, ideology, marital status, race, region, and probability of selection and phone usage. The Tarrance Group also provided analysis of the survey results.

## International Education: Essential, Not a Frill

The NAFSA public opinion survey of more than 1,000 likely U.S. voters in November 2010 yielded the following results:

**QUESTION 1:** International education includes foreign language learning, studying abroad in other countries, and learning other cultures. If increasingly, what happens around the world affects us at home, please tell me on a scale from 0 to 10—where 10 is very essential and 0 is not essential at all—how essential you think international education is to the educational experience.

**Ranking the value of international education, a strong majority of respondents (57%) say it is very essential or moderately essential to the educational experience. Across all respondents, the mean response of 6.4 suggests that Americans overall believe international education is essential to the educational experience.**

Response	Percentage
8–10 (very essential)	39
6–7 (moderately essential)	18
5 (neutral)	20
0–4 (not essential)	20
Don't know	2
MEAN	6.4

**QUESTION 2:** Respondents were asked if they agree or disagree with the following statement: *If our children and grandchildren don't learn other languages, they will be at a competitive disadvantage in their careers.*

**Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Americans surveyed believe that if our young people do not learn foreign languages, they will be at a competitive disadvantage in their careers. Forty-seven percent strongly agree with this statement.**

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	47
Not so strongly agree	18
Not so strongly disagree	15
Strongly disagree	17
Don't know	3

**QUESTION 3:** Respondents were asked if they agree or disagree with the following statement: *Unless our colleges and universities do a better job of teaching our students about the world, our children and grandchildren will not be prepared to compete in the global economy.*

**Nearly three-fourths of respondents (73%) surveyed believe that America's higher education institutions must do a better job of teaching students about the world if they are to be prepared to compete in the global economy. More than half of those surveyed felt strongly that our students must receive a global education.**

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	52
Not so strongly agree	21
Not so strongly disagree	10
Strongly disagree	13
Don't know	3

**QUESTION 4:** Respondents were asked to say if they agree or disagree with the following statement: *In order to thrive in the global workplace, more students need the opportunity to participate in a study abroad program while in college—where they can spend time living and studying in another culture.*

**A strong majority of Americans (57%) recognize that study abroad is a vital component of an education that prepares them for success in the global workplace.**

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	36
Not so strongly agree	21
Not so strongly disagree	17
Strongly disagree	21
Don't know	5

**QUESTION 5:** This question was divided into two statistically equivalent samples.

Respondents in the first sample were asked: *Do you think we should make it easier or harder for educational professionals from other countries—like professors, scientists, and researchers—to come to the United States to live, work, and build a career here?*

Respondents in the second sample were asked: *Suppose I told you that without educational professionals from other countries—like professors, scientists, and researchers—many colleges and universities would be unable to put a qualified instructor in every classroom, and the United States would be at a competitive disadvantage in our research and innovation. Knowing this, do you think we should make it easier or harder for educational professionals from other countries to come to the United States to live, work, and build a career?*

**Even on the contentious and polarizing issue of immigration, a plurality (40%) of Americans think it should be easier for educational professionals from other countries to come to the United States to work and live. When told about the benefits of attracting educational professionals to the United States, even greater numbers say it should be easier for them to come here—nearly fifty percent. In addition, Americans who indicated support for foreign languages, study abroad, and international education in the previous questions were particularly strongly in favor of facilitating the ability of educational professionals from other countries to come to the United States.**

**Sample 1**

Response	Percentage
Easier	40
Harder	31
Stay the same	22
Don't know	7

**Sample 2 (additional background provided)**

Response	Percentage
Easier	47
Harder	24
Stay the same	20
Don't know	9

## Summary

Americans believe that international education is vitally important to the success of today's young people in navigating a competitive international landscape, thriving in the global workplace, and leveraging their talents and skills in ways that move the United States forward in an increasingly connected world. These survey results are particularly significant at a time when concerns about the economy are foremost on the minds of Americans.



With nearly 10,000 members, NAFSA: Association of International Educators is the world's largest nonprofit association dedicated to international education. NAFSA and its members share a belief that international education and exchange—connecting students, scholars, educators, and citizens across borders—is fundamental to building mutual understanding among nations; preparing the next generation with vital cross-cultural and global skills; and creating the conditions for a more peaceful world

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