



International Students and Global Mobility in Higher Education: National Trends and New Directions

By Rajika Bhandari and Peggy Blumenthal, Editors

Palgrave Macmillan, 2011

Reviewed by Martin Tillman

THIS VOLUME updates a book by Blumenthal and colleagues on the same topic written in 1996: *Academic Mobility in a Changing World Regional and Global Trends*. It's an important book for international educators who wish to look behind the statistics of student flows around the world.

The overall data on student flows referenced throughout the book have been widely reported in varied online sources and by IIE in its important *Project Atlas* Web portal, the *Atlas of Student Mobility*. And while the impact of the rise in numbers of student flows across borders is well known to *International Educator* readers, the editors suggest what is new and consequential in their analysis are the “drivers of student mobility and the new modalities through which this migration occurs.” This frames the central focus of the book whose chapters provide campus policymakers and administrators with an in-depth analysis of the political and socioeconomic factors that influence the flow of students from the United States, China, India, Germany, the UK, Australia, Latin America, and selected African nations. In addition, two chapters address the importance of language in global student mobility and the phenomenon of emerging “regional education hubs” coinciding with the explosion of student flows in selected countries and cities.

Interest in student mobility and the implications of the dynamic patterns of cross-border study take on a different meaning in developed and developing nations. In the United States, international

students have a growing impact on state economic development, are an important source of revenue for cash-strapped academic institutions during the current recession, and support ongoing efforts to internationalize campuses. In the developing world, where capacity to educate students at the postsecondary level remains limited, access to a wider range of options to enter college abroad serves as a source of future talent in government and the general workforce as economies grow and prosper. For example, this pattern of reverse migration of talent—educated abroad and with careers built outside the country—has emerged in India in recent years.

The editors cite the importance—and difficulty—of accurately measuring the rising numbers of mobile students in light of the increasing diversity of sending and receiving nations. The variety of methods applied in reporting data, coupled with the varied range of reporting periods, between 2005–2008, does make comparisons and conclusions difficult.

But high quality data collection is of great consequence to faculty, administrators, and policymakers as they attempt to frame policy and it's equally important to other stakeholders such as government officials, students, and their families. Cited above, *Project Atlas* is a leading effort to chart global mobility trends. It collects data on 19 leading and emerging host nations and enrollment by students from 76 countries of origin. The authors cite how this data has helped track how China, once a leading sending country for international

students, has emerged today as one of the top 10 host countries; and how South Africa has become a leading regional host for students from Africa and elsewhere.

The volume highlights the importance of tracking data in terms of the global “competition” for international students. And not merely as relates to admissions, but also because of the complex global economic forces that now impact the search for workforce talent in both developed and developing economies. The editors state, “Many countries are also formalizing the link between higher education and the skilled job market by implementing policies that encourage international graduates to enter the workforce of the host country, especially in scientific and technical fields.”¹ For example, the figures cited for the United States in the STEM fields are startling: In engineering, foreign students earned 68 percent of all PhDs in 2007. The challenge is for leading academic institutions to keep pace with the needs of the labor market while at the same time, maintaining their capacity to attract top talent.

The editors review several other emerging trends based on their analysis of the data on student mobility:

- Fueling the diversity of opportunity for cross-border learning is the expansion of alternative modes of educating students including branch campuses, distance learning (i.e., “open courseware” of MIT), joint and dual degree programs, “sandwich” short-term study abroad programs, twinning, and experiments in curricular integration.

■ The new multidirectionality of student flows has forced a new interpretation of what used to be feared—“brain drain”; now, the terms more applicable are “brain circulation” or “brain exchange.” However, the singular exception to this dynamic pattern of student flow remains Africa which “has the highest outbound mobility ration of any world region.”

■ Increasing numbers of students are returning to their home countries to find employment. Research confirms that “large numbers of Indian and Chinese students in the United States plan to return home.” Other Asian nations have instituted policies to proactively recruit scientists and engineers to return home and enter the workforce.

■ Among top receiving nations, the United States has a “large untapped capacity to

absorb significant future growth in international student enrollment” (as of 2007–2008, enrollment of international students was only 3.5 percent of total higher education enrollment in the nation). By contrast, Australia’s international student enrollment as at 22.5 percent of its total student enrollment.

The last chapter by Jane Knight discusses what she refers to as “international education cities” and “regional hubs.” The terms apply to selected countries where traditional and nontraditional forms of delivering education are of a magnitude not found in other regions. These areas—and she discusses three Middle Eastern countries (United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain) and three in Asia (Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia). The education initiatives in these countries are not driven solely by the high-

er education sector, but also by “economic development boards, tourism authorities, multinational investment companies...and science and technology enterprises...”

These varied actors have differing expectations for the outcome of their investment—and student learning and related education goals may not be a high priority. However, Knight states that “a common element to all initiatives [in these six nations] is a clear acknowledgement of the need to prepare a skilled job-ready workforce for the knowledge economy.”¹**IE**

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