

# RECRUITING'S

# Brave New

**D**RIVEN BY intense competition for students and their tuition dollars, especially in the current economy, and also by ambitions to internationalize their campuses, many U.S. colleges and universities are adopting strategies to recruit students from other countries.

Recruitment strategies still include tried-and-true practices such as participation in college fairs and the use of alumni in foreign countries to attract students as well as university faculty and staff when they travel abroad. U.S. institutions also are outsourcing some of the recruitment function to service centers in other countries, a strategy not new to countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, which have aggressive international recruitment programs.

More controversial, however, is a practice many universities are implementing to pay agents in foreign countries who recruit students and enroll them in U.S. universities. The practice and the scrutiny of it are increasing as supporters point to its effectiveness and critics question its ethical implications. Two major national higher education associations have adopted policy positions against it.

Meanwhile, the world's largest international student placement service is entering the U.S. market, and two initiatives are underway in the United States to professionalize the use of paid third-party recruiters, although some higher education authorities who oppose the practice say that probably won't change their minds.

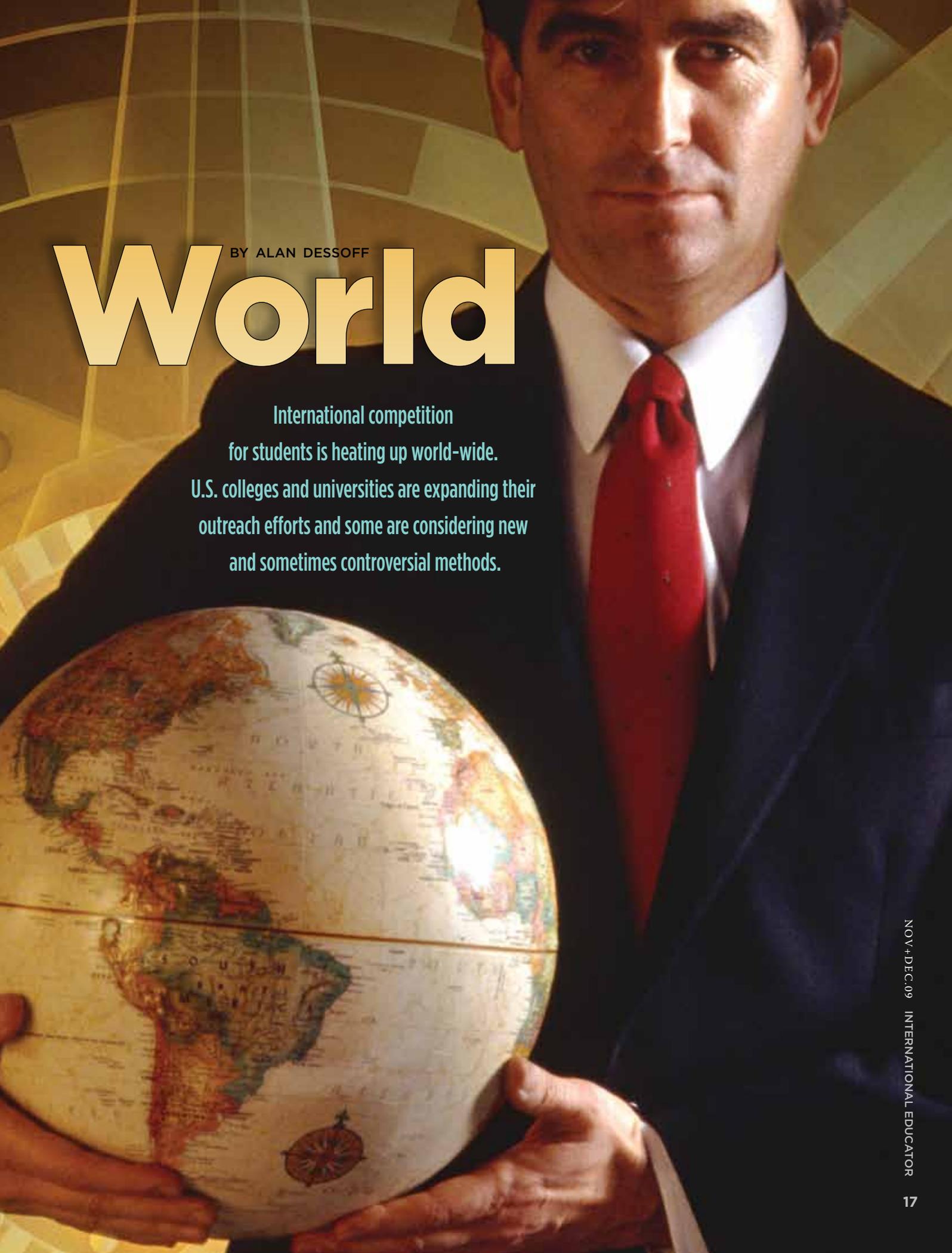
## Global Competition

The competition for students that U.S. universities face comes not just from other U.S. institutions but also from universities in other countries that target many of the same markets, mainly in Asia, as U.S. universities, with the strong backing of their national governments. In the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister's Initiative for International

Education, launched in April 2006, is a five-year initiative that seeks to attract an additional 70,000 international students to British higher education. Helping to recruit them is an important function of the 75-year-old British Council, which works in 109 countries and territories.

In Australia the national government and the country's major universities are aggressively recruiting students to add to an international student population that already is one of the largest in the world. Australia Education International (AEI), an agency of the government's Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations, supports universities in their recruiting efforts through a "Study in Australia" brand and Web site as well as other promotional services. With staff members located in Australian diplomatic missions around the world, AEI maintains a network of Australian Education Centers at some that prospective students and their parents can visit for information about studying in Australia.

Like other Australian universities, the University of Queensland conducts intensive recruitment activities of its own, with staff members and other "educational representatives" of its International Recruitment and Marketing Office assigned to and often located in more than 70 countries. Queensland pays third-party agents to recruit students, and one of the responsibilities of its staff is "making sure we have the



BY ALAN DESSOFF

# World

International competition for students is heating up world-wide. U.S. colleges and universities are expanding their outreach efforts and some are considering new and sometimes controversial methods.

appropriate agents in place and that they are well-trained and informed about our university,” says Alison Campbell, manager of the office.

For about half of its agents, Campbell says, Queensland contracts with IDP Education, the world’s largest international student placement service that is jointly owned by Queensland and 37 other Australian universities. IDP’s counselors, working from 70 offices in 25 countries, help students and their families navigate the enrollment process. In turn, universities pay IDP a placement fee.

IDP, now in its fortieth year, announced at NAFSA’s annual conference in May 2009 that it is entering the U.S. higher education market as well and looks to place international students in U.S. universities next fall.

The use of paid third parties to bring international students to the United States is ramping up because “we have been passive recruiters and now the demographics are working against us,” says Mitch

Leventhal, vice chancellor for global affairs of the State University of New York

(SUNY). Leventhal was formerly at the University of Cincinnati, which began paying agents in 2006. Leventhal also is spearheading the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC), one of the new initiatives underway to professionalize the practice.

“Part of it is survival,” Leventhal asserts. “After this year, the college-age student population in the U.S. will be declining and the global demand for higher education is continuing to grow.”

U.S. institutions have U.S. government support in their international recruiting efforts, mainly through EducationUSA, a global network of more than 450 advising centers supported by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the Department of State. The U.S. Commercial Service, the trade promotion unit of the International Trade Administration, with specialists in more than 80 countries, also is helpful.

But given the competition they face, many institutions feel pressed to implement their own intensive international recruitment strategies that include promoting themselves to potential students and their families. “If you’re in the top tier of famous universities, you don’t need to spend a lot of money to get your name out there. But for those of us whose universities are not internationally recognized at first

blush, we have to do a lot of promotion,” says Dennis Dunham, executive director of international affairs at the University of Central Oklahoma.

He does it with a strategy that includes the support of alumni in target countries, advertising in local newspapers, and third-party representatives who are paid for students they refer and who enroll at Central Oklahoma. As one form of payment, the university advertises on the agents’ Web sites, Dunham says.

## Questioning Assumptions

Using paid third-party agents is not new. U.S.-based English language programs have been doing it for decades, says Joann B. Stedman, a retired higher education consultant in Gilbert, Arizona. But she makes a distinction between those programs and universities that seek to bring more international students into their mainstream programs. Stedman, who recruited for several major universities, says she never used agents. “I worked for schools that didn’t have to do much to get applications. I always thought meeting students myself was more important than working through somebody else,” she explains.

However, she adds, “I was always approached when I was overseas by people who wanted to make deals, have contracts, that sort of thing. It was controversial at the time and I didn’t recommend it. I thought it was dangerous.”

It wasn’t “out of ethical bounds,” she says, to pay travel expenses to bring a third-party agent to the United States to “get familiar with your campus.” But “a contract for \$50 a head or something didn’t have such a great feel. You didn’t know how many institutions he was representing. He could be selling the application to the highest bidder,” Stedman says.

Concerns like that underscore some of the continuing controversy over the practice. But the use of paid third-party agents, often called counselors, is growing partly because of the competition for students and also because “people are questioning assumptions they had that agents were the wrong way to go,” says Julie Sinclair, a full-time Ph.D. student in higher education enrollment at Michigan State University who previously spent 12 years as director of international admissions at Oklahoma City University.

Paying third-party agents “can be a good experience if you are willing to develop a long-term relationship with them and make sure they get to know you and your institution. It’s something you have to develop. Just signing up a bunch of agents and expecting miracles to happen is not necessarily going to work,” Sinclair says.

## Recruiting TIPS

- **Work with the marketing and communication department to make sure that messaging is consistent across channels**
- **Encourage international admissions staff to engage current international students and recent alumni in developing content**
- **Use populations that are closest to target demographic, such as students and recent alumni**

—Cheryl Darrup-Boychuck

# Building an Alumni Network for International Recruiting

When Rosie Edmond started in her position as assistant director of admissions of the International Legal Studies Program with the Washington College of Law at American University in Washington, DC, she realized that she had “very limited resources” in terms of her budget for international recruitment. “I had to use what I had,” she says.

That was in 2005. Today international admissions to the International Legal Studies Program are up 25 to 30 percent. And the credit is due to her use of international alumni in recruiting international students.

“They have been one of my most valuable resources and most cost effective,” notes Edmond.

Prior to Edmond joining American University, travel was not part of the budget for international recruitment for the program. She began traveling, and even though it’s not the whole picture of international recruitment, it’s a start. Edmond’s first recruiting trip to China did get international alumni engaged in recruiting and set the tone to her approach to engaging international alumni ever since.

On her first trip, Edmond set in motion a strategy to build an alumni network. She set up meetings via a list-serv with international alumni (“such as coffee or dinner”), introduce herself, ask

them why they chose American University, ask them about the schools they attended as undergraduates, and also put them in contact with prospective and admitted students. This information gathering from international alumni can help a recruiter find out where the best students are in a particular country.

Once international students are admitted to the program and are on campus at American University, Edmond is the “first point of contact” and oftentimes, the only person who knows the students throughout their time in the program. “I try to maintain a relationship with international students when they are on campus, so I can build on that relationship when they are alumni later on,” explains Edmond. “Word of mouth tends to be the most effective method in terms of marketing. It helps if alumni know someone. If they are connected with the university, they are more likely to promote it through word of mouth.”

Edmond is seeing an increase in applicants from China and Turkey, specifically, due to her alumni network strategy.

But it’s not all about the numbers.

“Engaging international alumni in the recruiting process is not only increasing the volume of students, it’s also increasing the quality of students who apply,” she says.

The International Legal Studies Program is 28 years old and now takes recommendations from international alumni, which often result in better applicants.

Edmond says that even if travel budgets are limited, there are still other ways to reach out to international alumni. “We also use technology to interact with our international alumni by using Facebook. And there is also the old-fashioned method that works, too, like keeping track of what’s going on in the lives of international alumni and sending a congratulations card to recognize special achievements like promotions or awards received. I like to stay on their minds as much as possible.”

Ongoing communication helps keep an alumni network strong. In turn, international alumni are likely to feel more connected and willing to lend a hand when it comes to asking them about the best way to recruit in their home countries and connecting them with prospective international students.

For admissions officers who may balk at the effort it would take to establish an alumni network for international recruiting purposes, Edmond has this advice: “It’s worth the time and effort to establish these relationships. These relationships need nurturing to be successful. Yes, it’s time consuming, but the results we’ve seen are worth it.”

—IE





Many universities try to address the concerns on their own because they believe paid third-party agents can help them achieve their objectives. At Northern Arizona University, “we have a focus to internationalize the campus and create a diverse student population,” says Mandy Hansen, director of international admissions and recruitment. To do that, NAU participates in fairs in other countries and works with EducationUSA and the U.S. Commercial Service. “We’re reaching out as best we can,” Hansen says.

During the past year, the university also began using paid foreign agents—Hansen calls them “educational consultants”—for the first time, and has relationships now with representatives in China, India, and South Korea. “They have been very helpful and responsive. The quality of students they have sent us exceeds our admission standards. So far, the relationships have been going very well and what we’ve seen is reputable business practices,” Hansen declares. She “would rather not say how much” the university pays them, which is based on “a combination of different arrangements” that could include commissions or flat fees, Hansen says.

China and India are prime recruiting markets for other U.S. universities as well and paid agents play an important cultural role, says Theodore R. McKown, II, associate director of international affairs at Kent State University. “The families of students feel comfortable with someone from their culture they feel they can trust. So it’s a win-win for the students and the university,” he says.

An office that Kent State maintains in Beijing where interested Chinese students can learn more about the university also serves as an “interface” with agents, he adds. “If they have questions about Kent State, our office there can assist them,” McKown says.

“The reason the agent discussion has risen to the top is that the China market has risen to the top, and it’s pretty much an agent market,” declares Dunham at Central Oklahoma, who agrees that agents play an important cultural role. Since most U.S. universities do not translate their Web sites into Chinese or other foreign languages, “they are basically cutting out the parents of prospective students, who like to sit down with your representative there and hear about your university in the language they understand,” Dunham

## Technology and International Recruiting

**I**NTERNET RECRUITING. ONLINE RECRUITING. E-RECRUITING. Whatever you call it, recruiting international students via electronic communication—whether it is building Web sites, contacting them via e-mail or using social media applications like Facebook or Twitter—it’s here to stay.

Cheryl Darrup-Boychuck, C.I.E.O. of the *U.S. Journal of Academics*, says it first “went online” in 1996. “We cut and pasted ads for our clients put static information online,” she explains. “It was a much more trackable medium than a print publication and our advertisers [who recruit international students] were delighted because they could see the results rather than hope that branding actually worked.”

What was an experiment in the mid-nineties has morphed into using technology to recruit students internationally in more ways than could have been imagined just in the last decade.

“Online recruiting is really critical,” says Darrup-Boychuck. “The Internet is

the digital divide—not every prospective student has access to the internet but for those who do, even though we would like to serve all prospective students, it is realistic that students who are most qualified to enroll in our campuses would have access to the Internet.”

“A lot of campuses are getting much more sophisticated in developing portals for specialized student audiences. These portals may be regional, for example, or they may be academic (such as a portal for prospective students in a specific academic major.”

Technology has forced institutions to alter their recruiting game plans. “The attitude that has changed is that institutions have recognized that they can’t control their brand any longer,” explains Darrup-Boychuck. “They can try, but there is so much being said about institutions by alumni, students, parents. It’s frightening—for some. Some ‘old school’ PR people are used to keeping an institutions message on a tight leash. The transparency can be difficult to

deal with. By engaging current students and recent alumni in online efforts, it is enlightening the ‘old school’ on how to communicate with student populations online.”

Northern Arizona University is an example of one institution that is experimenting with online recruiting. The core is the Web site with virtual tours; international recruitment staff have branched out from there to include doing e-mail campaigns, Facebook, and Twitter.

“Internet recruiting is becoming more important,” says Mandy Hansen, director of international admissions and recruitment. “It’s become so important that I have one staff member that is focused on Internet recruiting. They have other responsibilities, but a least a quarter of their time is devoted to online recruiting activities.”

Northern Arizona University has 520 international students coming from more than 60 countries and of course, they hope to increase those numbers.

says. Alumni in foreign countries also can help close that cultural gap, he adds.

Kent State finds its agents through “a lot of networking with individuals we know and can trust around the world,” including alumni, friends of the university, and colleagues at other universities, says McKown. He declines to specify how much the university pays its agents. He also acknowledges a continuing concern about the ethics of the practice. “Sure, that’s something you have to take into consideration. Like everything else, there probably are unethical people out there. But there are ethical people as well. The challenge is to find the people who can represent your university well and do good work for you,” he says. So far he adds, he has not experienced any problems with agents.

Dunham says that when he enlists agents, he does not pay them for the first students they send to Central Oklahoma. “We use that as a test,” he says. He also asks them to visit the university, paying their own expenses. Later, he will discuss fee arrangements with them but only if the students they send to the university actually enroll, Dunham says.

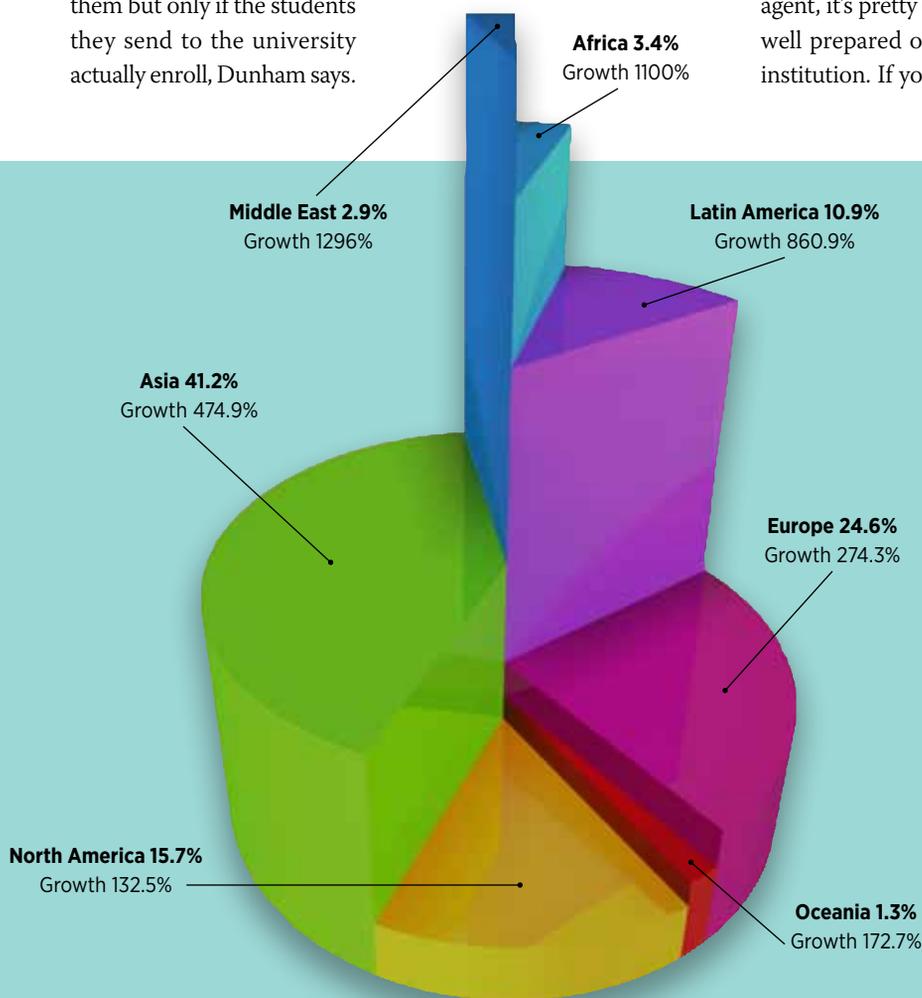
## Developing Relationships

“The worst thing that can happen is you have a representative who is trying to deliver students just for the money. You have to develop relationships with these people,” Dunham says. One of his staff members, who speaks Chinese, regularly visits the university’s representatives in China while Dunham, who speaks Korean, travels once or twice a year to visit agents in South Korea.

“I’ve been working with some of these people for 10 years. I have spent time with them and know them well. Some of they have become my friends. I trust them,” Dunham declares.

Sinclair agrees that staff travel from the home campus is important. “The best scenario is to visit them from time to time and do some recruiting together, because you have to build relationships with them and build their familiarity with your institution,” she says.

Another effective way to monitor how agents are working is through the students they recruit, she adds. “When students talk about their experiences with an agent, it’s pretty easy to tell if they were well prepared or not to come to your institution. If you hear too many com-



World Internet Usage by Region 2008 & User Growth, 2000-2008

Total Internet Users: 1,596,270,108

Source: [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com)

Graph by NingGeng Ong, USJournal.com. Reprinted with permission.

“It’s an exciting future,” says Hansen. “The way we reach students is always changing. We don’t necessarily know what the future is going to be, but we know that we will need to learn new technologies and ways to communication information.”

The university has also found that keeping in touch with alumni helps create partnerships when they return to their home countries. For example, an alumnus in Malaysia who helped with college fairs overseas is now heading an American degree program and transfer agreement is pending. And an alumnus in India is just starting conversations about developing a transfer agreement with an institution in India.

Northern Arizona University senses that they have just scratched the surface of how these connections can build international bridges

To increase the possibilities, the university is starting an extensive outreach to international alumni, including making alumni data collection is a new focus. “It’s a pool of energy there that can be tapped into,” says Hansen. -IE

plaints about one agency, it's a good time to question how things are going," Sinclair says.

Paid agents also are part of the recruitment strategy at the Tseng College of Extended Learning, a self-supporting college within California State University, Northridge. Because Tseng College is not state-supported, it can offer commissions, and does, says Mary Baxton, its director of admissions and international outreach specialist. The commission it pays is 15 percent of the first-term tuition that students pay for Tseng's intensive English program. Baxton notes that some institutions pay 15 percent of a student's entire tuition but "we're on the low end because we're affiliated with a state school."

Tseng has about 20 "good agents" through Asia, its principal market, Baxton says. The college tries to ensure the quality of its agents through a vetting process that begins when "I hear of a good agent through a colleague or the agent hears about me," Baxton says. "We ask them to submit information about themselves and letters of recommendation and after reading all that and contacting three references, we decide whether to consider them," she explains.

Hired agents sign an agreement that "clearly outlines the conditions and expectations" of the arrangement and they are instructed on Tseng's admission requirements and other relevant procedures. "You have to give new agents a lot of information to prepare them to work with you," Baxton explains. She also tries to monitor them closely, visiting the ones who provide the most applications annually when she travels to their countries.

Still, "I think there are some agencies out there that don't always honor a code of ethics," she says. In China, a key market, agents also are paid by students and their parents, who place "a huge dependency" on them because "there isn't space in all the Chinese universities for all the students who pass their national exams to go to college." So they look to go elsewhere, including the United States, "a huge market for students who can't go to schools in their own country," Baxton says.

It also can be challenging in China to "keep up with" her agencies, she adds, because "they sometimes change their names slightly, or subdivide their

businesses, or add new partners. It's difficult to keep up with it all."

Bryant University works with agents who are paid by students or their families but not by the university. "We work with those who don't charge commissions to the institution," says John F. Eriksen, associate director, international admissions. It's the credibility of agents that is "the difficulty with the field right now and we find that since they are charging the families, there's a little more credibility that they are looking out for the best interests of the students, which would be in our interest as well," he says.

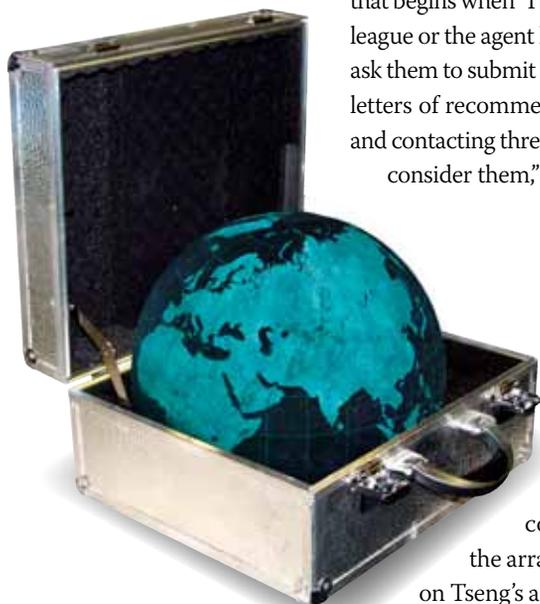
The University of Cincinnati, which has "a growing network" of agents, pays them 10 percent of the net first year tuition that a student pays after scholarship receipts, Leventhal reports. At first, he says, Cincinnati looked at agents working for Australian universities. "I used to work for those universities so I know everyone there," he explains. From Cincinnati, he communicated with prospective agents by e-mail, explained what the university expected of them, made some assessments, checked references at other institutions with which they were working, and usually visited them.

Paying third-party agents "can be a good experience if you are willing to develop a long-term relationship with them and make sure they get to know you and your institution. It's something you have to develop. Just signing up a bunch of agents and expecting miracles to happen is not necessarily going to work."

## Professional Certification

All that is changing now at Cincinnati and some other universities that have joined AIRC, which will hold its first annual conference December 4–5 in Coconut Grove, Florida. AIRC's mission is to develop professional standards for international student recruitment and give a certification framework for private agencies that provide advising and application assistance to prospective students for U.S. accredited institutions. Many in the international higher education community are watching it with interest.

As Leventhal, its founding chair and president describes it, AIRC's agent certification process, which will start officially early next year after a test run underway now with eight agencies, including IDP, will be functionally similar to the quality assurance process that universities go through to gain formal accreditation. "We have modeled this on what we learned about university accreditations," he says. With intense due diligence, professional development and external site review, it will go "far beyond anything that has been done anywhere else in terms of qualifying agents."



# e-Recruitment Timeline

“The agents need to have a wide array of different types of universities to represent in order to serve the best interests of the students,” he explains. “We don’t want them pushing square pegs into round holes. We don’t want them sending students to us who are not the kind of students we want. When an agent represents a good stable of institutions of all types—urban, rural, large, small, private, public, competitive, and less competitive—they can make better placements and also attract more students to their operations because they have more schools on their lists.”

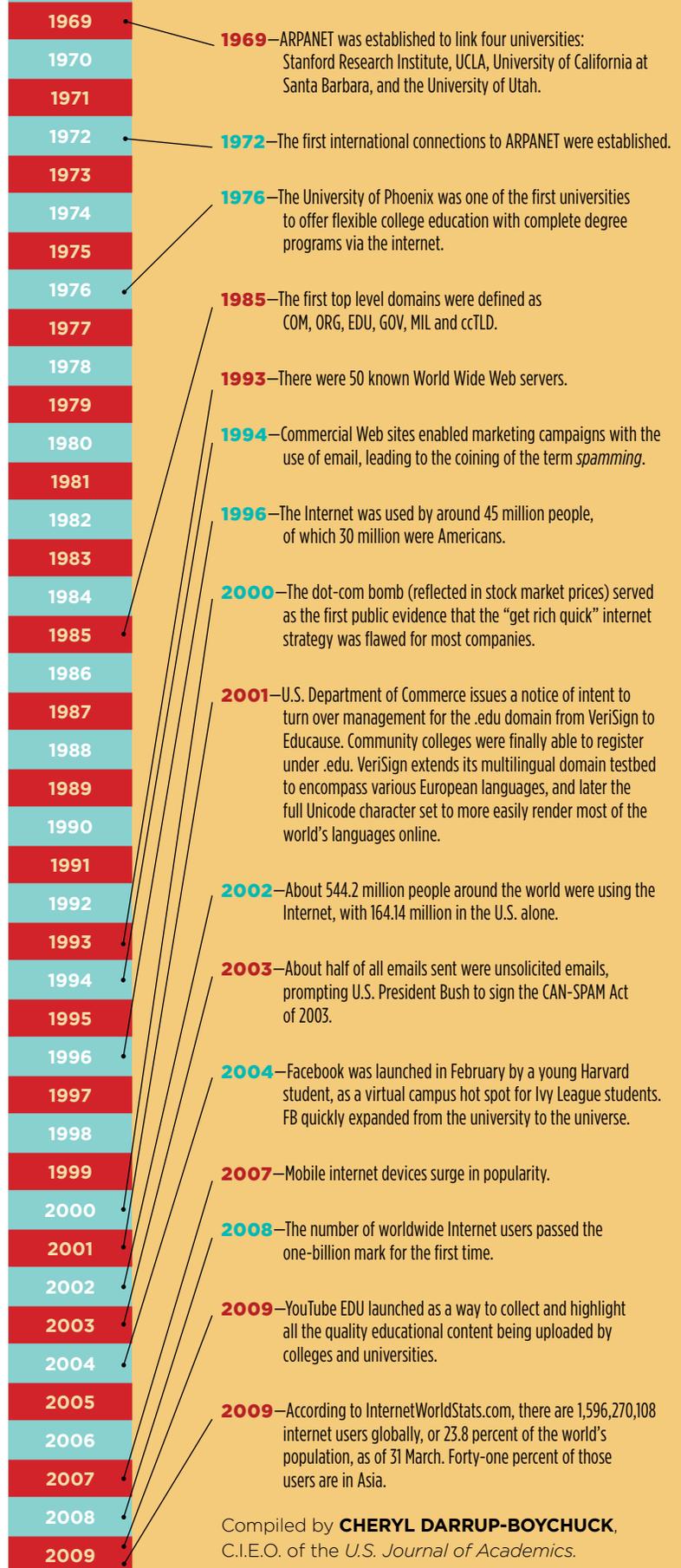
U.S. universities typically haven’t paid commissions to agents for many reasons, some well-intentioned and some misinformed, Leventhal says. He cites the issue of ethics. “Things are unethical if you do them unethically,” he declares. He points to industries that have adopted professional standards. “Once they are in place and widely accepted and enforced, the questions of ethics tend to diminish,” he says.

AIRC’s approach is intended to benefit students and their families as they will be charged little if anything and agents will recover their fees through placing them in colleges and universities where they fit, Leventhal says.

After agents apply for certification, AIRC will obtain “a lot of deep information” about their ownership structure, Leventhal says. A company that specializes in the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act will do due diligence on applicants. “We want to be sure the ownership of an agency has not been involved in any types of illegal activities, that there haven’t been complaints about them in the press, and so on,” Leventhal says.

If they get over that hurdle, he continues, they will go through a professional development component that will focus on the characteristics of U.S. higher education, including visa and labor regulations. Then they will conduct a self-study, followed by a visit to their offices by an AIRC-trained reviewer, usually from the admissions office of an AIRC member institution that does not have a relationship with the particular agent being considered. The reviewer will write a report and the application finally will go before an AIRC certification board.

Agents will have to be recertified every three years and if a complaint is filed against an agent in the meantime, AIRC will have a procedure to investigate it. If the complaint is of “the most egregious sort,” the agent can be decertified and blacklisted for five years. “A press release will go out. It will be public information and essentially, a scarlet letter against them,” Leventhal says. “So we think agents who go through the certification process will do everything they can to avoid that.”



Compiled by **CHERYL DARRUP-BOYCHUCK**, C.I.E.O. of the *U.S. Journal of Academics*.



Eventually, says Leventhal, any college or university, whether or not it is an AIRC member, that wants to enlist good agents, will be able to go to the AIRC Web site and see a list of the agents the organization has certified. Leventhal sees other benefits from the process as well. "We hope that when students in foreign countries go to a U.S. consulate for a visa, the consuls will have a greater degree of confidence that they are legitimate, their documents have not been forged, they have financial means, and so forth, because they have been assisted by an AIRC-certified agent versus one who is unknown. We hope eventually to reach that point," Leventhal says. He also has eventual hopes that EducationUSA will "embrace" AIRC-certified agents as an extension of the U.S. recruiting network and provide additional support and training for them. EducationUSA is "a great clearinghouse; it has a huge amount of information about every institution," Leventhal says. But students "need more than that. They need deep information about institutions that are more appropriate for them and they and their parents need a lot of handholding to get through the application process."

He adds that while EducationUSA has a network of about 450 offices, "there's no way they will ever be able to have outposts in all 5,000 cities of the world where students are coming from." The British Council has

a larger network than EducationUSA "and even they came to realize eventually that agents brought value to their efforts because they can't be everywhere."

In a new twist as recently as September 2009, the State Department has joined the dialogue about the use of agents in international recruitment. The agency has issued a policy to its 450 EducationUSA advising centers worldwide that bans them from providing "advising services to or with commercial agents." Whether EducationUSA centers will be able to partner with agents in the future if AIRC certification becomes reality is unknown. For now though, the possibility of EducationUSA centers working with agents is closed.

Still, Leventhal hopes that AIRC certification will give agents "a degree of quality that right now is suspect because we can't separate the good ones from the bad ones." There have been "a lot of misunderstandings," he says, including a mistaken belief that paying agents is illegal. As for their ethics, "I can tell you from personal experience that they're not all unethical. There are many good operators who are highly professional and they are as concerned about the bad operators as the universities are. They don't want to be tarred with the same brush. They don't want them in business."

## A Recruitment Center in China

**I F YOU THINK** all of international recruiting is done on campus or by an admissions officer traveling around the world, think again. Kent State University (KSU) has created an international student recruitment center in China, which is directed by a faculty member.

The impetus for starting the Center came from the highest levels of the university administration. Kent State University President Lester A. Lefton and Provost Robert G. Frank "made the vision real," according to David DiMaria, director of international student recruitment, admissions and advising.

The Kent State University China Center was established in 2008. Bei Cai, associate professor of communication studies at KSU's Stark Campus and native of China with 20 years of experience working in higher education institutions in both China and in the United States, is now the China Center director. She and three consultants work on-site in Beijing.

Some might wonder, why have a faculty member direct an international recruitment center abroad?

"It was determined that a faculty director would not only be best suited to advise prospective students and their parents on academic opportunities, but her presence would also provide greater prestige and credibility to the newly established center," says DiMaria. "Because the director is a native of China, she is able to communicate not only with students, but also with parents and other constituents."

The China Center is off to a great start, but it hasn't been smooth sailing entirely.

The two greatest challenges since launching the China Center have been physical distance between Kent State university campus and the China Center in Beijing and also "establishing a presence in Beijing." The distance problem was largely overcome using real-time technology. The latter challenge "was accomplished through active networking and delivery of quality services," explains DiMaria. "Eventually, word got around that Kent State has a staffed recruitment center ready to assist and admissions decisions are received back from the university in a matter of weeks."



## A New Player on the Field

Another move to professionalize the practice comes through an International Counselor Network that Hobsons has introduced. Hobsons' approach requires agents selected to participate in the program to honor comprehensive standards developed with input from advisory board members selected by Hobsons who are experts in international student recruitment.

"We think it's important to put a service out there that U.S. universities can really trust," declares Hobsons CEO Craig Heldman. The network, he says, will provide a way for universities "to interface with academic counselors for international students around the world."

Agents in the program will have access to ongoing extensive support and training provided by Hobsons to ensure that they have a full familiarity with the universities in the network so students they recruit are "a good fit" for the institutions, Heldman says. "We're going to be sure that they are highly ethical and credible and that they have the necessary training about the institutions they are serving," Heldman states.

## Not Convinced

The AIRC and Hobsons initiatives notwithstanding, some higher education authorities still are wary of the

practice of paying third-party international recruiters, although, as AIRC points out, Title IV of the U.S. Higher Education Act explicitly permits commission-based recruitment of foreign students (but not for U.S. students who qualify for federal financial aid). The Statement of Principles of Good Practice of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) prohibits the organization's members from paying any agency for recruitment of students and "we don't make a distinction between domestic and international," says David Hawkins, NACAC's director of public policy and research.

"I'm not sure that even the development of a set of rules would convince our members to change" that, Hawkins says, because "a lot of our members are skeptical that even in a well-intentioned regulatory environment, the potential for abuse remains profound."

But he acknowledges that discussion of a certification process for third-party agents is "a relatively new development in the U.S." and "I don't know what will happen in the future." That will be up to NACAC's members, he says.

Members of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) also have "some misgivings around outright out-

To assist with getting known in Beijing, the China Center has its Web site (<http://www.beijing.kent.edu/>) and promotional materials written in Chinese.

The China Center has been a resounding success. International undergraduate admissions is up more than 120 percent and international graduate admissions is up more than 40 percent over the last academic year.

"This is at a time when the Council of Graduate Schools is reporting an overall decrease in international graduate admissions at U.S. institutions," says DiMaria. "Our greatest growth has come from China and this is due to the establishment of the China Center."

But it's not all about the numbers. For Kent State, establishing the China Center has a broader mission. Kent State wants to make a difference in their community and bring Chinese faculty to the United States as well.

"The president and provost view our partnerships with Chinese institu-

tions as opportunities for internationalization of the curriculum and economic development of Northeast Ohio," says DiMaria. "While it is still early to speak to the fruits of these new agreements, we already have four [Chinese] faculty members from partner institutions participating in Kent State graduate programs."

The Center has also reached out to Chinese universities seeking partnerships. Agreements have been signed with 15 Chinese institutions so far.

For other institutions investigating setting up a recruitment center abroad, DiMaria offers this advice:

"First, and most importantly, the center must be supported by the University administration. I remember once reading that 'vision without resources is just hallucination.'

Secondly, the center must utilize local expertise. This means knowledge of the target country's language, culture, and educational system as well as desires, concerns and expectations

of potential applicants and their families. Thirdly, relationships are very important. This is something any international student recruiter knows, but very few have the ability to truly establish and maintain a presence in the target country. Lastly, credibility is very important. Accessibility of information, rankings, and a delivery on promises is essential to success. For example, the China Center's Web site and promotional materials are in Chinese. Moreover, applicants and their parents can call or stop by to meet with a university representative. Almost daily communication between the China Center and the Office of International Affairs lends to clear expectations and extremely quick processing of applications." *-IE*

*Editor's Note: David DiMaria was preceded by Ted McKown II, who was responsible for helping to get the China Center established. McKown is now associate director of international affairs at the university.*

sourcing of institutional recruiting overseas through commissioned agents,” says Barmak Nassirian, AACRAO’s associate executive director.

While a draft of a new code of ethics that AACRAO is vetting does not address the issue directly “because there are too many genres of highly specific questions to be addressed,” Nassirian says he doubts that the AIRC and Hobsons moves will change AACRAO’s principles. “I think those principles would give pause to many of our institutions in terms of handing over recruitment activities to outside agents. The practice may be fairly compelling from a specific international recruitment perspective, but when you look at it from the institutional perspective, it defies credulity that institutions can engage in practices overseas that are entirely incompatible with their activities here,” he declares.

While most U.S. colleges and universities are “deliberate in terms of how they recruit, whom they

recruit, and whom they admit,” some see recruiting as “an opportunity to bring in revenues and internationalize the campus by the mere presence of international students and they obligate no additional resources and provide no further commitment than letting them in. We think that’s a problem,” Nassirian says.

In the end, says Sinclair, “every institution has to decide for itself whether it fits into their recruiting plan. A large state university may never need to do that because they get lots of students. But other institutions might need more strategies and any good recruiting strategy has many facets. There are so many different views. I think it will be a while, if ever, before there is total agreement on this topic. But it’s worthwhile to engage in the discussion, and question assumptions that we hold, and ask why we think this is or is not a good idea.” **IE**

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## International Students Help Recruit at Home

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS often travel back to their home countries during academic breaks. Sharing their experience attending college in the United States is a way that Rice University has found to indirectly recruit more international students. REAP International is Rice’s formal program that encourages international students to speak about their personal experiences at Rice on their holiday breaks, which began in 2005.

“The program allows students to go back and talk in their own country in their own language,” explains Adria

Baker, executive director of the Office of International Students and Scholars. “It allows international students to have leadership role.

We’ve had people speak to an auditorium of 800 students or a classroom of 25 kids. Upon returning to campus, they submit a written summary of what they did. It’s really creative. They have an opportunity to meet people in their own hometown city and they make their own contacts. REAP is dual purpose: it helps Rice University and helps students develop their own contacts for networking.”

International students who want to participate in the program, called student ambassadors, must visit two different institutions while they are in their home country. They choose where they would like to speak and contact the headmaster or principal themselves. Then, they submit an application on the program’s Web site for Rice University to accept or reject. Upon completion, they are required to have a letter showing that they spoke at the school.

During their presentations, students talk about their experiences as an international student at Rice University. They also give a virtual tour of the university online and if anyone

asks questions about admissions to Rice, the international students direct prospective applicants to Rice’s admissions Web site. International students get a certificate for participating, and thanks to funding that was obtained by the International Office, they also receive an honorarium.

Since the inception of the program, approximately 35 student ambassadors have participated, visiting about 16 countries. Baker estimates that nearly 5,000 young people have learned about Rice through the REAP program.

“We’ve gotten some really interesting stories with REAP,” says Baker. “For example, in Venezuela, one student went to speak, and the school was closed. Instead, they got the student on the radio and he spoke on two stations. We got more coverage than we ever expected.”

Allowing international students to speak about their education in the United States has proved to be a win-win situation for both Rice University and their students. This builds enthusiasm within our international students when they see that people in their country appreciate what they have to say,” says Baker. “It builds leadership skills within them.” **-IE**



An international student ambassador speaks about his experience at Rice University.