

Recruiting International Students— Community College Style

ROY MULEMI HEARD ABOUT COMMUNITY COLLEGE the way the majority of international students do—through word of mouth. His cousins lived in Texas and suggested he attend college there. Mulemi’s parents traveled from Kenya to check out area colleges and they decided on Lone Star College System in Houston, Texas.

“I decided on a two-year college so I could better integrate into the U.S.,” Mulemi says, who lives with his cousins. After graduating this June he will attend Sam Houston State University and then go on to earn a PhD. He hopes to use his education to “bring up my country through technology.” His dream? “To be president of Kenya one day,” he says.

Adding Diversity and a Global Perspective

Why recruit international students in the first place? The main reason cited by educators is to increase diversity on the campus and to expose students and faculty to people and ideas from other cultures.

“Even though we are a diverse college, international students add richness to the classroom,” Eddie West, dean of counseling and international programs at Ohlone College in Fremont, California, says. “Since most of our students will not be able to study abroad, this is the best proxy for an overseas experience, for both students and faculty.”

Ohlone College

Total enrollment: **8,853**
Year the college started recruiting international students: **2006**
Number of international students enrolled first year: **63**
Number of international students enrolled first year: **360**

“The world is more closely interconnected,” he says. “It is incumbent upon us as educators to weave global intercultural experiences into students’ education.”

Vilma Tafawa, executive director at Bunker Hill Community College in Boston, Massachusetts, agrees: “It does a lot for our students to meet someone from Kazakhstan or Kuwait. And the international students

are able to gain a perspective on America’s role in the world and learn about American culture.” Global learning has become one of the college’s goals, as evidenced by a new World Studies Certificate program.

Bunker Hill Community College

Total enrollment: **13,600**
Year the college started recruiting international students: **2002**
Number of international students enrolled first year: **484**
Number of international students enrolled now: **830**

Targeting Geographic Areas

Although many community colleges host students from 30 to 100 countries, Asia is overwhelmingly the most popular, with Latin America next in line. According to *Open Doors 2011* report, prepared by the Institute of International Education, 13.4 percent of international community college students in the United States came from South Korea; China and Vietnam were close behind. On average, 1.2 to 1.5 percent of a community college’s population includes international students.

At Ohlone, China and Vietnam lead the pack, with Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Myanmar next in line. Coast Community College District (in Costa Mesa, California), China, Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea are well represented; many of its domestic students are Asian American. The same

Glendale Community College

Total enrollment: **16,000**
Year the college started recruiting international students: **mid 1990s**
Number of international students enrolled first year: **fewer than 150**
Number of international students enrolled now: **500 per semester**

goes for Glendale Community College, also in California, with most of its students from South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, China, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Sweden also sends many students to GCC through a government funding program. The Lone Star College System in Texas attracts most of its international students from Mexico, Nepal, Venezuela, Columbia, and Vietnam.

Lone Star College System
 Total enrollment: **85,000**
 Year the college started recruiting international students: **2008**
 Number of international students enrolled first year: **2,238**
 Number of international students enrolled now: **2,600**

Before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, many international students at BHCC were from the Middle East. But when visas became more difficult from that region, the college switched its recruitment efforts to Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Today 150 students are from South Korea, 107 from China, and 67 from Vietnam, with others from the Congo, Senegal, and Japan.

Recruitment Tactics

How a college recruits international students is based on a number of factors: budget, staff, and policies. Those who can afford it send representatives overseas to attend college educational fairs and speak to high school students and their parents.

Some hire overseas recruitment agencies, which promote the college, as well as helping with visa applications, bank accounts, housing, and transportation.

Many colleges establish relationships with English-language schools, which often are the first stop for international students. They often refer students to community colleges.

Faculty members with ties to other countries may be drafted to help the cause, either directly when they visit or indirectly through phone calls and e-mail messages.

Some more familiar recruitment methods are also employed: Web sites,

advertising in international recruitment guides, social networking, and promotion materials in various languages. Geography is sometimes a factor. A well-known city like Boston or Houston may be attractive to some, while the weather in Florida or California may attract others.

But, overwhelmingly, the most successful recruitment tactic is word of mouth. At Lone Star, 95 percent of its international students come this way. “We tell them to share their journey with their friends and family,” Nithyanantha Sevanthinathan, executive director, international programs and services at Lone Star, says.

Sometimes help comes in unexpected ways. When Sevanthinathan visited a high school in Vietnam, he learned the principal’s daughter had graduated from Lone Star. The principal quickly arranged for a parent forum so he and Sevanthinathan could speak to them.

Challenges to Overcome

One of the biggest challenges administrators face is explaining the community college model because most foreign countries do not have any. Therefore, there’s a lack of information and misinformation about what they really are. West heard from a colleague overseas that some are apt to think it’s a place where you do arts and crafts or is a senior citizen center.

“We are misunderstood,” he says. “We need to show how a community college intersects with a four-year college.”

Recruiters constantly emphasize the advantages of community colleges: lower cost, smaller classes, dedicated teachers, and location.

Cost is a big issue, since international students pay three to four times the in-state tuition. At Hillsborough Community College (HCC) in Tampa, Florida, in-state students pay \$78 per credit, while those out-of state pay \$312. This is a boost for college coffers, but makes it difficult for many students to attend. Still, community colleges are much less expensive than traditional four-year colleges. Some countries

Hillsborough Community College
 Total enrollment: **48,016**
 Year the college started recruiting international students: **2010**
 Number of international students enrolled first year: **134**
 Number of international students enrolled first year: **184**

subsidize the cost for their student going abroad, while other students get financial help from their families.

Kenyan student Cephass Kaburu was excited to begin his college career at Tallahassee Community College (TCC) in Tampa, Florida, in 2011. But just two weeks before he was to start, he received news that his financial sponsor had been murdered in his home country. Without funds, Kaburu would have to return home. TCC had already sent home three students when the tuition increased by \$1,000. But the college started a scholarship fund and was able to fund Kaburu for two semesters. He intends to his work this summer to earn enough money to continue his studies.

Tallahassee Community College
 Total enrollment: **15,000**
 Year the college started recruiting international students: **2008**
 Number of international students enrolled first year: **81**
 Number of international students enrolled now: **88 in spring 2012**

Housing is another concern since most community colleges serve local students. Most international students live with friends or relatives, 95 percent at Lone Star. Others live with local host families or in apartments. Ohlone College has affiliated with a nearby housing provider where new international students can stay for a few weeks or months until they hook up with others to find affordable housing.

For the past five years, TCC has awarded 10 housing scholarships in a nearby apartment complex. “We try to give the scholarships to students who otherwise would not be able to come to TCC,” Betty Jensen, international student services coordinator, says.

HCC built a 420-bed residence for students; 19 international students live there. "It's part of the 'wow' factor when we're recruiting overseas and they see the modern apartment complex, with its pool and gym," Michael Brennan, director of international education, says.

Shinta Shintawati, project manager for international student recruitment, agrees: "A student from Indonesia changed his mind about attending another community college and decided to apply to HCC instead because of our on-campus housing."

English proficiency is a challenge for many international students because they need additional instruction. Usually they go to the community college or to a private English language school, which can take up to a couple of years. According to Andreea Serban, vice chancellor educational services and technology at CCCD, many students from Asia read and write English

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well, but speaking is more difficult. Almost 30 percent of the 924 international students came to the school after attending one of these English schools. Serban says a new regulation could have a "massive impact" on international student enrollment in the coming years. By 2013 all English teaching schools in the United States must be accredited by an agency recognized by the Secretary of Education.

Growing Enrollment

Enrollment in community colleges has gone up and down over the past few years. According to *Open Doors*, 89,853 international students attended U.S. community colleges in 2010–11, an increase of approximately 10 percent in the past decade. In 2008–09 it reached a high of 95,785. Last year enrollment decreased by 4.5 percent from the previous year.

Some schools have seen large increases, while others have been able to sustain its numbers. Both TCC and GCC have held steady, the former with 110 international students and GCC with 500 to 550 annually, both out of a total student body of 15,000. Others have shown large increases: CCCD went from 649 in 2007 to 924 in 2012; BHCC from 282 in 2001 to 830; LSCC from 1,200 in 2002 to 2,600 (rated number three in enrollment by *Open Doors*); and Ohlone College from 63 in 2006 to 360.

Retaining and Supporting

Support and guidance programs and activities are part of the recruitment package: international clubs and centers, mentor and buddy systems, counseling, speakers, and orientations. HCC requires international students to enroll in a one-credit orientation course to introduce them to the college's resources and help them acclimate.

Immigration forms are a hassle, and require specialized staff to guide students through the process. International students have special requirements to obtain and keep their F-1 visas, which permits them to study in the United States. Students have to carry a full load of at least 12 credits and are precluded from working off campus during the school year. TCC has academic, career, and immigration advisers in one office "so mistakes are less likely to occur," according to Jensen. HCC also has a one-stop approach by combining various offices into one "so we can set them up to be successful from application through graduation," Brennan says.

ADVERTISER'S Index

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATOR | JULY+AUG.2012

<p>Aetna Student Health23</p> <p>Arizona State University (American English & Culture Program)25</p> <p>Ascension Benefits & Insurance Solutions (formerly Renaissance and Summit America)8</p> <p>Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE)45</p> <p>Cambridge English: Advanced9</p> <p>Chartis39</p> <p>College Year in Athens51</p> <p>ELS Educational Services, Inc.back cover</p>	<p>ETS-GRE7</p> <p>ETS-TOEFLinside front cover</p> <p>Gateway WorldMed27</p> <p>HTH Worldwide11</p> <p>IELTS International3</p> <p>Nanyang Technological University13</p> <p>On Call International51</p> <p>University of Technology, Sydneyinside back cover</p> <p>WorldLearning10</p>
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International Student Recruitment Strategies for Community Colleges

- Marketing and advertising with multiple publications and agencies with both print and online advertisements
- Place magazine ads in countries where most international students come from and place ads in magazines that focus on advertising in overseas countries
- Provide promotional materials to various partners and agencies abroad
- Improve marketing (Web site and Facebook)
- Ongoing visits and in-person presentations and outreach to local language schools
- Partnership agreements with international recruiters
- Participation in overseas recruitment fairs and expos
- Housing scholarships
- Engage services of StudyUSA, online resource for students, parents and educational advisors around world; engaged services of American Association of Community Colleges' Profiles of U.S. Community Colleges;
- Create intensive English program
- Recruiting video on YouTube and other sources and will be handed out to international students returning to their countries on vacation or for good, to take to their high schools
- Seamless 2+2 transfer program
- Build support infrastructure by opening Center for International Education at largest campus
- Streamline application process, developing technology-based communications management with prospective students and applicants
- Launch multifaceted recruitment effort in Asia and Latin America including college fairs, agents, high school visits, Education USA offices
- Create a "culture of evidence" by measuring what we do for purpose of realizing continuous quality improvement
- Create a special program—Coastline Community College offers a unique program known as Education Bound United States (EBUS) which enables students to take college-level credit courses while in their home country (EBUS is conducted in partnerships with foreign high schools and colleges)

Tips provided by professionals representing institutions mentioned in this article.

Two + Two

Partnerships with four-year colleges and universities are one of the most important selling points for recruiters. Students and their parents want to know that once they've completed the associate's degree, there is a clear path to a four-year college or university.

Lone Star has agreements with approximately 80 universities to smooth the transition from two- to four-year colleges. In addition, five Texas universities have annexes on two of the Lone Star campuses. And two of those have joint admission for international students if they meet the academic requirements.

HCC gives conditional letters of acceptance to The University of South Florida. "This makes the 2+2 concept less abstract for students, their parents (influencing students' decisions), and consular affairs officials (making visa issuance or denial decisions)," Brennan says. "We are committed

to executing agreements that create specific road maps for international students to four-year degrees at multiple institutions."

CCCD has a dual admission program in which students admitted to any of its three colleges are guaranteed admission at the same time to one of nine four-year universities, if they meet the academic requirements. These universities are located throughout the country, including Iowa, New Jersey, Michigan, and Florida. "This eliminates some of the risk," Serban says. "Parents invest a lot to have their children study abroad and want a guarantee of admission to a four-year university."

Advice to Other Recruiters

Patience, appropriate resources, and a dedicated staff are vital to the success of an international student program, according to international advisers. The staff needs to meet regularly with international students

to ward off problems, guide them, and make sure they know about available resources.

"It needs a full commitment and support by the campus at large for any international student office to be successful," David J. Nelson, director of international recruitment and outreach at GCC," says.

"They need to take the long view and make sure they understand they're not going to see results overnight," West says. "You can't just dabble in it."

According to Serban, there are significant up-front costs to establish a robust international student program, but once the program is strong it will be self-sustaining and even add to the college's coffers. "We are not doing this just for the revenue," she says. "We want to make sure we prepare our students for a global society." And she cautioned that as the numbers of students increase, the numbers of staff must also increase.

Others expressed caution in hiring recruitment agencies and strongly suggested carefully checking them out before signing on the dotted line.

Sevanthinathan recommends looking at your own community to assess what's happening globally there. "If a company is working overseas, you might hook up with them to recruit in that country."

Maxim Khristenko came to BHCC from Sakhalin, Russia. "I knew there was more opportunity in America." He graduated with an associate's degree in communications, is now taking the requirements for business school and plans to apply to Boston University and Harvard. "This was more affordable, there are a huge number of international students, and I loved my professors. This is definitely the way to go."

Summing it up, Brennan says: "Growing and diversifying our international student population produces a multiplier effect for domestic students, faculty, and curriculum." **IE**

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