



BY MENACHEM WECKER

MAGNET SCHOOLS?

“WHEN THE UNITED STATES SNEEZES,” it used to be said, “the world catches a cold,” a reference to the nation’s outsized influence. Now India, the second-largest sender of international students to U.S. universities and the planet’s second most populous nation, may be on a path to eventually becoming the international education equivalent.

In a two-pronged education strategy, India aims to simultaneously attract international students and to keep more Indian students from selecting higher education institutions abroad, its Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced in March. To be sure, the nation is just beginning this initiative in earnest. But for U.S. institutions, the consequences of India’s growth strategy having even modest success in siphoning off Asian or other international students who might otherwise attend in the United States could be profound: The effort could begin chipping away at the more than \$5 billion annually that Indian students spend when they study in the United States, according to U.S. Department of Commerce estimates.

For U.S. institutions that rely on international students to make their budget and internationalization goals, the timing poses a challenge: India is the fastest-growing source of their international students at a time when the flow of Chinese international students has slowed and universities are working urgently to diversify their sourcing.

As India Expands Internal Capacity and Launches New Initiatives to Attract Top International Students, U.S. Universities Are Watching Closely

As of 2013, all Indian colleges and universities have been required to be accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council and the National Body for Accreditation in order to raise standards at the two-thirds of universities and four-fifths of colleges that were not accredited.

In 2015–16, nearly half of international students at U.S. colleges came from China (about 32 percent) and India (about 16 percent). China's 328,547 students outpaced India's 165,918, but the number of Indian international students in U.S. universities grew nearly 25 percent over the previous year. The number of Chinese international students in the United States grew only about 8 percent, according to Institute of International Education data.

But India will have to overcome significant challenges to ramp up the quality and availability of its own educational institutions, international education experts say, if it is to truly compete with the United States and the United Kingdom on a global scale.

Unrealized Potential

This isn't the first time India's outsized higher education ambitions have drawn attention. In 2009, international press coverage celebrated India's higher education goals, and its human resources minister believed he would turn its higher educational landscape around. "That never really materialized," says William Brustein, West Virginia University's (WVU) vice president for global strategies and international affairs.

India was trying to convince U.S. and UK universities to invest in Indian campuses, and Brustein, then Ohio State University's (OSU) vice provost, oversaw OSU's Indian "gateway" launch. But when he attended education summits in India hosted by the influential Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Brustein recalls government ministers and vice chancellors all echoing each other: "India was going to create the Harvards, Stanfords, and Dukes throughout India," in addition to its public Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), he says. "I kind of scratched my head."

Brustein questioned why India wasn't meeting its need for scaled-up higher education capacity with the land grant model, which has been successful for The Pennsylvania State University, the University of Wisconsin, Michigan State University, OSU, North Carolina State University, and others. "You can go down the list that really serve a much greater population, and traditionally they've had great engineering and agricultural programs," he says. "They listened, but I didn't see anything done."

Hopes on the Way to Reality?

In July 2016, two scholars associated with the Association of Indian Universities released a study finding that no more than 26 Indian universities had a sizable number of international students, and even that number may be generous: "If one goes through parameters, such as collaborations with foreign universities, infrastructure to accept international students, and faculty that can encourage international students on campus, the number would not be more than 10 to 15 universities," says Vidya Yeravdekar, principal director of the Symbiosis Society of 46 schools and more than 27,000 students from all of India's states and more than 85 countries.

Whichever estimate one uses, it's a tiny slice of the larger Indian landscape of nearly 800 universities and nearly 40,000 colleges, Yeravdekar notes.

One significant and noticeable difference may be that India's leadership is now taking note of the challenges: Indian press reports have noted that President Shri Pranab Mukherjee takes a keen interest in reversing India's poor showing on international higher education rankings.

Observers in India and elsewhere note that the country's higher education system also has built-in

advantages, including affordability and the fact that its universities all provide instruction in English, the international language of business, science, technology, engineering, and other key fields.

But Yeravdekar says the government there needs to focus on developing and implementing a workable strategy to attract international students. The governmental University Grants Commission allows Indian universities to enroll up to 15 percent international students. Using that formula, Yeravdekar says, it could have 4.3 million international students. Instead, she notes, "India has hardly 40,000 international students."

The country also faces daunting odds just meeting domestic demand: In 2011, Indian leaders estimated that the country needed to build 1,000 new universities and 50,000 new colleges by 2020 to serve its own projected population. "This has been simply impossible to achieve: 125 new universities and 6,250 new colleges per year," says Girish Ballolla, CEO of the international education company Gen Next Education.

Regulatory and Quality Concerns

When Brustein began working with schools and governmental organizations in India when he was at Ohio State, he had heard from colleagues about Indian red tape and bureaucracy, but had no such troubles.

Many Indian faculty members and administrators, he found, are trained at U.S. or European schools. "Many of them are familiar with our system," he says. "There was nothing more significant I can think of than if we had a relationship with a UK or a French university."

Others have had different impressions. Gen Next Education's Ballolla says that in his experience, some Indian institutions have challenges ranging "from incentive-based admissions practices to instructional malpractices to unethical evaluation, which have led to the survival of sub-par institutions."

Kevin Kinser, head of Penn State's education policy studies department and an education professor, agrees. "India has had more difficulties than success on the national level, with corruption still being a problem and the lack of an efficient quality assurance process," he says. "India is not an easy country to work in. They have developed a big presence in overseas campuses, but questions of quality and legality are ever present."

One of India's biggest challenges remains creating an efficient and effective regulatory infrastructure for institutional quality and autonomy, says Rahul Choudaha, CEO of the research and consulting firm DrEducation.

"With 34 million students, India is already the second-largest postsecondary education system in the world," he says. However, "The regulatory framework

By the Numbers:

A Snapshot of Indian Higher Education

- The Indian Ministry of Human Resource and Development counts 757 universities and 38,056 colleges in India for the 2015–16 year. (Source: Institute of International Education, <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Project-Atlas/Explore-Data/India/Higher-Education-Sector--Most-Recent>)
 - Number of Indian postsecondary institutions among the top 500 in the 2016 QS World University Rankings: 8 (the same number as in 2010). By comparison, there were 97 U.S. institutions in the top 500 (12 fewer than in 2010). (Source: Economic Times, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/this-is-why-india-started-its-own-university-ranking-system/articleshow/58155300.cms>)
 - In early 2016 India approved 10,000 new spots for foreign students at its Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). But those students would pay \$6,000 to \$7,500 per year, compared with the annual tuition of \$1,350 that Indian students pay. (Source: ICEF, <http://monitor.icef.com/2016/03/indian-technology-institutes-open-admissions-to-foreign-students/>)
 - By 2025, India will have 119 million young people (aged 18 to 22) ready to enter higher education, dwarfing China's estimated 80 million, according to a December 2015 British Council study: <https://ei.britishcouncil.org/educationintelligence/shape-international-education-2025>. The study notes that after China, the next largest populations in
- that age group will be Indonesia, Nigeria, the United States, Pakistan, Brazil, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the Philippines, and then Russia.
- In 2015–16, the countries that sent the largest proportion of international students to India were: Nepal (21 percent of all its international students), Afghanistan (10 percent), Bhutan (6 percent), Sudan and Nigeria (5 percent each), Malaysia (4 percent), and United Arab Emirates, Iran, Yemen, and Sri Lanka (3 percent each). (Source: All India Survey on Higher Education, http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/AISHE2015-16.pdf)

has not kept pace with the growth and pace of change with the students, institutions, and employers,” he says. “A large number of regulatory bodies [in a] territorial power struggle have only created more confusion for stakeholders. They have neither helped students in making informed choices nor institutions in improving quality.”

Martha Denney, emeritus director of international education at Colorado State University and an independent international higher education programs consultant, also sees some of the for-profit schools in India as a problem. Business tycoons who are trying to capitalize on the dearth of educational programs to make money are creating schools that lack quality, and some are “absolute scams,” she says. “What you are seeing is an explosion of private schools.”

There are also unpredictable student strikes and the vagaries of trying to expeditiously navigate the bureaucracy of programs, according to Denney.

What's Next?

Looking forward, WVU's Brustein predicts that India will continue down the path China is already on—the same one South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan traveled on their way to creating their own internationally competitive educational institutions.

“They used to send many more students to the U.S., but then they developed great universities,” he says. “More and more students and their families did cost-benefit analyses and said, ‘You know, for the quality of education we can get here for the price, staying in-country might be the answer.’ In years to come, that’s going to happen more and more with China and India.”

That’s why U.S. universities need to diversify their source of students, according to Brustein, who notes that Iran was the largest source of international students in the United States in the 1970s until the 1979 revolution there. “It can change and we must adapt to those changes.”

Over the coming years and decades, Vietnam, Bangladesh, or Nigeria, with its growing middle class, might become the next largest source of students. In the meantime, higher education observers say, India continues to bear watching.

As noted in a report by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry and the accounting and professional services firm Ernst & Young, the nation has been systematically targeting the hurdles—including a relative lack of emphasis on research output, international collaboration, and incubation/entrepreneurship—that have put a drag on its higher education reputation.

The Indian government has also taken comprehensive steps to boost the quality of higher education there: As of 2013, all colleges and universities have been required to be accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council and the National Body for Accreditation in order to raise standards at the two-thirds of universities and four-fifths of colleges that were not accredited.

Perhaps an early reflection of these efforts and a sign of things to come has been a notable rise in domestic student interest in Indian institutions. Engineering and management institutes have reported a 20 percent to 35 percent boost in applications this admission season. ■

MENACHEM WECKER is a reporter based in Washington, D.C.

For More Information:

- “10 Universities That Attract the Most International Students,” from *U.S. News & World Report*, about the U.S. universities with the highest percentages of international students: <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/the-short-list-college/articles/2016-07-05/10-universities-that-attract-the-most-international-students>
- “2016 Top Markets Report Education Country Case Study: India,” published by the U.S. Department of Commerce’s International Trade Administration, and part of a broader “Top Markets” web tool: http://trade.gov/topmarkets/pdf/Education_India.pdf
- *All India Survey on Higher Education (2015-16)*, a 2016 report of the government of India’s Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education: http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/AISHE2015-16.pdf
- *Higher education in India: Moving towards global relevance and competitiveness*: [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY_-_Higher_education_in_India/\\$FILE/EY-higher-education-in-india.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY_-_Higher_education_in_India/$FILE/EY-higher-education-in-india.pdf)
- *Inbound International Student Mobility in India: Path to Achievable Success*, by Vidya Rajiv Yeravdekar, published by the Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC), Sept. 2016: http://www.ris.org.in/pdf/FIDC_DP2.pdf
- *Indian Students Mobility Report, 2016: Latest Trends from India and Globally*, published by the New Delhi-based M.M. Advisory Services: <http://mdotm.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/MM-Report-2016-Final.pdf>
- “Outbound internationally mobile students by host region,” part of a trove of data on the UNESCO website: <http://uis.unesco.org/indicator/edu-mobility-out-out>
- *Understanding India: The future of higher education and opportunities for international cooperation*: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/understanding_india_report.pdf

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