A 360° View

BY CHARLOTTE WEST

A successful comprehensive approach to international enrollment management must include all aspects of the process—from recruiting and admissions to retention and graduation.

LL TOO OFTEN, when administrators talk about "international enrollment management" (IEM), they concentrate efforts on marketing and recruitment without requisite investment in admissions, student services, retention, and graduation. International education leaders argue that a more successful and effective approach to international enrollment management involves a holistic and comprehensive perspective that includes campus stakeholders ranging from upper-level administration and faculty to academic advisers and food services representatives. Strategies for successfully advocating for comprehensive IEM include presenting hard facts and figures about both revenue and quality of students, linking IEM to broader institutional goals and values, and making sure someone with an international perspective is present during wider discussions about not only enrollment but also any issues affecting international students and the experiences they have on campus.



Fanta Aw, director of international scholar and student services at American University in Washington, D.C., says IEM is not just about how many students are being brought in, but also about diversity and academic quality.

"You really need to have a 360-degree view of this. It's not just about recruitment, the admissions process, but also retention and building the alumni pipeline. All too often, I think people make the case for recruitment without really thinking about the retention piece. The retention piece is key because it speaks to the caliber of students you are bringing onto your campus," Aw says.

Jacqueline Vogl, assistant vice president for international enrollment management at the State University of New York in Plattsburgh, concurs, describing IEM as a "targeted approach to all aspects of the decisionmaking process for international students."

"We are part and parcel of a larger enrollment management plan. We liaise with every office on cam-

pus that touches international students whether they are degree-seeking students or exchange students," Vogl says.

Besides offices like admissions, student life, and academic affairs, this also includes housing and food services. For instance, certain student groups might have dietary needs that need to be accommodated.

In addition to preparing the campus for the presence of international students, such an approach has the added benefit of garnering additional support. As Aw puts it, "what you get is buy-in from different sectors because people are involved in the process."

Dennis Dunham, executive director of the international office at the University of Central Oklahoma, adds that this also builds an alumni network that can be essential to future recruiting: "Getting international students is just part of it. You need to have the services and activities to keep them here. It's also important later on, as 30–40 percent of our enrollment is based on student referral."



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IEM can also be an integral part of larger international affairs offices with close connections to education abroad. Vogl, who has extensive experience working with international enrollment, was recently given oversight over education abroad programs for domestic students.

"When one thinks about international enrollment management, sometimes the study abroad aspect is not on the radar. There is cross-pollination and a real power that comes from having those two populations of students interact, work together, and learn together," she says.

As an example, several returning education abroad students were hired to work during the autumn orientation for newly enrolling international students. "They have experienced being a stranger in a strange land, and they know this campus better than anyone else. It also gave them an opportunity for them to professionalize their study abroad experience," Vogl explains.

In the same vein, Vice Provost for International Affairs David Schmidt describes his office at Middle Tennessee State University as a "one-stop shop for international affairs."

"Study abroad and international enrollment can be very collaborative and complimentary. It just makes sense and it's more efficient and beneficial to the campus ethos of globalizing and internationalizing," he explains.

Multiple Benefits

The benefits of a comprehensive approach to IEM are many, not in the least because it provides a broad base for support for internationalization as well as a realistic view of what is appropriate for a particular institution.

Aw argues that such an approach to IEM has more benefits than just monetary. "The return on investment is much broader than how much did you invest into the program and how much did you get out. There are other intangibles that are equally important," she says.

For example, Vogl says that international students are only 7 percent of the population at SUNY Plattsburgh, but they are much more heavily represented in honor societies and leadership roles. "They embody all of the ways in which we hope to develop leaders among our student population," she says.

For regional universities like Plattsburgh and community colleges with smaller numbers of outbound domestic students, IEM has the additional benefit of adding a crosscultural component at home.

Jonathn Weller, director of international admissions at University of Cincinnati, says the vast majority of students at his institution don't participate in education abroad programs: "One of the ways we can help them prepare for the twenty-first century workforce is by getting an international experience on their own campus."

Schmidt agrees that international enrollment contributes to the overall diversity on campus: "When you look at the diversity of our



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students in terms of where they come from, most come from a 50–100 miles radius. Bringing other students from around the world to influence the residence halls, the student groups and clubs, and athletic teams is part of our overall approach to international affairs."

Several experts reiterate that successfully implementing IEM is dependent upon having homegrown support. While there are strategies to successfully lobby reluctant faculty members and administrators, IEM and greater internationalization goals have to fit in with the institutional mission.

"If there's not an inherent desire to increase the global perspective on campus, it would be a challenge (to implement IEM)," Vogl says, adding that at her institution, located in the Northeast, the need grew from a practical need to boost recruitment when there weren't enough domestic students to fill seats.

In other regions, such as California, public institutions can face the opposite problem. There can be reluctance to increase international enrollment as international students are seen as taking spots away from domestic students, who are already facing tough competition to get in. Ohlone College, a two-year community college, is an example where this is occurring.

"People have a tendency to misperceive what's going on and say that if there are three students from China, three fewer students

from the local community can take that class. We try to counter the tendency for that misperception and explain it's not a zero sum game," explains Eddie West, director of international programs and services at Ohlone.

He explains that they create additional course sections based on the anticipated enrollment of international students, which is on top of local enrollment caps. That means there will be a maximum number of domestic students regardless of the number of international students brought in. He emphasizes, however, that the additional course sections are not international-student only as they strive to integrate them across the curriculum.

Link to Broader Institutional Goals and Strategies

One practical approach for success is to strategically link an IEM plan to broader institutional strategies. This applies to not only general advocacy but also in concrete enrollment plans and other related documents. "If you can't point to the core institutional mission and values to anchor this work, chances are you are going to have a hard time trying to sell this," Aw explains. "For the campus leadership, IEM needs to be part of a larger strategy. You need to specify how this endeavor fits with the institutional mission."

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The quality of the students, how they are performing academically, how we are retaining them and at what rate compared to domestic students.... These are metrics to measure the success of IEM.



At Ohlone, the international programs and services office has just ratified their 2011-2015 strategic plan. "Having that as an existing document that we can refer to is gong to be hugely beneficial. We deliberately linked our international education and exchange goals, including IEM goals, to the broader goals and objective of our college, which has its own overarching strategic plan. We then set out to create our plan in such a way that it was purposefully supportive of the broader goals of the (institution). People who wouldn't necessarily have an affinity for international education can see the rationale if you do link it to something they do care about," West says.

At Middle Tennessee State University, they determined what percentage international students should make up of the total student population and it was put into the university's master plan. "I think once that's articulated and the university buys into it, it's a very important number," Schmidt says.

In addition to strategically linking international enrollment plans to broader institutional goals, there is also a particular logic in formulating such a plan. Dunham spent 18 months developing an IEM plan for the University of Central Oklahoma and implemented it in 2009. He believes the goal of such a plan is to link international enrollment goals with other offices and competencies on campus. "People will come to you and say how many students can you bring in? That's where it gets tricky, needless to say. How do you do that? Answering that question is what the enrollment plan does," he explains.

"You don't want to say 'I'm going to bring in 100 students.' Instead, it's, 'If we're able to do X, Y, Z, we can bring in 100 students.' You link everything to 'ifs' and 'thens'."



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Have Someone at the Table

In addition to putting it in writing, it's also important to have a presence in the campus committees making decisions that affect international enrollment. "Someone who is advocating IEM has to be at the table. If there are discussions about enrollment management, and no one is there to represent the international side of it, it's almost always lost," Schmidt says.

Across the board, international enrollment leaders stress that one of the ways to make a case for IEM is with hard facts and figures. Schmidt says he always points to figures such as international students having lower discount rates and higher retention rates.

Aw agrees: "I have found that all too often people embark on this road without substantial evidence-based data for their case. The quality of the students, how they are performing academically, how we are retaining them and at what rate compared to domestic students. . . . These are metrics to measure the success of IEM," Aw says.

But the specific arguments you should use depend on who you are talking to. Dunham says it's important to have support from the top leadership of three different camps: student affairs, finance, and academic affairs.

As Aw puts it, "you really need to understand stakeholders and speak their language," while Schmidt says "you have to sell to different constituencies."

Vogl explains it like this: "I always pitch to the audience. If its the vice president for business affairs, for instance, then I go back to data decisionmaking and really look at the financial impact of international student enrollment. The revenue-generating side is a very practical application of why this benefits us. When I'm talking as an educator, to faculty for instance, we talk about globalization and preparing our domestic students for a market that is very global in nature."

West says he uses both the financial argument and the cross-cultural benefits international students bring to campus: "We deliberatively put forth both of those arguments. One or both are going to resonate with almost everyone."

Both arguments are important. Aw argues that while support from top leadership is essential, so is support from middle leadership. "Often what I hear is as long as we have the support of the president or the



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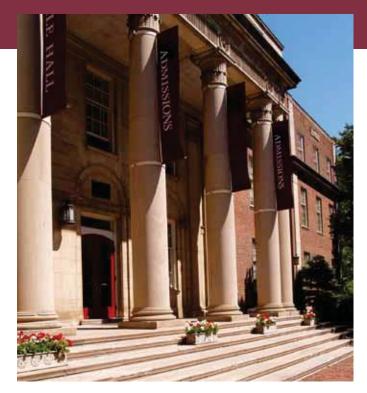
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provost, we're ready to go. But you need to have the support of the faculty and the deans. If you can't get your middle leadership to move with it, it doesn't matter that the president supports it," she says. "The way to engage faculty and deans is to make sure you are talking about retention and quality of programs."

Weller says they have tried to promote a lot of grassroots efforts to gain support for IEM at the University of Cincinnati. "We spend a lot of time working with faculty members and deans to develop very specific plans to support their unique interests. We haven't been trying to force colleges and deans and faculty to do something; we've been inviting people to come to table and participate," he says.

For institutions that are just starting to consider comprehensive IEM strategies, another tactic to "sell" your idea is to draw parallels to peer institutions. Schmidt advises: "Do subtle comparisons—subtle because you don't want to embarrass upper administrators of your

own institution—and say, 'Let's not just replicate what they are doing. Let's do something better."

"Look at institutions like yours that have successfully developed IEM plans and show what the return on their investment has been," Vogl adds.

Reinvestment

Another argument in favor of IEM is that successful international enrollment can be used to enhance, and in some cases fund, broader internationalization goals and international activities.

University of Cincinnati might be an ideal case of reinvestment. "We have been successful at convincing the university to reinvest some of the tuition revenue these students are providing into support services that help both international and American students," Weller says.

His office has grown in direct correlation to an increase in international student enrollment. They have used the money to expand their ESL program and fund a number of education abroad scholarships for U.S. students.

Ohlone has also used international enrollment revenue to fund other international activities. It has helped fund a faculty exchange program to China, which in turn created broader support for internationalization.

"International enrollment and the revenue it generates actually help to subsidize these other important activities. The experience abroad helps our faculty immensely in understanding our Chinese students. One of the goals we have in running these faculty exchange programs is that our faculty will be that much more accepting of our international students," West says.

CHARLOTTE WEST is a freelance writer in Seattle, Washington. Her last article for *IE* was "You're on Facebook...Now What?" in the May/June 2011 issue.



Six Key Questions

Answering these questions can help you successfully implement an international enrollment management strategy:

- **1.** How will IEM enhance the academic profile of the institution?
- 2. How does the presence of international students inside and outside the classroom enhance the overall community?
- **3.** How does IEM fit in with the learning paradigm?
- **4.** How does IEM allow you to enhance a broader internationalization mandate?
- **5.** Is the infrastructure appropriate to specific IEM activities?
- 6. Is there an appropriate level of intercultural competency on the campus to ensure that once these students arrive, they will be fully integrated both inside and outside of the classroom?

-Fanta Aw, director of international scholar and student services at American University