

Enrollment

Is Up!

By Charlotte West

Germany is rapidly increasing the number of international students enrolled to keep pace with an expanding world market.

AIMING TO BOOST ITS INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY A THIRD FROM THE CURRENT 265,000 TO AT LEAST 350,000 BY 2020, the German government has launched an ambitious plan to maintain its position as a leading destination for international students. In 2011 Germany hosted 6.3 percent of the world's 4.3 million international students, making it the third-leading study abroad destination after the United States and the United Kingdom.¹

According to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the country aims to maintain its 6 percent market share of the expanding total worldwide international student population through coordinated marketing, strategic partnerships, and exchanges. Stefan Hase-Bergen, head of communication and marketing at DAAD, says that ultimately they are seeking to build cooperative partnerships—common study programs and exchanges with institutions in other countries—in part to help support their target of sending German students abroad. “We are very partner oriented in our international recruitment efforts. We want to create a win-win situation for both sides,” Hase-Bergen says.

Since 2009 international enrollment has increased every year to reach the highest number of international students ever enrolled at German higher education institutions in 2013. The number of German students pursuing higher education is also at an all-time high. The 282,201 international students make up between 11.3 percent of the entire student population in Germany, which was an increase of approximately 17,000 students from the preceding year. Of those

282,201 international students, approximately 193,000 did their previous education outside of Germany while 72,000 are foreign nationals who have a German university entrance qualification.²

According to DAAD, the top five sending countries to Germany in 2012–2013 for bachelor's degree programs were China, Russia, Austria, Cameroon, and Bulgaria. For master's programs, the top countries represented were China, India, Russia, Iran, and Turkey. The most popular subjects are engineering; law, economics, and social sciences; mathematics and natural sciences; and language and cultural studies.

English Language Instruction

Much of the growth has been among students seeking full degree programs at the bachelor's or master's levels, many of which are offered in English. Along with the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries, Germany was one of the first non-Anglophone countries in Europe to offer full-degree programs where the language of instruction was English. In 2013, for example, Germany offered more than 700 English-taught master's programs, the second largest number in Europe after the Netherlands. However, while countries like Denmark and Sweden continue to see significant growth of English-taught programs, the number of programs in Germany seems to have leveled off.³

Hase-Bergen says that around 10 percent of degree programs are taught in English, and international degree programs are part of every German institution's internationalization efforts. For its part, DAAD is encouraging institutions to create additional English-taught programs, both to make domestic students more competitive and to attract international students. Hase-Bergen estimates that around 20–25 percent of international students are currently studying in English.

In conjunction with its goal of increasing its international student enrollment, the German government has set a target of sending at least half of German students abroad before they finish their degree. To encourage German students to go abroad, DAAD and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) launched a "Go Out!" campaign beginning in 2006. The campaign has included the provision of funding to universities to promote study abroad opportunities, a yearly symposium on German student mobility, and an annual study abroad magazine. Hase-Bergen says that 50 percent is an ambitious target as the current study abroad rate for German students is about 30 percent. German study abroad rates have remained relative stable for the last several years, but a reform of the German higher education system and degree structure due to the Bologna Process have meant that the type of study abroad—short term programs versus full degrees abroad—has changed.

Tuition Policy is a Factor

One of the major factors attracting international students is the lack of tuition at most higher education institutions in Germany. While many of its European neighbors such as Sweden and Denmark have implemented fees for international students coming from outside the European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EEA) in the last decade, Germany has moved in the opposite direction by eliminating them. In 2005 around half of the German federal states introduced modest fees for international students, but most states have subsequently abolished tuition.

"Our aim is not to earn any money from tuition. We have a philosophy that higher education has to be financed by the state and there has been a strong political resistance to tuition," Hase-Bergen explains.

Students from countries like the United States and the United Kingdom with high tuition say that the non-existent tuition is one of the reasons they decided to study in Germany. Hase-Bergen notes that since 2011, DAAD has seen more than a 13 percent increase

in students coming from the UK, which significantly increased its tuition for all students in fall 2012.

Nicole Gonyea, who is originally from the United States, received a dual master's degree in international relations from Jacobs University Bremen and the University of Bremen in 2012. "Other than a one-time registration fee and semester fees, there were no tuition fees due

to the degree's connection with the University of Bremen, a public university. For me, this was a very strong reason for deciding to study in Germany, and in this program in particular. Despite not having tuition fees, the program offered a structured program not unlike that in the United States with renowned professors. Additionally, the students in the program were from around the world—a major benefit for a degree program in international relations," she says.

Tuition was also a factor for fellow U.S. student Eric Miller, who earned a master's in comparative German studies at Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg in August 2014. He studied abroad in Germany as an undergraduate at Boston College and returned later as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant. Because he was fluent in German, he was able to pursue a program taught in German.

"There were a number of benefits for me in studying in Germany. First, I had already had to take out large student loans to complete my bachelor's and could not have afforded to pursue a master's degree in the United States. The approximately €150 I was expected to pay per semester in Germany was a true bargain. Second, seeing as one part of my bachelor's was in German studies, it was a natural fit that I should supplement that degree with a master's in a similar subject and from Germany itself. I also appreciated



the interdisciplinary nature of my master's program, which is not always something one finds in their studies in Germany (but is much more common in the U.S.)... It was also beneficial for me to be able to get work experience next to my studies, and the flexibility and independence of the German system allowed me to do this with relatively little issue," he says.

However, although students cite the lack of tuition as a major selling point of German higher education, it is not something that the institutions themselves highlight in their recruitment efforts. "(International students) pay social the contributions like all students, about €250 per semester. We don't use this information for marketing," says Anne Gellert, director of the international office at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf.

Diverse Student Profiles and Other Advantages

Another advantage for German institutions is that their international student populations look different than in other countries,

according to Martin Bickl, director of the international office at Goethe-University Frankfurt. "(The lack of tuition) means a very different international student profile than Australian, British, or North American universities have. Our student body is much less skewed towards 'commercially exploitable' subjects like business or engineering. Our international students also study subjects with much less of a financial return such as social sciences, arts, and humanities. Our student population is also much more diverse, with no single nation representing more than 10 percent of total international student enrollment," Bickl says.

Hase-Bergen believes that one of the main reasons students are attracted to German education is the combination of teaching and research, especially on the master's level. "We have a dual focus on research and applied learning, and very closely cooperation with companies," he says.

He also cites the safety of the country, the strong economy, and low living costs as additional factors attracting international students to Germany. In addition, it has recently liberalized its immigration

The oldest university in Germany, Heidelberg University (HU), is also one of the country's most internationally focused higher education institutions. Seventeen percent of its total student population and one-third of its enrolled doctoral students come from abroad. HU has exchanges established with 470 universities worldwide and 19 university partnerships and three international research training groups. Additionally, Heidelberg has a satellite campus in Latin America and liaison offices in North America and Asia. Another initiative is the International Summer School of German Language and Culture, which attracts more than 500 students from around the world every year, many of whom later return to Heidelberg for longer study abroad programs.

Heidelberg was one of the first German universities to launch an alumni program, Heidelberg Alumni International (HAI), in 1996. Originally, the program was focused on international alumni, but eventually integrated domestic initiatives. Communicating with its members via a website, newsletters, the alumni magazine, events, and social media, HAI includes international alumni clubs in different countries, national groups, professional groups by discipline, and a research alumni group for former researchers and visiting professors.

According to Irmintraud Jost, executive director of the Heidelberg University Association, HAI also offers career services, internships, a mentoring program, seminars, and continuing education as well as special travel opportunities to its members.

There are currently more than 10,000 active members of the HAI international network. "Heidelberg Alumni are the university's best ambassadors. Besides the university's strong academic performance, having former students talking about their terrific experience at Heidelberg University is a great incentive for future students to enroll as well," she says.

One example of how alumni are helping the institutions in its marketing and recruitment efforts is a scholarship for U.S. students who want to study in Heidelberg sponsored by the Heidelberg Alumni U.S. (HAUS) group. "The alumni would like to offer the same opportunity and experience they enjoyed to the next generation," Jost explains.



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laws to allow non-EU/EEA students who complete a degree at a German institution to stay and work in the country after graduation for a period of time.

Full Classes Has Meant Little Marketing by Universities

Although DAAD works to promote Germany as a study destination and provides some support to institutions to increase their profiles internationally, German universities have been rather late to embrace full-scale international marketing and recruitment strategies.

“Different to many Anglo-American institutions, which ask for tuition fees and have a different motivation for their international student recruitment, many German universities do not see an urgent need for intensive marketing. That means that only few universities have their own marketing departments. At the moment, the programs are in fact full, which is one reason (why universities aren’t doing much marketing). The second is that Germany is attractive to international students anyway. We have seen an increase of 20 percent in the last three years,” Hase-Bergen says.

Simone Mueller, a representative of the international office at the University of Duisburg-Essen, says that although her institution doesn’t do any specific international marketing and recruitment, international applications jumped from around 3,000 to 8,000 between the 2012–2013 and 2013–2014 academic years. This has meant that admission for international students has become much more competitive and the workload has increased significantly for staff.

“We have too many applications. It’s very comfortable for us at the moment,” she says, adding that she is unsure of why the number of applications increased so much.

However, Hase-Bergen adds that German institutions have realized the necessity of marketing in the last decade. “But they often do not have enough funds and resources to do more marketing. So compared with institutions for example in UK or U.S.A., marketing at German universities is still at a low level...A lot of work needs to be done to convince and support them, which is what we (at DAAD) are doing,” he explains.

Goethe University was one of the first German institutions to pursue a targeted international recruitment strategy, starting in 2009. However, their resources have also been limited, with a small budget and only one full-time staff member.

“To not spread our resources too thinly, we decided early on to focus our active recruitment on two or three countries. A deciding

factor for our choice of those countries was in-country presence of organizations (such as DAAD regional offices) to support our

recruitment efforts. We are dealing with complex and often opaque marketplaces, and given the absence of commercial incentives for student recruitment agents are not an option. This is compounded by a lack of quality control for agents,” Bickl explains.

In the future, Bickl says Goethe University will focus less on recruitment fairs as

they are expensive and too broadly focused: “Instead, we will be focusing on workshops for PhD students and short-term programs as an opportunity for prospective PhD students and potential supervisors to meet. We also think that focusing on the noncommercial intermediaries of higher education enrollment such as scholarship providers or government agencies is more effective to reach quality students.”

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Improving International Student Success and Retention

One area where DAAD would like to see improvement at German institutions is in the area of student success and retention. Hase-Bergen said that the graduation rate for international students is much lower. He says German universities need to do more to help prepare international students “for our kind of teaching and living.” DAAD’s goal is for international students to graduate at the same rate as German students. Master’s students currently have the same graduation rate as German students at about 90 percent but international bachelor’s students graduate at about 59 percent compared to 72 percent for German students. However, DAAD notes that there has been some progress in the last few years.

At Goethe University, support services are focused on international students’ first two semesters. “If a student falls behind in semester one or two they usually never catch up. Hence we are providing many support services that are designed to smooth the transition from an overseas education system to the German one. This includes, for example, workshops on academic writing or time management as well as other critical study skills,” Bickl says.


Gellert says that Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf has focused its efforts on helping welcome students to the campus instead of traditional marketing and recruitment.

“We focus on services for international students and helping them integrate into life at our institution. We try to establish an atmosphere of welcome in all branches of the university, especially administration, to make students feel welcome. We hope that when they feel good they will tell their friends and by doing so, they do the marketing for our institution,” she says. **IE**

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(ENDNOTES)

- 1 OECD. *Education at a Glance 2013*. [http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2013%20\(eng\)--FINAL%2020%20June%202013.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2013%20(eng)--FINAL%2020%20June%202013.pdf).
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- 3 Brenn-White Megan and Elias Faeth. Institute of International Education. “English-taught Master’s in Europe: A 2013 Update.” Institute for International Education, 2013. <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Publications-and-Reports/IIE-Bookstore/English-Language-Masters-Briefing-Paper-2013-Update>.



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