

Creating an International Student Diversity Advisory Council to Advance U.S. Academic, Economic and Foreign Policy Priorities

October 2016

In order to increase equity and access to U.S. institutions of higher education for a broader circle of students from around the world, we urge the next president to establish a federal advisory council to provide advice and recommendations to the president and senior U.S. officials on matters relating to diversifying international student recruitment to the United States. An International Student Diversity Advisory Council would be charged with formulating international student initiatives that support our nation's academic, economic, international development, and foreign policy priorities.

Current Trends

The United States currently educates more than one million students from around the world. However, because growth in international student enrollment is being driven largely by a few countries (50 percent come from China, India, and South Korea) and by students and families with means to pay the comparatively high cost of a U.S. education, particularly at the undergraduate level, we are increasingly educating a less diverse pool of international students. Moreover, the countries from which we currently attract the most students result chiefly from external geopolitical and economic factors, rather than any proactive national effort on our part. By allowing external factors to determine who studies in the United States, we fail to educate enough students from as wide a variety of cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives as we should, putting our own nation at risk of losing important opportunities to foster an understanding of and connection with parts of the world that may be critical for diplomacy, development, research, commerce, global health and security.

Diversity Benefits U.S. Students

Diversifying the pool of international students on our campuses will also provide more opportunities for U.S. students to gain a better understanding of the world, its nations and cultures. There is no question there is a deficit of global knowledge in this country; currently, less than two percent of U.S. students study abroad prior to graduation. For many U.S. college students, the only direct engagement with the wider world is with the international student who sits next to them in class, lives with them in a dorm, or shares a meal in a dining hall. If global diversity on campus is deficient, then the U.S. students who do not study abroad will lack the skills necessary to contribute toward the nation's prosperity, security, and well-being.

Why a Federal Advisory Council?

A federal advisory council would focus needed attention on the academic, economic, and foreign policy benefits that international student diversity offers the U.S. government, U.S. higher education, and the private sector, and would provide a formal mechanism for formulating new ideas on how to best attract and support a more geographically and economically diverse pool of students to the United States.

A federal advisory council on diversity in international student enrollment would also seek to:

- Identify challenges faced as well as best practices used by U.S. higher education in recruiting a diverse international student body.
- Identify, coordinate, and expand existing U.S. government programs and resources to enhance international student diversity on campus.

- Leverage private sector sources of support to provide expanded opportunities to international students with limited means.

Council membership should be balanced and include representatives from key federal agencies with authority over policies that impact the recruitment of international students (such as the National Security Council's Office of Global Engagement, the Departments of Homeland Security, State, Commerce, and Education), as well as the full spectrum of U.S. higher education institutions and organizations needed to implement a national initiative to diversify international student enrollment (such as public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, and minority-serving institutions). The council should also include representatives from civil society to represent the needs of potential international students, and as well as from the private sector, who will rely on both U.S. and international students as their future workforce and consumers.

The International Student Diversity Advisory Council should be modeled on the effective [Homeland Security Academic Advisory Council \(HSAAC\)](#). Established by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2012 by then-Secretary Janet Napolitano to engage the academic community on homeland security matters, the HSAAC provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary and senior leadership. Supported by DHS' Office of Academic Engagement, HSAAC is comprised of university presidents and academic leaders and its work has significantly improved DHS engagement with the academic community. Eighty-two percent of the recommendations put forward by the HSAAC have been fully or partially implemented, including enhanced campus resilience and emergency planning efforts, improved transparency and engagement on international student issues, and increased engagement with academic institutions on cybersecurity matters.

Conclusion

To better defend U.S. interests and more effectively address global unrest now and in the future requires a greater understanding of the world we live in, and educating international students is one of the most effective ways to do that. However, educating international students from as wide a variety of countries and backgrounds as we can is not a challenge that U.S. higher education can tackle alone. A U.S. government-led advisory council on diversifying international student recruitment and enrollment will provide the innovation and leadership to create more globally-inclusive U.S. campuses.

Contact

Rachel Banks, Director, Public Policy
202.737.3699 x2556; rachelb@nafsa.org