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Create a Masterpiece International Student Recruitment Plan

Great works of art—even ones that seem divinely inspired—take careful planning and execution. A masterpiece often begins with a sketch just as an international recruitment plan starts with an outline. Once the sketch is complete, the artist creates a plan of what colors, textures and materials to use to bring the sketch to life. In the same way, the higher education professional creates a plan with unique strategies and a careful mix of recruitment activities all intended to create an effective and comprehensive international student recruitment plan.

As the traditional domestic student pool has decreased over the past few years, universities have begun seeking new pools of students to fill their classes. One of the most promising of these student markets is the international student market, which has been steadily growing in the U.S. In fact, the number of international students studying in the U.S. increased to an all-time high of 974,926 in the 2015 academic year, an increase of 10.0% over the previous year (IIE, 2015). Further, projections show that this population will continue to increase over the next several years. However, though number of international students in the U.S. is progressively increasing, so too is the competition for these students both nationally and abroad. So colleges need to prepare, plan and continually update their strategy to effectively recruit this population of students.



BEFORE YOU CREATE YOUR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT PLAN, YOU'LL WANT TO ASK SOME KEY QUESTIONS:

What do you want to accomplish by recruiting in students from outside the U.S.?

Perhaps you want to increase the number of freshman students or the tuition revenue. Maybe you want to increase diversity. Whatever the case, answering this question can help you define your goals for international student recruitment.

How much can you invest?

This expenditure is not just a monetary one, but also a staff investment. Keep in mind that you should plan expenses for 3 to 5 years to see good returns on your international recruitment investment.

HOW MANY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CAN YOU SUPPORT ON YOUR CAMPUS?

In order to be successful in the international student recruitment arena, your campus needs to be prepared for this unique student population. International students require some special campus-based services that differ from your domestic population such as visa services, orientation/acclimation to the country, academic support offices, and potentially ESL courses or programming.

Once you answer these important questions, the next critical step you need to accomplish before you start recruiting is to develop your strategic international recruitment plan. You'll need to develop at least a three-year plan as it takes time to build your plan and to assess how different activities are working. In addition, be sure to determine your targeted countries and markets—where are you going to focus your recruitment efforts—because you can't afford to go everywhere. Take care to set differentiated enrollment goals per market in order to assess which markets are working for you, which aren't and where you may need to change your strategy. And, of course, you'll want to create your multi-year budget to map out your investment over the years of the plan.

International student recruitment can be a costly endeavor with frequent overseas travel and other expenses. The most effective international student recruitment plans incorporate a mix of different activities, consistently measure the effectiveness of these pursuits, and continually modify the plan to maximize ROI. The following are several proven, budget-savvy strategies you may wish to consider in your international student recruitment plan:



1. Develop contracts with agents in targeted areas.

The use of agents is more common in some countries than in others. For countries in which agents are widely used, they can be very effective in recruiting students for your institution and in helping reduce international travel. But remember, when selecting agents, you'll want to vet them carefully. Ask for a client list of colleges as references and check with international higher education organizations such as NAFSA to make sure you are working with a reputable agency. Also, keep in mind that relationships are key with agents, so if you want to cultivate and maintain these contacts over time.

2. Work with an experienced firm to develop electronic and print recruiting materials targeted to international students.

Marketing messaging is different for international students than for traditional domestic students. Therefore, international recruitment materials should focus on what they and their families value in an American university education. Also, you should be careful to adjust your writing style for international with an emphasis on clarity, directness, and an avoidance of slang. You may also wish to consider providing recruitment materials in multiple languages for the parents of international students.

3. Increase your web presence to attract international students.

A section of your website dedicated to international students and their parents should be a key strategy in attracting and engaging international students. Since most international students will not visit your school before making the choice to enroll, they will rely heavily on your website. These pages ought to have clear steps on how to apply, other important information for international students, online chat and a video campus tour.

4. Explore English as a Second Language (ESL) opportunities on your campus or in your area.

If you don't have an ESL program on your campus, you can look into partnering with an ESL school in your area. Some of these schools may even be open to teaching on your campus. As a long-term plan, you may want to consider developing your own program to attract international students who may need assistance with English language skills prior to taking college courses on your campus.

5. Create a network of student and alumni ambassadors in key international recruiting locations.

With international students, knowing someone from their country who has attended your college and had a positive experience is a very powerful recruiting strategy. You can develop a far-reaching network of current students and alumni in several countries, train and provide them with recruitment materials to reach out to family, friends and community in their



area. This is one of the least expensive recruiting strategies but can also be one of the most effective.

6. Develop articulation agreements with local community colleges for international students.

Articulation agreements with community colleges in your area can be an inexpensive pipeline to many international students. The community college has made the major recruiting investment, procured student visas, and provided ESL courses. These students could be great candidates for your upper division courses and potentially even your graduate programs.

7. Consider creating a modest international student scholarship program.

Scholarship programs can get expensive; however, a modest scholarship program can be very effective in recruiting international students. Keep in mind that parents generally pay for the majority of international students tuition and appreciate scholarships and the bragging rights that go along with them.

8. Sign MOUs with institutions abroad.

Establishing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with institutions abroad can provide a steady, reliable source of international students for your college. Student exchange, 2+2 and 3+1 programs great ways for international universities to tap into many unique academic programs American universities offer. At the same time, they become a pipeline for upper division students into your college, benefiting both institutions and their students.

The most successful universities use a multi-channel approach to international recruitment. So, make your international student recruitment plan a masterpiece by incorporating these proven-successful planning ideas and strategies.

At KelmscottEDU, we have enrollment consultants with expertise in international student recruitment and strategy. Let us partner with you develop an international student recruitment plan, create compelling international viewbooks and print components, and craft electronic messages designed to peak the interest of international students and their parents.

REFERENCE

Institute of International Education (2015). *Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange*. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathleen Cross, Ph.D. serves as Executive Vice President of KelmscottEDU, a nationally recognized higher education enrollment consulting and marketing firm, where she leads consulting, strategy, and marketing. With experience working in both U.S. and international universities, Kathleen is a former Vice President of Enrollment, Chief Technology Officer, and Dean of Studies Abroad.

Serving 500+ higher education institutions over the years, Kathleen's approach is to create authentic experiences that engage and inspire the audience combined with innovative and proven data-driven strategy.

Kathleen holds a doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration from Saint Louis University along with a bachelor's degree from Saint Louis University and master's degrees from the University of Cincinnati and California State University. Kathleen also serves as a professor in the Higher Education Administration Graduate Program at Bay Path University. She is a frequent national speaker and published author.

She has additional experience in corporate and healthcare organizations as a former bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist and former director and part-owner of successful medical device/technology company. She has lived in several countries and fluent or proficient in multiple languages.

ABOUT KELMSCOTTEDU

KelmscottEDU is a privately owned, full-service communications and marketing solutions provider for the higher education market. Founded in 1936, our headquarters houses, a team of enrollment and marketing strategy experts, an award-winning graphic design and copywriting department, an e-business technology center, sophisticated printing operations, and mail and fulfillment operations—assuring you quality control, lower costs and fast, effective results.

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