



Chinese students head to U.S. to study

More parents send children overseas, thanks to China's booming economy

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - Chinese students are enrolling in U.S. universities in record numbers, encouraged by aggressive recruiting combined with China's booming economy and growing middle class.

Their enrollment grew by 8 percent in the fall of 2006 and by 20 percent last year, according to Institute of International Education figures being released Monday.

Individual universities surveyed by The Associated Press also are reporting high growth this year.

Chinese enrollment increased 300 percent this year at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. George Fox University in Newberg, Ore., accepted 65 students from China, more than double its 2007 figure.

Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., already boasting a strong international student program, is enrolling 290 Chinese students, up from 127. The spike was more than 400 percent at Ohio State University, the nation's largest campus, with 115 undergraduates from China compared with 20 last year.

Xiaoli Liu, an Ohio State freshman from Beijing, said Chinese universities offer solid academics but can't compete with the overall experience of an American college, including more opportunities for out-of-class activities, an open learning environment and diversity.

"In China you can seldom find people from the U.S., but in the U.S. you find people from all over the world," Xiaoli said.

7 percent jump in foreign students

The influx is part of a solid and welcomed rebound in the number of international students coming to the United States, with its giant pool of 4,000 colleges and universities.

Numbers of international students had dropped alarmingly due to competition from other countries and tighter visa procedures after the September 2001 terrorist attacks. But the latest IIE report finds 7 percent more students at U.S. universities than a year ago, at an all-time high of 624,000.

India again sent the most students, followed by China and South Korea. Enrollment from Saudi Arabia jumped 25 percent, putting the country back into the top 10 for the first time since 1982, thanks to a new Saudi government scholarship program.

A snapshot survey the institute did of campuses this fall found that 55 percent reported increases in students from China, the most from any country.

"The misperceptions have finally been laid to rest — that it's impossible to get a visa," said Peggy Blumenthal, IIE's chief operating officer. Students choosing schools "are looking strictly at academic issues, because there's no reason to believe they'll have any more trouble getting to the States than getting to Australia."

Kansas State enrolled 199 Chinese undergraduates, up from 65 last fall.

"There is a whole emerging middle class of Chinese, well over 300 million, many of them with one-child families who are interested in sending their son or daughter abroad with higher educational experience," said Kansas State provost Duane Nellis. "We're trying to capitalize on that and also enrich our campus community."

International students and their families contribute more than \$15 billion annually to the U.S. economy, according to a separate survey by NAFSA, the Association of International Educators, also being released Monday. And they typically pay higher out-of-state tuition, so they're an important revenue source for colleges at a time when the supply of college-age American students is beginning to crest.

A cosmopolitan education

Out-of-state students pay an average \$515 more per credit hour at Michigan State University, where the number of new undergraduate Chinese students soared from 95 last year to 327 this year.

Universities also like the international students' cosmopolitan flair.

"We're thrilled about the cultural benefits, the educational benefits it brings to our resident students," said Mike

Brzezinski, Purdue's associate dean of international programs. "It gives them a study abroad experience right here on campus."

The number of Americans studying abroad is also at a record high, the Institute of International Education reports, increasing 8 percent to 242,000 in 2006-2007 — the latest year figures are available. Students continued the trend toward more untraditional destinations, with increases of more than 20 percent each to China, Argentina, South Africa, Ecuador and India.

Next year's increases may slow as a reflection of the struggling economy and weak dollar, but Blumenthal says U.S. colleges are committed to study abroad and keeping it no less expensive than college in the United States.

The number of new Chinese students still represents a fraction of overall enrollment: just 2 percent of the Ohio State freshman class, for example. They must meet the same entrance requirements as anyone else, including passing an English-language test.

Siyi Chen, a freshman from Changsha in China's central Hunan province planning to study finance, was especially impressed by Ohio State's array of 32 libraries.

But like Xiaoli, she has no interest in staying on after graduation.

"I probably will go back to China to work there and find more opportunity there," she said. "I didn't know any reason for me to stay here (rather) than staying with my family. That's more important."

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