

# Report: USA sees first increase in foreign students since

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## 9/11

By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY

The number of foreign students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities has increased for the first time in five years, a sign that efforts to recover from a post-9/11 dip are paying off, a report says.

The report also found that the number of U.S. students studying abroad is continuing its upward trend, increasing 8.5% in the 2005-06 academic year to a record 223,534.

Nearly 583,000 foreign students studied in the USA during the 2006-07 academic year, up 3% from the previous year, says the report, Open Doors 2007, released today. Based on a survey of nearly 3,000 U.S. colleges and universities, it is published annually by the Institute of International Education (IIE), a New York-based non-profit, with support from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. That follows several years when enrollments either declined slightly or remained flat.

The report says evidence suggests the rebound will continue. The number of new enrollments in the USA rose by 10% last fall, it says, a sign of growing interest. And a separate online survey, conducted last month and released today by several higher-education organizations, suggests modest growth continued this fall. Of the 702 institutions responding, 57% reported increases in overall international enrollments this fall over last fall; 24% reported level enrollments; 19% reported a decline.

Institute president Allan Goodman attributes the turnaround to "vigorous efforts at the national, state and campus level," including a smoother visa application process through the U.S. State Department and stronger recruitment and outreach by colleges and universities. "America needs to continue its proactive steps to ensure that our academic doors remain wide open and that students around the world understand that they will be warmly welcomed."

Some educators remain troubled by the sluggish growth, noting that the USA is losing ground to other countries as competition for foreign students intensifies. The market of students studying outside their home countries grew 49% between 1999 and 2004 to 2.5 million, and the number is projected to nearly triple by 2025 to 7.2 million, says Marlene Johnson, executive director of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, a Washington-based group.



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IIE data show international enrollments in U.S. schools increased 10% during the same period. "We are not doing as well as we should be," she says. "Attracting international students and scholars to the United States is integral to effective public diplomacy, and we need a comprehensive national strategy."

It also confers economic benefits. During the 2006-07 academic year, the report says, international students and their families spent \$14.5 billion on the U.S. economy.

The report raises concerns about the number of U.S. students studying abroad, which has increased 150% in the past decade. But most of the nation's 15 million college students graduate without the experience, the report found.

Language and cultural skills are increasingly valued by employers and vital to America's national interest, Goodman says. Acknowledging that costs may deter some from study abroad, IIE has created a website, StudyAbroadFunding.org, aimed at helping students find scholarships to help support overseas study. Says Goodman: "Students should get a passport along with their student ID."

#### Other Open Doors findings:

- India remains the leading exporter of students to the USA for the seventh year in a row, followed by China and the Republic of Korea.
- Asia remains the largest sending region, accounting for 59% of U.S. international enrollments.
- Business remains the leading field of study for foreign students, followed by engineering; 18% and 15% of foreign students, respectively, study those disciplines.
- Colleges and universities in California enrolled the largest number of foreign students (77,987, up 3.5%), followed by New York (65,884, up 2.5%) and Texas (49,081, up 5%).
- For the sixth year in a row, the University of Southern California enrolled the largest number of international students, 7,115.
- Of U.S. students studying abroad, 52% enroll in short-term programs; 37% spend a semester abroad; and 5.5% spend a full academic year or longer abroad.
- The United Kingdom remains the leading destination; 32,109 U.S. students were enrolled there, about the same as the previous year. Italy was the second most popular. Spain, France and Australia rounded out the top five.
- Among regions of the world that saw increases in the number of U.S. students: Asia (26%), Latin America (14%), Africa (19%) and the Middle East (31%).
- The top three major fields for study abroad are the social sciences, business and management, and humanities.

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