

India-US Student Mobility In Higher Education: Can India Become A Destination of Choice To Students From The U.S.?

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Abstract: The India-US student mobility scenario is principally characterized by the large and growing outflow of Indian students to US campuses and a relatively miniscule inflow of American students to Indian higher education institutions (HEIs). Going ahead, it is imperative that Indian policy makers and providers work towards increasing the inflow of American students into Indian campuses and thereby help take the India-US higher education engagement to the next higher level. A growth in the number of U.S. students coming to Indian campuses would greatly benefit Indian higher education in multiple ways. The aim of the paper is to identify India-U.S. student mobility traits and to recognize the potential drivers to enhance the inflow of students from the US to Indian campuses through analysis of relevant documents. The paper primarily depends on Institute of International Education (IIE) reports and a few other prominent and reputed publications as source of information. The insights presented in this paper could have implications for Government agencies and Indian higher education providers looking to attract students from the US to Indian campuses.

Keywords : International Student Mobility, Indo-US Higher Education, Indian Higher Education, International Students, India US Student Exchange

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I. Introduction

The cross border student mobility between India and the U.S. has been an integral feature of the India-U.S. Higher Education (HE) engagement. International Student Mobility (ISM) between US and India has been a long standing one and has risen considerably over the 1998/99- 2015/16 period¹. This increase in ISM between the two countries has been primarily driven by the huge growth in the outflow of Indian students to US campuses. The outflow of Indian students to U.S. has more than doubled in the period 2005/06 to 2015/16 and is presently at a record high². The inflow of American students to Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has also grown from 1,767 in the year 2004-05 to 4,438 students for the year 2014-15³, which in percentage terms reflects a decent growth for the said timeframe. However, in terms of absolute numbers the inflow number is diminutive as compared to the huge outflow of Indian students to American campuses. A growth in the number of American students coming to Indian HEIs would not only benefit Indian higher education in several ways but would also help take the Indo-US higher education engagement to the next higher level.

In 1950, the U.S. and India came together to establish the United States Educational Foundation in India, USEFI (now United States-India Educational Foundation, USIEF) which has since been one of the most visible initiative to promote student mobility between the two countries. Presently, USIEF promotes international student mobility between the two countries through the 'Study in the U.S.' and the 'Study in India' programs amongst its other initiatives. The Indian initiatives to attract international students to Indian campuses include the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) backed 'Study India Program' which works towards the objective of enhancing engagement with the Indian diaspora youth through 'short term' courses in the nature of summer schools and the UGC-MHRD 'Connect to India' program. The American effort of the 'Passport to India' initiative recognizes the need to increase the inflow of American students to India and encourages young Americans to reevaluate India's future significance in their lives and careers⁴. Partnership programs such as the US-India "Shared Effort: Progress for All" initiative having an agenda to promote student and scholar mobility amongst other aspects, indicates a commitment to further foster a long-term engagement in higher education⁵. The effort to have more American students in India is apparent and these initiatives could actually translate to having a greater number of American students over a period of time. The United States is looking to have 15,000 Americans going to India and that would mean having more than triple the number of students India is getting as of now⁶.

1.1 The Indian and U.S. higher education sectors

The Indian education system is one of the largest in the world. “The total enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 34.6 million and the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education in India is 24.5.”⁷ “The foreign students come from 165 countries and the top ten 10 countries constitute to 62% of the total foreign students.”⁸ The number of international students coming into India for the year 2015/16 was 42,420. (IIE Project Atlas, 2016) and the major sending countries are India’s neighboring countries and some countries from Africa. In the year 2015, the major contributors to India’s international student inflow are Nepal, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Sudan and Nigeria (IIE, Project Atlas, 2016). The total number of Indian students going abroad for their higher education needs stood at 1,81,872 in the year 2014⁹. Indian students go to the US and UK for their higher education needs.

The U.S. higher education system is an education powerhouse and offers high quality education which attracts the best talent and a large pool of aspiring international students from around the world. The year 2015-16 saw a total of 10,43,839 international students going to the US for their higher education needs which translates to 5.2% of the total student population in the US¹⁰. In the year 2015-16 the US had 4,709 higher education institutions and 20,264,000 higher education students¹¹. China, India, Saudi Arabia and South Korea are the major source countries of International students to US campuses (IIE project Atlas, 2016). The outflow of US students for the year 2014/15 stood at 3,13,415 and the major destination countries for US students are the UK, Italy and Spain¹².

Enhancement in collaboration between Indian and US higher education would further strengthen the cultural relationship between the two countries, would promote advances in research in various sectors, and help in the respective internationalization agenda. International students also contribute to the host country’s economy in a significant way¹³, in this case both India and the US would benefit.

Students from the US coming to Indian campuses get an opportunity to learn about the Indian society, way of life, and cultures and thereby broaden their outlook. The Indian institutions benefit both in terms of student diversity on campus and in terms of revenue generation. India, presently draws international students largely from its neighboring countries and other developing countries. American students coming into India would be a potential game-changer as far as a larger number of students from the developed countries coming into India is concerned.

1.2 This Paper

This paper looks at the student mobility in higher education between the US and India and focuses on the aspect of the relatively low inflow of American students to Indian Institutions. The purpose of the paper is to study mobility traits and identify possible drivers to enhance the inflow of students from the US to Indian campuses. In order to achieve this objective the author has done a content analysis of relevant literature on the topic. As source of relevant information the paper primarily depends on Institute of International Education (IIE) studies and a few other reputed publications. There have been ongoing deliberations and research on the aspect of how Indian higher education can attract international students, however, there is a need to have insights on how a greater number of American students can come to India. Inward student mobility of U.S. students to Indian campuses would enable a stronger engagement with the leading higher education sector in the world. The China example of successfully attracting a good number of American students to its campuses would be a good case in point where a developing country has become a popular education destination for foreign students. The insights of the paper may have implications for Government agencies and Indian providers looking to attract students from the US to Indian campuses.

II. Indo- Us Cross Border Student Mobility

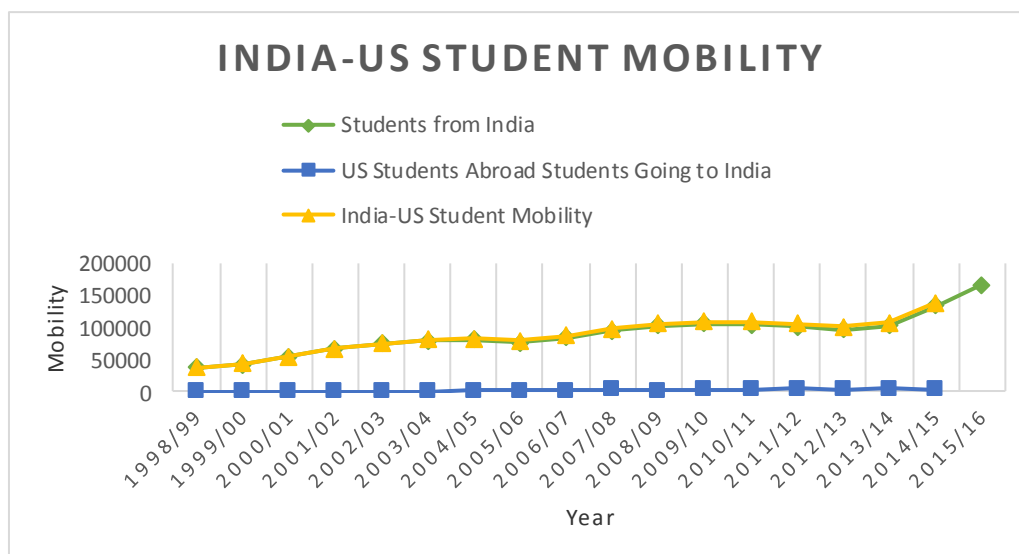
“Student and scholar mobility has been occurring for as long as universities have been in existence”¹⁴. Over the recent decades the number of internationally mobile students has continued to increase. Globally “the number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship have increased more than threefold, from 1.3 million in 1990 to nearly 4.3 million in 2011.”¹⁵. It is estimated that this figure will be 8 million by 2025¹⁶.

India and U.S. are major contributors to global International Student Mobility in terms of being amongst the leading source and host countries respectively. Indian students have gone to the US for their higher education needs for many years now. Data relating to the Indian and US international student mobility show some interesting trends about host and sending countries and the area and duration of study of U.S. Study Abroad students. Some of the prominent international student mobility trends and takeaways pertaining to the Indian and U.S. Higher education systems are as mentioned.

- The year 2015/16 has seen 1,65,918 Indian students opting for education providers from the U.S.¹⁷. Presently, India is the second largest contributor of international students to US campuses. “In 2014/15, China and India together accounted for 67 percent of the increase in international students, and they now constitute nearly 45 percent of the total number of international students in U.S. higher education.”¹⁸ This

means that Indian students continue to get attracted to U.S. education providers. The 2015/16 number indicate a robust increase over the previous year. The India and China number tell us a story of students moving from developing Asian countries to a developed country in large numbers.

- In terms of the inflow of U.S. students to Indian campuses it can be said that India is not a traditional destination for students from the U.S. as yet. In the year 2014/15, the number of US students coming to India stood at 4,438¹⁹.
- India is presently 13th on the top 25 preferred destination list of internationally mobile US students. China, a developing country with large student outflows to American campuses, is presently 5th on the most favored destination list internationally mobile US students for the year 2014/15²⁰. Here, China would be a great example to study where in spite of being a developing country it has managed to break into the top 5 destinations for American students.



Data Source: Based on IIE, Open Doors 2016 Data

Fig. 1: India-US Cross-border Mobility (1998/99-2014/15)

(Adapted from the IIE Open Doors Fact Sheet India Report, 2016)

The above IIE, Open Doors 2016 data prominently reflects that the growth in the outflow of Indian students to the US has been significant. The percentage increase over the previous year is a whopping 24.9% for year 2015/16. The other feature that can be identified is that though the number of ‘US Study Abroad’ students coming to India has more than doubled over the past 10 years, it still translates to a comparatively small number of 4,438 for the year 2014/15²¹ and that the Indian student outflow remains the dominant contributor to the student mobility numbers. The post 2010/11 period has seen the number of American students coming to India remaining relatively flat. For the year 2014-15 the outflow-inflow ratio stands at approximately 29 Indian students going out for every incoming American student.

III. Knowing The Internationally Mobile American Student: Relevant Trends And Possible Implications

“The majority of U.S. students who study in India participate in short-term programs that are typically one semester or shorter (including summer programs), compared to Indian students who often stay in the U.S. for several years to complete their graduate degree programs.”²². This tells us about the preference of the U.S. student is to study in India for a shorter term as against the comparatively long term stay of Indian students in America. Understanding the American students through regular surveys and document analysis would be a good idea to get a measure of their interest areas, preference of study duration, location preferences amongst Indian cities amongst other things. Profiling of the U.S. student would also help associate interest areas to respective profile segments. This will help Indian HEIs to chalk out programs based on the field of study, duration preferences and scholarship requirements in a better way.

The number of internationally mobile U.S. students has shown good growth over the last two decades. As per the IIE Open Doors Reports the phase between the years 2000/01-2014/15 has seen a strong increase in the internationally mobile US student population. One in every ten U.S. undergraduate student studies overseas prior to graduating²³. There has also been a strong growth in the American student travelling to a till then non-

traditional country like China. The number of American students going to study abroad in China has also increased. The 2005 to 2015 ten year period saw decent growth of American students going to China where the numbers increased from 10,299 in the year 2005 to 21,975 in the year 2015²⁴.

This trend of growing mobility of US students suits well to India's endeavor of attracting American students to Indian campuses as the trend indicates more openness of the American student to study abroad. The strategic importance of the U.S.-India partnership will encourage the Governments of both countries to foster ties in higher education. The willingness to travel to China as education destination also signifies the openness of the U.S. student to travel to non-traditional and developing country destinations. This growing international mobility of American students along with India's growing prominence as a world economy and a country of strategic importance can translate well into more U.S. students wanting to expose themselves to Indian culture and ethos.

- The Study Abroad 'Duration of Study' data by IIE 2003/04-2013/14 of U.S. Study Abroad students tells us that 62% is of the students go for Short Term Duration (Summer or up to 8 weeks), 35% of the students go for Mid Length (one-two quarters/ one semester) and 3% of the students opt for Long Term (academic or calendar year) courses²⁵. A very large part of the internationally mobile student opts for short term courses which suits well with India's ability to provide shorter duration courses of 4 to 8 weeks in niche areas such as the Indian language, history, culture and service learning.
- The Study Abroad Duration of Study data by IIE 2003/04 - 2013/14, indicates that the five top field of study preferences for U.S. Study Abroad students are: the STEM Fields 23%; Business 20%; Social Sciences 19%; Foreign Language and International studies 8% and Fine or Applied arts 7%²⁶. (IIE, 2016). Many Indian providers might find it difficult to show capacity and compete at the global level in the STEM fields. Indian providers have an opportunity to focus on foreign language and fine and applied arts related courses which would match well to Indian competencies. Promoting Indian languages would be a good niche opportunity and provide uniqueness in program offerings.
- In India, US students go for language study, cultural studies, service learning, internships, and independent research and degree programs at Indian higher education institutions²⁷. The individual Indian HEIs can target these areas of study as a program offering to American students, based on their competencies and suitability.

India would do well to customize programs based on the study of the traits of the American student and also on the basis of recognizing niche areas and core competencies of the country and providers. Identifying and becoming visible amongst the target American student audience would be an important aspect in the way forward roadmap to attract the American student. A step in this direction would be to know what the present set of students to America do in terms of the area of study, duration, their interest areas and their expectations of India as an education destination. The other areas of importance in understanding the American students would be the institutions they go to and the cities they stay in, a more detailed study would involve looking at the quality of life aspect and finding key areas in managing their India experience.

IV. India As A Favored Destination To Students From The US

There is a growing interest amid the American students to study in 'nontraditional destinations'²⁸ and this might just be the right time for India to pitch in and employ strategies to attract American students. U.S. institutions and organizations are making efforts to send their students to countries such as India through their Study Abroad Programs and India can find ways towards gaining synergizing with these initiatives.

4.1 The Challenges

There are a number of obstacles that India needs to overcome if it is to attract American students to its campuses. In fact overcoming these obstacles would in itself act as a major facilitators to attracting American students to Indian campuses²⁹ say that the challenges to institutions to extend the study abroad to India include "bureaucracy and lack of infrastructure" and add that the challenges to students may be "primarily cultural." These challenges are ground realities and it would take a sustained effort by Indian policymakers and providers towards overcoming these challenges. The Indian providers will have understand the American students requirements and accordingly prepare a road map to achieve the objective of having American students at their campuses. Understanding the U.S. student would include their way of communication, cultural traits, expectations and program preferences. Apart from the HEI management the faculty and staff of the Indian HEIs will have a big role to play in terms readying themselves to better address the needs of the U.S. student.

4.2 Getting American students to Indian campuses

There is a need for a coordinated effort from policy makers and providers to attract students from developed countries to Indian campuses. Having a nodal body to specifically chart out a road map and take accountability of attracting students from US would be a step in the right direction. The nodal agency would co-

ordinate with the Indian offices in the US, the Indian authorities, and policy making bodies and also engage with US students on matters such as pre-departure orientation, visa, housing and travel. Targeting to achieve a certain inflow number during specified timelines with a holistic 'American student' centric roadmap would be a step in the right direction.

- Short Term Programs in niche areas

Existing Study Abroad programs have several programs directed towards India's history, its political and social environment and its art and culture³⁰. Programs related to the Indian language, history, culture and service learning programs would be unique to India and would provide a competitive edge to Indian providers in terms of the program offerings. Such programs would potentially be of interest to the large Indian diaspora in the U.S. looking to experience India through short duration study tours. Short term programs related to Indian art, culture, history and languages should be aggressively promoted in the U.S. by the Indian Government through its Embassy and Consular offices. Indian HEIs can reach out to potential partner institutions in global conferences of NAFSA: Association of International Educators where they can create awareness about their respective short term programs aimed at American students. Becoming focused and specific in terms of identified programs and providers for the target audience and providers would enable a more efficient road map to attract American students.

- Marketing the Indian education wares to its American audience

It has been seen that leading developed host countries 'Market' their education wares through various promotional tools and give visibility to their educational programs through structured and well laid out marketing activities. The Marketing tools used to attract students include counselling sessions with prospective students, international student friendly websites, social media marketing, catchy slogans, and road shows. Promotional activities are generally carried out by representative agencies which have access to marketing intelligence of the local area/ city.

India would do well to adopt well-structured marketing strategies where they segment the student population and then target the student segment with proper positioning of their education programs. The Indian government offices abroad can be used to implement such promotion programs. A good example to follow for Indian policymakers would be that of the EducationUSA team in India. They have 7 centers, 30+ advisers in India and have reached out to new audiences and markets over the past few years, building awareness and providing services in new segments of student populations³⁰.

- Gaining visibility by Competing in 'Global Rankings' and Participating in American Conferences

Another very good way to gain visibility and recognition in the US and any other country would be Indian HEIs participating in Global Rankings. Ready themselves to have representation in the Top 200 in Global Rankings would be a big step in this direction. The Indian institutions could do well to actually study the ranking parameters of say the 'Times Higher Education' World University Rankings and the 'QS World University Rankings' and prepare themselves accordingly. China has been very active in participating in Global Rankings and getting their Universities to occupy top positions and thus are gaining reputation. In 2015-16 there were 37 Chinese universities in Times Higher Education's World University Rankings which is more than Australia or Canada³¹. An initiative worth mention in this regard would be the "Double-World Class Project" declared in 2015 where China has specifically focused on a specific number of Universities with an aim of ranking six of them as the world's fifteen top universities by the year 2030³². India would do well to study the feasibility of such a model where targeted Indian cities, education providers and specific programs would be encouraged to compete at the global level by the government.

Americans predominantly go to their own conferences³³ and the NAFSA and International Education Administrators (AIEA) would be good forums to gain visibility and engage the target audience. Indian policy makers and providers should look to increase their presence in these conferences.

- Getting onboard with International Student Mobility facilitator organizations

Indian HEIs can establish a touch point with prospective internationally mobile American students by partnering with organizations which look to facilitate international student mobility. IIEPassport Directory, Generation Studyabroad, International Student Exchange Program and Goabroad.com are amongst the forums with whom Indian providers can partner with.

IIEPassport Directory: The IIEPassport directory provides interested U.S. students a wide-ranging databank of information about opportunities to study abroad³⁴. Listing the Institution and program would help become visible to the US student looking for opportunities to study overseas.

International Student Exchange Program: ISEP is a nonprofit organization helping students to overcome academic and financial barriers to study abroad and has sent 51,000 students to 54 countries for Study

Abroad programs. In the Indian context the University of Hyderabad is a member and other Indian Universities would do well to join in as members. The ISEP exchange programs allow students to exchange place for a semester or a year which could be a potential vehicle for Indian institutions to have a US- India exchange, The ISEP direct program focuses on cultural emersion and leadership and the Global engagement programs offer and opportunity to engage with local communities³⁵.

Goabroad.com: This forum provides detailed and comprehensive information under the study abroad, intern abroad and volunteer abroad themes. Goabroad has 71 programs in India and is a popular study abroad search engine³⁶.

V. Conclusion

India has a long standing higher education relationship with the United States of America, sustained and cultivated largely through Indian students aspiring to travel to the U.S. for their higher education needs. With India emerging as one of the largest education sectors in the world in terms of enrollments and as a prominent world economy there is now an increased opportunity to cultivate a partnership and reap the many mutual benefits on offer. India is still a ‘non-traditional destination’ for American students. To become a favored destination India should prepare a road map of initiatives which would work towards a targeted number of American students coming into Indian campuses within specific timelines. This would require a planned promotional campaign where Indian offices in the U.S. reach out to students with specifically identified fields of study and short term offerings. Studying the ‘1,00,000 Strong Initiative’, designed to increase the number of American students in China would be a good idea. Insights drawn from studying the example of China successfully becoming a ‘top 5’ destination to American students could potentially generate good leads for India to work on.

The suggestions and insights of this paper mainly cater to the traits of student mobility between two of the most prominent higher education sectors in the world i.e. the Indian and U.S. higher education sectors. The paper focuses on identifying ways to attract American students to Indian campuses, studying student mobility trends and understanding the internationally mobile U.S. student. The future scope for research on the subject would include study the ‘China’ example as a case in point where a developing country has been successful in attracting American students in good numbers.

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