

International Students' Enrollment in the United States of America – Facts, Figures And Trends

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Abstract:

As the world gets more interconnected, many nations are vying for the attention of international students, who enrich the cultures and economies of their host while bringing diversity and skill. It is therefore important to monitor the facts, figures, and trends in the international student's enrolment in the United States so that policy makers can be continually informed about the states of the international students' enrolment and necessary policies be made in other to continue to attract international students in the US. The aim of this research is to study the facts, figures, and trends in international students' enrollment in the United States from 2018 to 2022. From 2018 to 2022, there has been a total enrolment of 6,925,605 international students on either F1 or M-1 visas. About 74% of these students are from Asia. Most international students are found in the Northeast region of the United States.

Keywords: Enrollment, Facts, F1 visa, International Students, SEVIS, Trends, Universities.

Date of Submission: 03-09-2024

Date of Acceptance: 13-09-2024

I. Introduction:

Introduction to international education

Every year, people travel from one country to another for education. Some travel overseas for high school diploma, college degrees, vocational training and graduate degrees like masters and PhD. People make the decision to study abroad for a variety of reasons: the desire to learn a new language is among the most popular ones. Students have the chance to learn new language and culture while studying abroad, which can speed up and improve their language acquisition (*Studying Abroad Is Great for Language Study and Immersion | OptiLingo*, n.d.). Living abroad can be an amazing opportunity to experience new cultures, traditions, and lifestyles. Additionally, studying abroad can be a great opportunity for students to acquire knowledge and abilities that will be useful to them in their future careers (Sobkowiak, n.d.). Employers often emphasize global experience and seek out applicants who have studied or worked overseas. Employers usually considers applicants' ability to adapt, communicate, and solve problems, all of which can be developed through international study (Sisavath, 2021). In addition, the type of academic programs of colleges in foreign nations, for instance, may draw some students to study in those nations. Foreign students could be drawn to a specific university because of its reputation or because they have a specific field of interest that is not offered at their local colleges or universities. The decision to study abroad may also be influenced by financial factors. In some circumstances, attending a university outside of the student's own country may be cheaper. Some countries provide financial aid such as Graduate Teaching Assistantship, fellowships, or scholarships to foreign students, which can help defray the cost of tuition and living costs (*Abroad in America: The Unique Opportunities and Barriers Faced by International Students in the U.S. - The Arizona State Press*, n.d.). This attracts a lot of international students to those countries. Again, the choice to study abroad might also be influenced by personal desires. For instance, some students may want a change of environment or may be curious to learn more about new prospects. An excellent way to push oneself and venture beyond one's comfort zone is by studying abroad. This might give students the chance to grow more independent and self-assured. This can promote their decision-making abilities, problem-solving, and situational adaptation. Some people also decide to study abroad so that they will form networks and acquaintances. Meeting people from different parts of the world can broaden students' views and aid in the development of a global perspective. Finally, although it can be intimidating, living abroad can also be very rewarding (*10 Benefits to Studying Abroad | Study Abroad Guide*, n.d.). Students who study abroad frequently state that the experience shaped who they are as people and gave them a new sense of self-assurance and purpose. (*10 Benefits to Studying Abroad | Study Abroad Guide*, n.d.)

Countries that are most preferred for international education include US, UK, Canada, China, Australia, just to mention a few. US, over the years, has been the most desired destination for international students (*Why Is The USA Preferred Study Destination For International Students? - Whizstorm*, n.d.). Several foreign students from all over the world travel to the United States each year to pursue higher education. But why do they pick America over other nations? I'll go through a few of the factors that might influence international students' decision to attend American universities.

First, the United States is home to some of the world's top universities. 27 of the top 100 institutions in the world are found in the United States, according to the QS World University Rankings (*First, the United States Is Home to Some of the World's Top Universities. 27 of the Top 100 Institutions in the World Are Found in the United States, According to the QS World University Rankings. - Google Search*, n.d.). These institutions give students access to top-notch facilities and services, as well as a variety of courses and programs. The quality of education in America is therefore one of the factors which draws international students to the United States.

Additionally, there are many opportunities for both personal and professional improvement available in the United States. Internships, opportunities for research, and other hands-on learning experiences are frequently provided by American institutions so that students can get the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their chosen fields of career. Additionally, many of the top businesses and institutions in the world have their headquarters in the United States, giving international students access to employment options and networking prospects. In terms of innovation and technology, the United States is well advanced. This makes it a desirable location for overseas students who want to pursue jobs in disciplines like technology, engineering, and business (*Why the US Leads the World in Entrepreneurship and Innovation - ResearchFDI*, n.d.). The United States also provides a distinctive cultural experience. The United States is home to several well-known landmarks and attractions and has a long and varied history. International students who study in the United States have the chance to travel around the nation, discover its history and culture, and participate in American customs like Thanksgiving. International students may find this to be a worthwhile and enriching experience that will improve their knowledge of the United States and its citizens.

Aim:

To study the facts, figures, and trends in international students' enrollment in the United States from 2018 to 2022.

Rationale

It is critical for institutions to analyze the trend in international student enrollment so that they will remain competitive and relevant in the global education market. Studying the facts, figures and trends in foreign student enrollment can assist universities in identifying areas where they could make changes to attract more students (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). This can involve upgrading the standard of their programs, expanding the curriculum options, or providing more scholarships and financial assistance. Understanding the trends in the enrolment of international students in the United States can assist institutions and the government to monitor the changes in international education and modify their policies and plans appropriately. This is especially important considering the growing competition among nations to attract international students as well as the possible effects of geopolitical developments on the mobility of these students. Universities and the government can find ways to entice and keep more international students, which could have a good effect on the economy, by analyzing the trends in the enrolment of international students. As the world gets more interconnected, many nations are vying for the attention of international students, who enrich their host nations' cultures and economies while also bringing diversity and skill. Universities and the government can better support international students and increase the allure of the USA by examining the trends in the growth of international students in the country. By doing this, they can identify areas where their policies and practices need to be improved.

II. Method

This work was done through the extensive study of the website of Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). The SEVP is an integral part of the National Security Investigations in the United States. The SEVP acts on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security to manage institutions, international students on F1 and M1 visa as well as the dependents of the international students (*Student and Exchange Visitor Program | ICE*, n.d.-a). SEVP has a record of all the international students in the United States. This record is called the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). SEVP uses SEVIS to track and monitor institutions and international Students on F1 and M1 visas (*Student and Exchange Visitor Program | ICE*, n.d.-a). Therefore, to obtain accurate data about international students in the US, data from "SEVIS by the Numbers annual

Report” were studied from 2018 to 2022 to understand the facts and trends in international students’ enrollment. The graphs in this paper were made using graph prism version 9.5.1.

III. Results/Discussion

International Students enrollment trend in the U.S.A from 2018 to 2022

From 2018 to 2022, there has been a total enrolment of 6,925,605 international students on either F1 students or M-1 visa in the United State (Table 1). The F-1 student visa allows international students to enter the United States of America and study full time at educational institutions that have been approved by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) (*F-1 Visas for International Students: Requirements, Rules, Status | Shorelight*, n.d.). To qualify for this visa, foreign students must be enrolled in a program or course of study which leads to a degree, diploma, or certificate(*Students and Employment | USCIS*, n.d.). The M-1 visa is for foreign students would want to enroll in vocational and technical programs in the United States.

In 2018, there was a total of 1551373 international students enrollment in the United States, which is 366638 increases from what was recorded in 2017 (1,184, 735) (*BIANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENT TRENDS Executive Summary Background*, 2017). This is a 30.95% increase in international students’ (F1 and M-1 students) enrolment from 2017. However, in 2019, the number of international students recorded was 1523758 which is a decrease of -27615, representing a percentage decrease of 1.7% from 2018. This decrease may be due to the onset of the Covid-19. Again, in 2020, the total number of international students who were issued M1 and F1 visas was 1251569 which is a decrease of 272189, representing a percentage decrease of 17.86 percent. This decrease again may be due to the high number of Covid-19 cases which was recorded globally in 2020. In 2021, the number of international students decreased as the recorded number of F1 and M-1 students was 1236748, which is a decrease of 14821, which is percentage decrease of 1.18 from 2020. In 2022, the number of international students increased by 9.21%. That is, the total number of F1 and M-1 students enrolled in the United States in 2022 was 136215 which is an increase of 125409.

Altogether, at the onset of Covid-19, the number of international students enrolled in the U.S continued to decrease from 2019 to 2021 (Fig. 1). This decrease was more pronounced between 2019 and 2020. America's first COVID-19 case was officially confirmed on January 21, 2020. The outbreak was considered a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020. On March 11, 2020, the WHO proclaimed COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic (*CDC's Global Resources Pivot to Address COVID-19*, n.d.).This could account for the drastic decrease in international students enrollment in the US in 2020 and subsequently in 2021. Interestingly, the number of international students’ enrollment in the US in 2021 began to increase with respect to the 2021 (Fig.1). This may be due to the introduction of vaccines, continuous observation of Covid-19 protocols and subsequently decrease in the Covid-19 cases and death tolls in 2022.

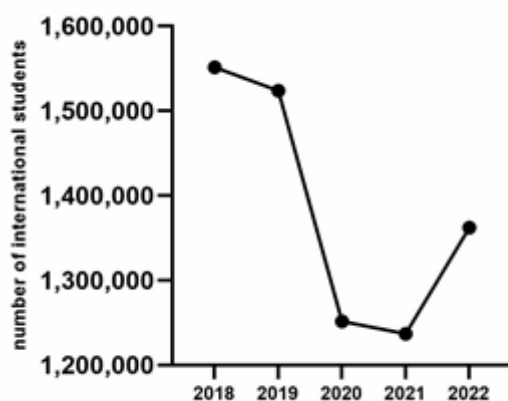


Figure. 1: Number of F1 and M-1 students who enrolled in Universities in the United States from 2018 to 2022. There was a slight decrease in the number of international students’ enrolments from 2018 to 2019. Again, there was a steep decline in the number of international students’ enrolments in 2020 compared to the previous year (2019). A further decrease in international students’ enrolment was recorded in 2021. Comparing 2021 to 2022, there was an increase in international students’ enrolment in 2022.

Origin of international students in the U.S

Most international students in the U.S over the last five years (2018 to 2022) originated from Asia (Fig. 2a). In fact, out of the 6,925,605 total international students who enrolled in US schools and colleges, 5,076,493 of them came from Asia. This represents 73.84% of the total number of international students from 2018 to 2022 (Table 2, Fig. 2a and Fig.2b). 2,008,978 out of this 5,076,493 came from China alone which represents 39.6% of the total number of international students from Asia (Table 3). This makes China the leading country in the world that brings a lot of students to study in the U.S. Some people believe that Chinese prefer to study Abroad, especially in the U.S than in China because the education system in China places more emphasis on test scores and these test scores may be used to determine the subjects or the program students can pursue (*What Is the Chinese Government Doing to Improve Education? | Times Higher Education (THE)*, n.d.). Hence, unlike in China, the US education system offers some sort of flexibility to these Chinese to pursue what they are passionate about. Another possible reason for high enrolment of Chinese students in the United States may be the expansion of China's middle class and policies on families. Changes in Chinese economy might have enabled individual families to be wealthy enough to pay the fees of their children in the United States (Sheng, n.d.; *Why Do Chinese Students Study in the U.S.? - The Washington Post*, n.d.). These families believe that it is an investment to have their children educated in the U.S.

Apart from China, India is the second country which brought a lot of international students to the US. That is, 1237973 out of the total number of students from Asia came from India, which represents 24.4% of all international students from Asia from 2018 to 2022 (Table 3). This makes India , the second leading country in the world that brings a lot of students to study in the U.S. Interestingly, these two countries (China and India) are the most populated countries in the world with populations over 1 billion (*Total Population by Country 2023*, n.d.). South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Japan, and Taiwan are also among the top Asian countries that bring a lot of international students to the U.S (Table 3).

The second continent that brought a lot of international students to the US from 2018 to 2022 is Europe. Europe brought 595776 international students to the US which represents 8.67% of the total international students in the US from 2018 to 2022. After Europe, Central/South America, Africa, and North America had 8.04%, 4.94%, and 3.86% (respectively) of the total international students in the US from 2018 to 2022. The continent that brought the least number of international students to the US was Australia/Pacific which brought 44306 international students, representing 0.64% of the total number of international students to the US (Fig 2b).

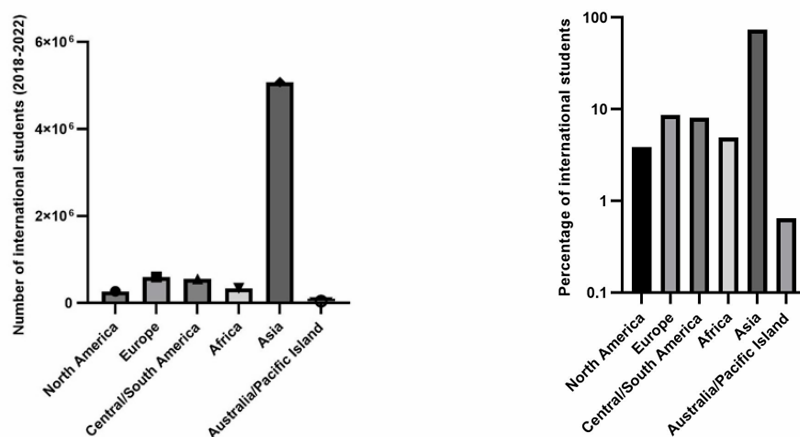


Figure.2: Continents of origin of international students who enrolled in institutions in the United States from 2018 to 2022. (a) Most international students in the United States come from Asia, then Europe, Central or South America, Africa and North America. Australia/Pacific Island brought the least number of international students in the United States from 2018 to 2022. (b). In terms of percentages, about 73% of the international students are from Asia. About 8% each are from Europe and Central/South America with almost 5% and 4% from Africa and North America. Less than 1% are from the Australia/Pacific Island.

Regional distribution of international students in the U.S

Among the regions in the US, the Northeast had the greatest number of international students (Fig.3a). After the Northeast, the West and South have comparable number of international students even though there are few more students in the West than South. Midwest had the least number of international students from 2018 to 2022. Some of the possible reasons why Northeast has the greatest number of international students may include; the top region in the country for higher education is the Northeast (*Forbes America's Top Colleges List*

2022, n.d.). Again, seven of the top 10 universities and nearly half of the top 50 schools in the entire country are all found in this region. Moreover, people in the Northeast are among the highest educated in the country, with a greater proportion of the population possessing postsecondary degrees (*The 10 Most Educated States in the U.S. | Best States | U.S. News*, n.d.). Besides, the Northeast is home to some of the oldest and most prominent universities in the nation, including Harvard, Yale, and Columbia. MIT, Williams College, Princeton University, other famous Ivy League schools, liberal arts colleges, and the United States Military Academy are also found in this region (*Forbes America's Top Colleges List 2022*, n.d.). Interestingly, the number of international students decreased in 2019 compared to 2018 in all the US regions except for the Northeast region (Fig.3b). In 2020, the number of international students in all the regions decreased drastically as compared to 2019. This could be due to the Covid-19 being a pandemic. In 2021, the number of international students in the West and the Midwest further decreased as compared to the previous year, meanwhile, the number of international students in the Northeast and South increased compared to the previous year. In 2022, all the regions had an increased number of international students compared to 2021 and this trend is likely to be seen in 2023, especially now that Covid-19 outbreak is under control.

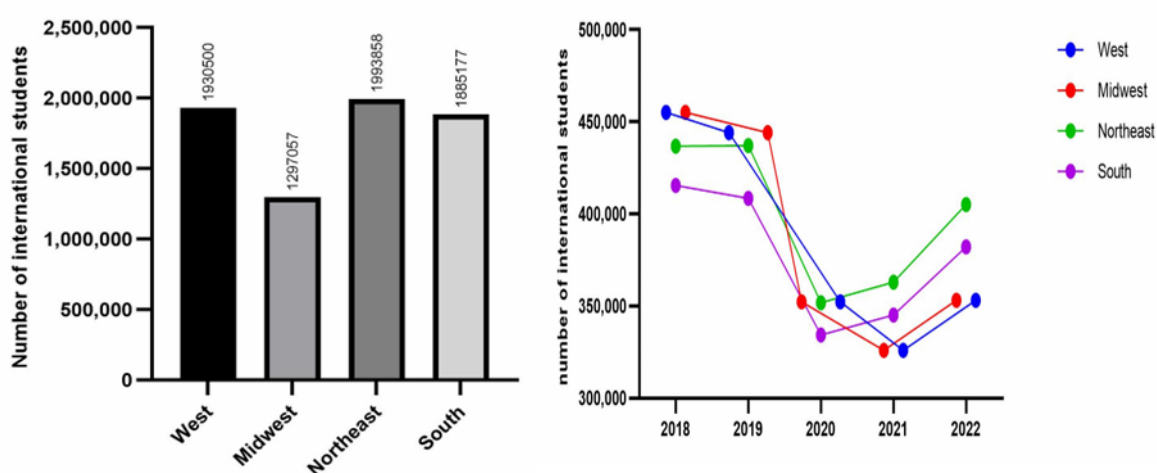


Figure.3. Regional distribution of international students in the U.S: (a). The Northeast region had the greatest number of international students' enrollment in the United States from 2018 to 2022. This was followed by the West, South and finally the Midwest region. (b). The number of international students decreased in 2019 compared to 2018 in all the US regions except for the Northeast region. In 2020, the number of international students in all the regions decreased drastically as compared to 2019. In 2021, the number of international students in the West and the Midwest further decreased as compared to the previous year, meanwhile, the number of international students in the Northeast and South increased compared to the previous year. In 2022, all the regions had an increased number of international students compared to 2021.

Universities in the USA that have greater enrolment of international students.

The total number of foreign students at a particular university has a big impact on both the "persona" and the financial standing of the university in question (Hegarty, 2014) . Some, if not most, of the international students pay their own tuition fees which is a great income generator for most universities. Among all the Universities in the United States, the New York University has the highest number of international students' enrolment from 2018 to 2022. From 2018 to 2022, 96610 international students enrolled in the New York University (NYU) alone (Table 4). It is not surprising that in 2022, international students in New York alone contributed 3.8 billion US dollars to US economy (*International Students Trends in New York*, n.d.). According to the 2022 U.S.News and world report, University of New York ranks 24th in National Universities in USA and 5th in Business programs (*New York University (NYU) - Profile, Rankings and Data | US News Best Colleges*, n.d.). Apart from NYU, Northeastern University and Columbia University in the City of New York enrolled 96157 and 94890 international students respectively from 2018 to 2022. This respectively makes Northeastern University and Columbia University in the City of New York the second and third Universities with the largest international students' enrollment. Northeastern University ranks 44th (*Northeastern University - Profile, Rankings and Data | US News Best Colleges*, n.d.) while Columbia University in the City of New York ranks 18th (*Columbia University - Profile, Rankings and Data | US News Best Colleges*, n.d.) according to the 2022 U.S.News and world report. It is interesting to note that these top three universities (New York University,

Northeastern University and Columbia University in the City of New York) with the largest international students' enrolments are found in the Northeastern part of the United States. This affirms that the Northeast is the US region that has a lot of international students.

Other highly ranked Universities as shown in table 4 enrolled a lot of international students in the US and consistently made it to the top 20 SEVIS-certified Universities that had greater number of international students enrolment from 2018 to 2022 according to SEVIS by the numbers annual report (*Student and Exchange Visitor Program | ICE, n.d.-b*).

Type of degrees international students pursue in the U.S

Even though other international students come to the US to enroll in high school to get high school diploma and vocational programs, the focus of this part of the research was to look at the proportion of international students who enrolled in associates, bachelors, masters and PhD programs, From 2018 to 2022, a total of 2379218 international students enrolled in bachelor's program (Fig. 4a) which represents 39% of international students in the US from 2018 to 2022 (Fig.4b). Similarly, the number of international students who enrolled in masters' programs was 2349649 (Fig. 4a) which represents 38% (Fig. 4a). A total of 933741 international students enrolled in PhD programs which represents 15% of the F1 international students. Lastly, 450904 international students enrolled in associate degree which is 7% of the total F1 students in the United States from 2018 to 2022. This shows that most international students who are on F1 visa are pursuing bachelor's degrees, which is followed by masters, PhD and lastly, associate degree. Since 38% are pursuing master's degrees and 15% are pursuing PhD degrees, it means that about 53% of the students are enrolled in graduate programs. This implies that more international students are enrolled in graduate programs.

Taking it year by year, the percentage of international students who pursued the various degrees did not change that much in 2019 when compared to 2018. Nevertheless, in 2020, when Covid-19 became a pandemic, there was a slight decrease in the number of students who pursued associate degree and master's degree. Interestingly, it appears that a greater number of international students enrolled in PhD and bachelor programs.

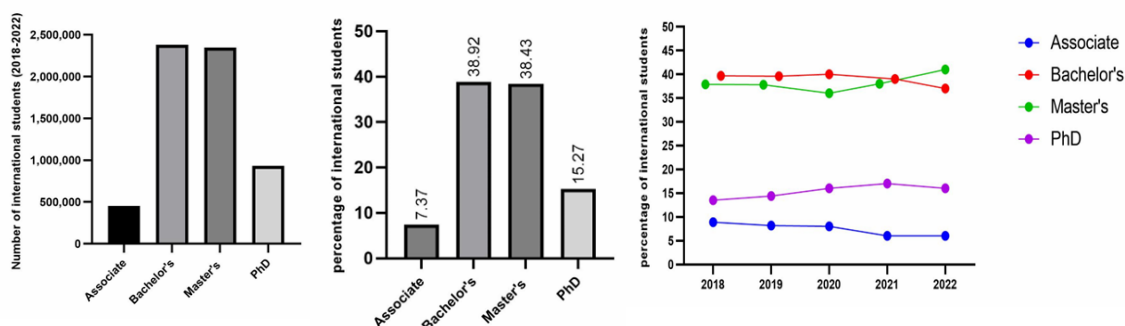


Figure 4. Type of degrees international students pursue in the U.S: (a) A total of 2379218 international students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs. The number of international students who enrolled in masters' programs was 2349649 with 933741 international students enrolled in PhD programs. Only 450904 international students enrolled in associate degree. (b). In terms of percentages, almost 39% of international students are studying bachelor's degree, 38% are enrolled in masters' programs, 15% in PhD programs and about 7% in associate degrees. (c). General trend on year-by-year basis from 2018 to 2022.

IV. Conclusion:

From 2018 to 2022, there has been a total enrolment of 6,925,605 international students on either F1 or M-1 visas in the United State. There was a slight decrease in the number of international students' enrolments from 2018 to 2019. Again, there was a steep decline in the number of international students' enrolments in 2020 compared to the previous year (2019). A further decrease in international students' enrolment was recorded in 2021. Comparing 2021 to 2022, there was an increase in international students' enrolment in 2022.

Most international students in the United States come from Asia, then Europe, Central or South America, Africa and North America. Australia/Pacific Island brought the least number of international students in the United States from 2018 to 2022. In terms of percentages, about 73% of the international students are from Asia. About 8% each are from Europe and Central/South America with almost 5% and 4% from Africa and North America respectively. Less than 1% are from the Australia/Pacific Island

Among the regions in the United States, the Northeast region had the greatest number of international students' enrollment in the United States from 2018 to 2022. In fact, most of the top Universities in the

Northeast had the greatest international students' enrolments. Apart from the Northeast region, the West and South were the next in the rank. The Midwest region had the least number of international students' enrolments. The number of international students decreased in 2019 compared to 2018 in all the US regions except for the Northeast region. In 2020, the number of international students in all the regions decreased drastically as compared to 2019. In 2021, the number of international students in the West and the Midwest further decreased as compared to the previous year. Meanwhile, the number of international students in the Northeast and South increased compared to the previous year. In 2022, all the regions had an increased number of international students compared to 2021. Most international students enrolled in graduate programs, that is master's and PhD even though majority of them enrolled in bachelor's programs. A few of them pursued associate degrees.