



iie COVID-19
SNAPSHOT SURVEY SERIES

**COVID-19 EFFECTS ON U.S.
HIGHER EDUCATION CAMPUSES**

***From Emergency Response to
Planning for Future Student Mobility***

Mirka Martel, Ph.D.

May 2020

COVID-19 Effects on U.S. Higher Education Campuses

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COVID-19 Snapshot Survey Series

The Institute of International Education (IIE) is studying the effects of COVID-19 (coronavirus) on international educational exchange at U.S. higher education institutions. Our aim in this series is to provide more information about the effects that COVID-19 has had on international student mobility, and the measures U.S. higher education institutions are taking to support international students currently on campus and those overseas, international students interested in studying in the United States, and U.S. students planning to study abroad.

Report 1: *Academic Student Mobility to and from China*

The first report in the series focuses on the effects of COVID-19 on academic student mobility to and from mainland China.

Report 2: *From Emergency Response to Planning for Future Student Mobility*

The second report takes a broader look to analyze COVID-19 effects on U.S. campuses in spring 2020, as well as looking ahead to institutional adjustments to inbound and outbound student exchange in summer and fall 2020.

To download these reports, visit IIE's COVID-19 page: <https://www.iie.org/Connect/COVID-19>

Introduction

The COVID-19 Snapshot Survey Series began with research interest at the Institute of International Education (IIE), and in the international education community, to study the effects of COVID-19 (coronavirus) on U.S. higher education institutions and academic student mobility to and from the United States. When IIE launched the first survey on February 13, 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 was centered in China, and the first report focused on student mobility to and from that country. By the time the first report was released on March 4, the virus had spread at an alarming pace to Europe and the United States. On May 1, 2020, when the second survey closed, COVID-19 had infected more than 3.2 million people globally, with almost 1.07 million cases in the United States.ⁱ

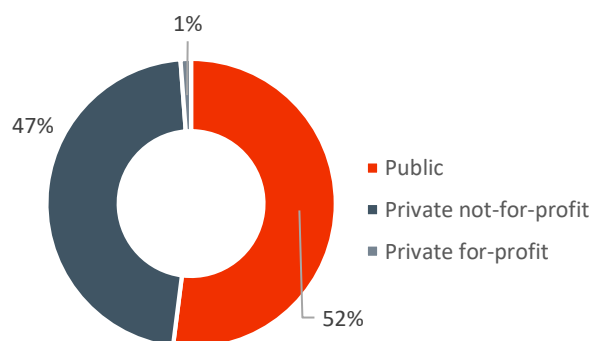
In two months, global and national events brought the realities of COVID-19 to the doorstep of U.S. higher education institutions. On March 11, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a health pandemic.ⁱⁱ On March 13, the United States issued a national health emergency and travel was halted to many countries affected by COVID-19.ⁱⁱⁱ In the subsequent days, nearly all U.S. higher education institutions made the decision to end in-person instruction, moving student engagement to virtual communication. Most study abroad programs were canceled, and U.S. students were asked to return home. International students made difficult decisions about whether to stay in the United States or return to their home countries.

Our report traces these realities, analyzing the disruptions that COVID-19 has had on U.S. higher education and the tens of thousands of international students and U.S. students subsequently affected. The three main sections of the report present data on U.S. higher education institutions and the effects of COVID-19 on 1) campus life; 2) international students, both those that could not come and those already on campus in the spring semester; and 3) U.S. students studying abroad. The analysis also looks ahead to summer and fall 2020 and the recruitment of international students, as well as insights into student interest in future study abroad.

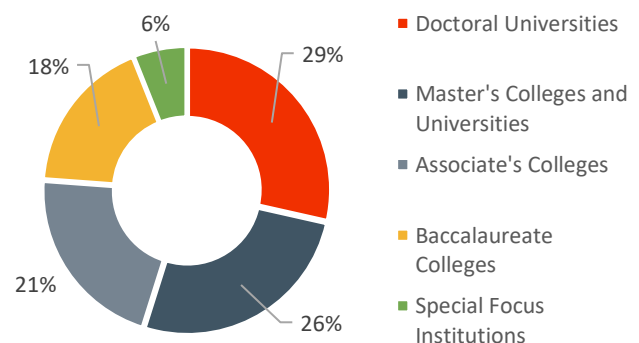
Survey Respondent Institutions

IIE administered the second survey to U.S. higher education institutions from April 16 to May 1, 2020. The survey was sent to the *IIE Network* and respondents of the *Open Doors® 2019 Report on International Educational Exchange*.^{iv} 599 institutions completed the survey, doubling the response total from the first survey in the series.^v Over 87% of respondents participated in *Open Doors 2019*.

Institution Sector



Institution Type



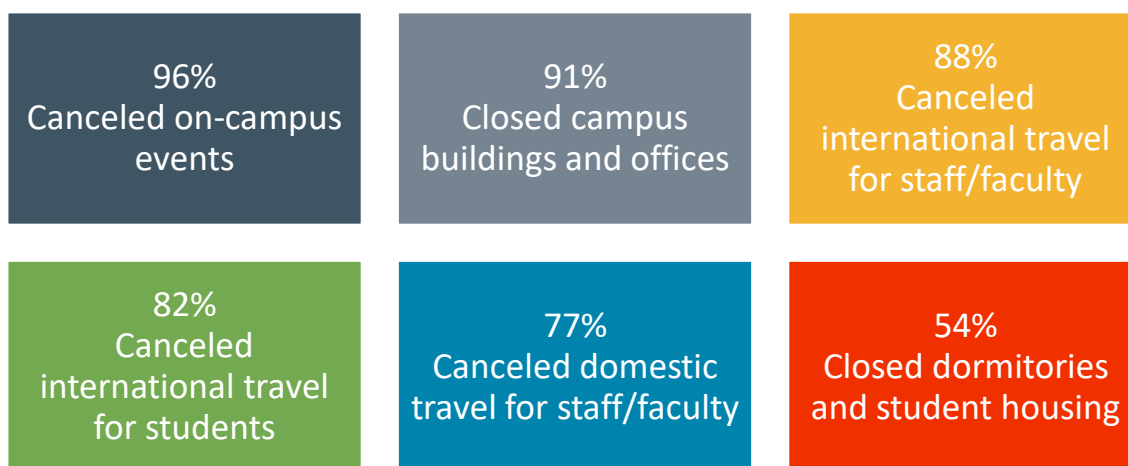
U.S. Institutions and Their COVID-19 Response

U.S. higher education institutions enrolled approximately 19.7 million students on their campuses in 2019.^{vi}

The 599 institutions represented in the COVID-19 analysis hosted 519,456 international students on their campus in 2018/19, or 47% of the total population of international students in the United States.^{vii} Additionally, 175,289 students from these campuses studied abroad in 2017/18, or 51% of the total U.S. student population studying abroad for academic credit.^{viii}

With the threat of COVID-19, institutions have grappled with virtual instruction on campus, the safety and security of their U.S. and international students on campus, and the return of U.S. students studying abroad. This section analyzes the response by U.S. colleges and universities, with an emphasis on the decisions that most impact international student mobility and internationalization.

Institutional Closures as a Result of COVID-19 in Spring 2020



In addition to canceled on-campus events during the spring 2020 semester, respondent institutions noted that their commencement ceremonies for the academic year had been postponed to the summer or moved to a virtual platform. 86% of institutions transitioned on-campus events to virtual events.

Closed facilities and offices on campus included administrative offices and classrooms, dining halls and meeting areas, and libraries and laboratories. Respondents noted that some COVID-19-related laboratory work had continued; however, most work was halted. Several respondents noted that university employees were allowed to enter campus offices to pick up time-sensitive work. Respondents also noted that all internships and externships for students were canceled or moved to remote work.

The relatively lower number of closed dormitories and student housing was due to institutions reporting some housing available on campus for students who did not have alternative options. As one institution noted, “[We] kept dorms open only for international students or domestic students with special requests (e.g., insufficient support at home or at-risk family at home).”

88% of respondent institutions reported creating a COVID-19 emergency response plan. Over 93% created a website for students, faculty and staff, providing updates on COVID-19. This represents a significant increase from the first IIE COVID-19 Snapshot Survey, when only 37% of institutions reported having a website in place.

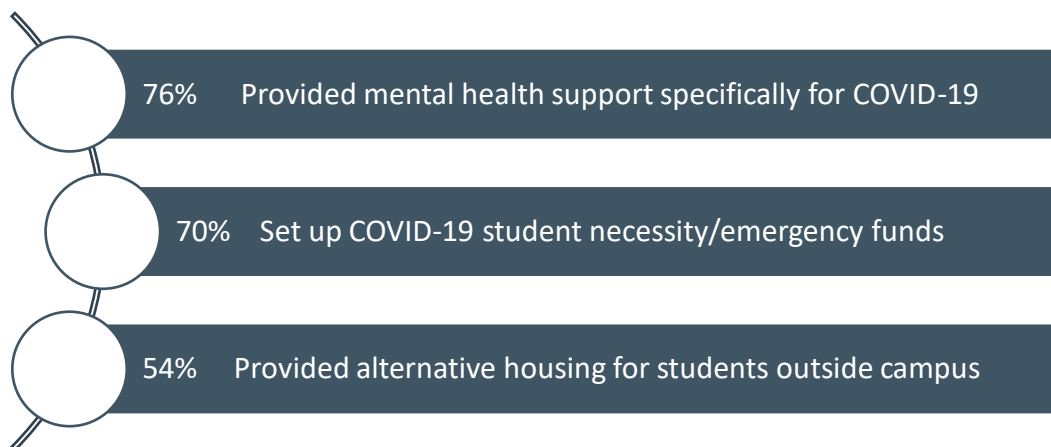
Virtual Instruction

99.5% of respondent institutions (all but three) moved in-person classes to remote/virtual instruction. To support and continue student instruction during this time, 96% of colleges and universities offered virtual office or advising hours for students. Several institutions also noted offering online tutoring for students. Approximately 51% adapted asynchronous learning options for students in other time zones. **Over 74% of institutions altered their grading policies** (e.g., moving to pass/fail, universal pass).

Respondents also shared insights into how their institutions helped both faculty and students adapt to virtual instruction. Colleges and universities offered faculty technical assistance, delivering webinars and training on conducting virtual instruction and providing necessary hardware or software to move courses online. Other institutions reported arranging internet services or hardware loans for students and scholars who did not have access. Some institutions also offered online tutoring for students.

Support to Students, Faculty and Staff

Respondents shared the needs that students, faculty had during the spring semester and the physical and emotional toll that the pandemic had on their campus population. To this extent, campuses provided significant support beyond academic services.



Several institutions indicated setting up emergency funds for faculty and staff affected by COVID-19, and additional support for students and faculty for health insurance, and food supplies. Finally, institutions were also looking ahead to housing for their international students during the summer in the event they would not be able to return home. As one institution shared, *“Students who are not able to return home at the end of [the] term may remain on campus with a discounted room rate and the possibility of financial assistance for hardship cases.”*

International Students and Study Abroad in Spring 2020

This section analyzes the emergency response that U.S. campuses took amid the COVID-19 outbreak and their assessment international student needs in the U.S. and abroad, as well as their U.S. students studying abroad.

According to *Open Doors*, international students make up 5.5% of the student body at U.S. higher education institutions. In 2018/19, over one million international students were in the United States, with half of these students coming from China and India.^{ix}

Additionally, nearly 342,000 U.S. students studied abroad for academic credit in 2017/18, with the most popular destinations being the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain.^x

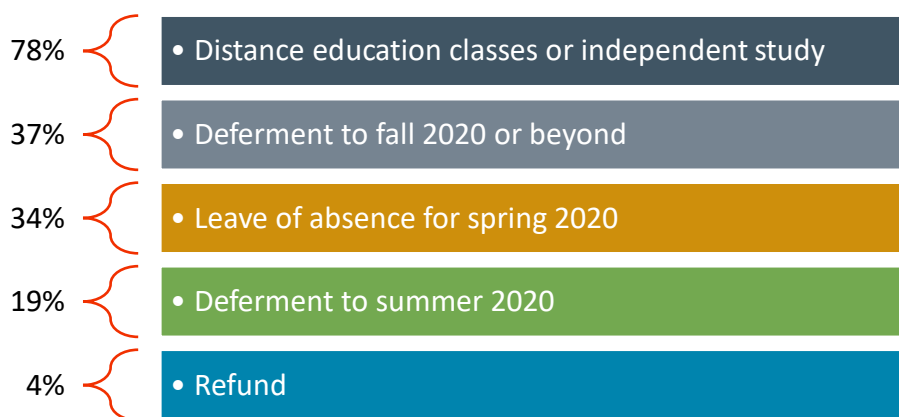
International Students Unable to Travel to the United States in Spring 2020

138 respondent institutions (31%) indicated **3,144 international students** were not able to come to the United States as a result of travel restrictions related to COVID-19. This finding is similar to the first COVID-19 Snapshot Survey and suggests that the majority of international students were already on campus for the spring semester.

- International students affected by travel restrictions in spring 2020 represented approximately **0.6% of the total population of international students at respondent institutions.**^{xi}
- The vast majority of international students unable to travel to the United States in spring 2020 were from Asia, including **mainland China (59%), India (15%), Japan (14%) and Taiwan (11%).**

100% of all institutions that had students abroad impacted by travel restrictions were in communication with them.

Most institutions offered these students options for online enrollment or deferment to future semesters. In comparison to the first COVID-19 Snapshot Survey, a relatively smaller number of institutions offered deferment to summer 2020, potentially due to the realities of restricted travel continuing through the summer semester. A lower proportion of respondent institutions also offered refunds, likely due to the availability of online classes.



International Students in the United States in Spring 2020

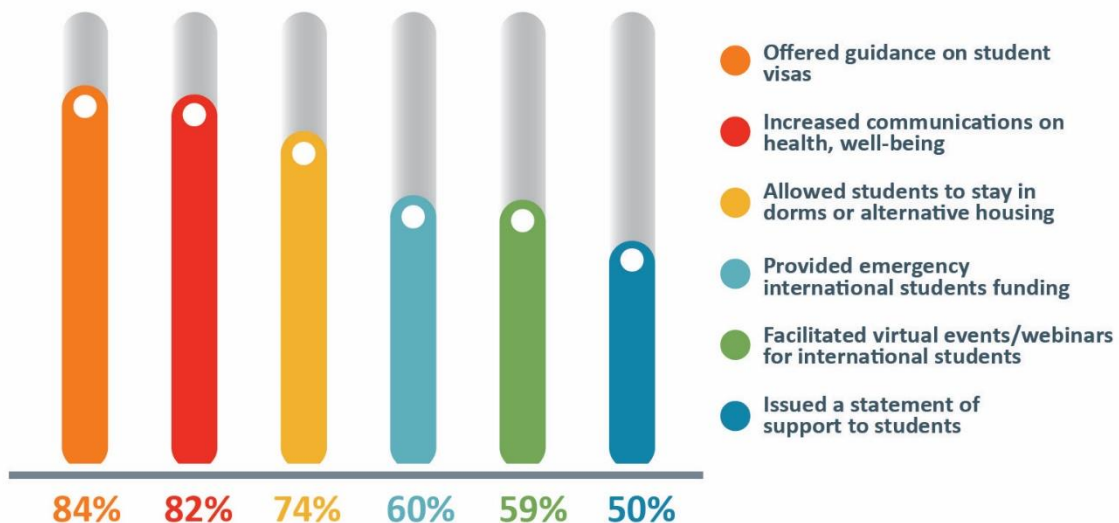
International students on campus have been a priority for U.S. higher education institutions since the outbreak of COVID-19, and subsequent closures of college facilities and housing have had an impact on the ability of students to stay on campus. Travel restrictions have also affected students' ability to return to their home country.



The number of international students that returned home from respondent institutions varied significantly by the size of the institution ($p < .001$). Large institutions were more likely to offer housing options to their students, and as such, more significant numbers of students stayed. The largest institutions (20,000 students and above) reported that between 0% and 20% of their students had left. In contrast, only three institutions reported that 100% of their international students had left, and these were all small institutions with less than 5,000 students.

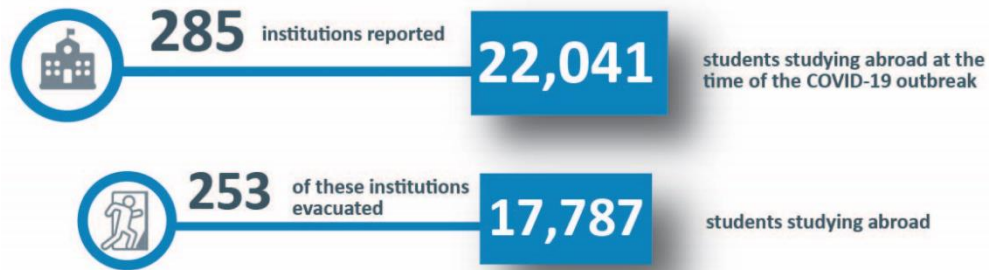
Institutional Support to International Students on Campus

While respondent institutions noted offering international students the same services provided to their U.S.-based students (Page 4), they also reported additional services being provided to international students in the spring semester. **Over 80% of colleges and universities provided increased communications to international students on health, safety and wellbeing, and offered guidance on compliance with visa status.**

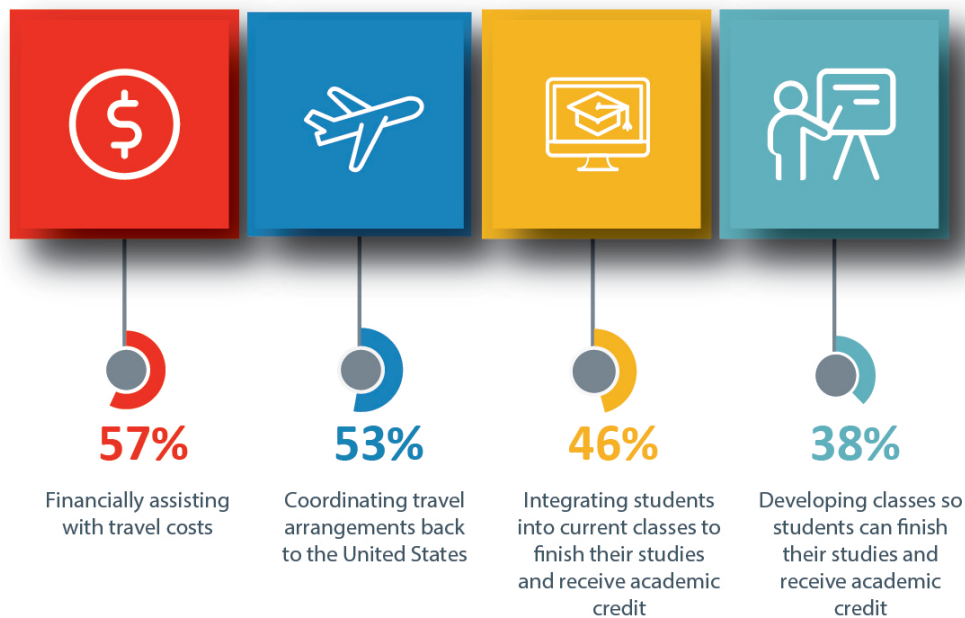


U.S. Students Studying Abroad for Academic Credit in Spring 2020

Most institutions reported students studying abroad in European countries affected deeply by COVID-19: United Kingdom (72%), Italy (63%), Spain (71%) and France (60%). According to *Open Doors*, more than half of all U.S. students (55%) studying abroad for academic credit in 2017/18 traveled to Europe.^{xii}



Given the prevalence of students in Europe and the early March travel restrictions placed on European countries due to COVID-19 outbreaks, the vast majority of students (81%) returned to the United States. **Most institutions indicated offering support services to students returning to the United States, such as assisting with travel costs and coordinating travel back to the United States.**



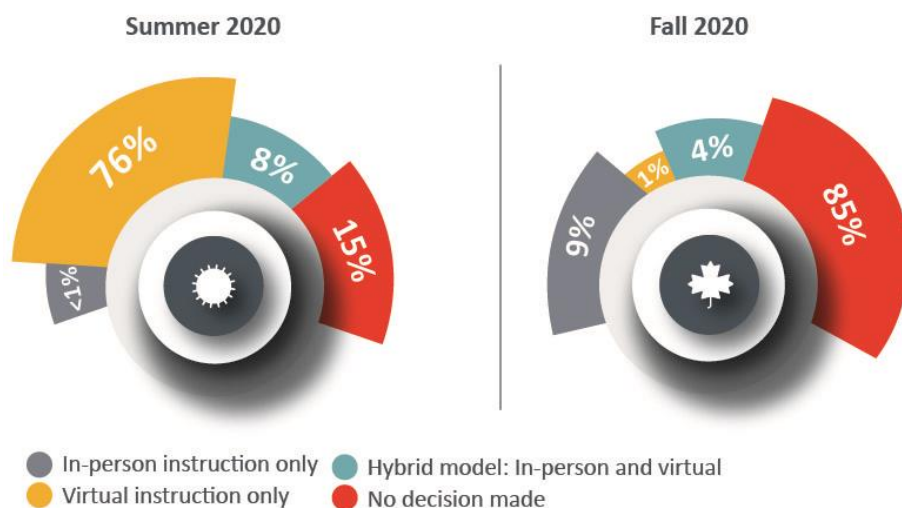
Many students who chose *not* to return home were offered virtual communication support, including check-ins, counseling, returnee meetings, and support or advice via emails. Some institutions also noted helping students maintain health insurance and sign-up for emergency registration with U.S. embassies. Additionally, institutions asked students to sign informed consent waivers acknowledging the risks and their decision to remain abroad.

Institution Plans for Summer and Fall 2020

We now turn to the future outlook as U.S. higher education institutions prepare for the summer and fall semesters.

We first asked institutions whether they had made a decision on the mode of instruction for the rest of the calendar year 2020. While most institutions had confirmed their plans for summer 2020, the fall semester still remains uncertain.

Mode of Instruction in Summer and Fall 2020



While most respondent institutions have made plans about their mode of instruction for summer 2020, plans for fall 2020 are less clear. Anecdotal evidence from open-ended responses suggests that the decision to move instruction online was made more quickly for the summer because institutions have fewer students enrolled. The majority of colleges and universities have not made a decision on the mode of instruction for fall, likely due to the evolving nature of COVID-19 and how businesses proceed to open up within states amidst social distancing.

Small institutions (less than 5,000 students) were more likely to make decisions around mode of instruction in summer 2020 than larger institutions ($p < .005$). The only institution to indicate that in-person instruction would take place in summer 2020 has less than 5,000 students. Public institutions were significantly more likely to make a decision on summer 2020 than private institutions ($p < .01$). Public institutions were more likely to choose a hybrid option for the summer semester.

There were no differences in institutions' decision-making for the fall semester by institution size, location, or institution type (public/private). At the time of the survey, the five institutions that indicated they would be entirely virtual in the fall were Master's Colleges or Universities or Special Focus Institutions. This will likely evolve as institutions make decisions in the coming months.

International Students in Summer and Fall 2020

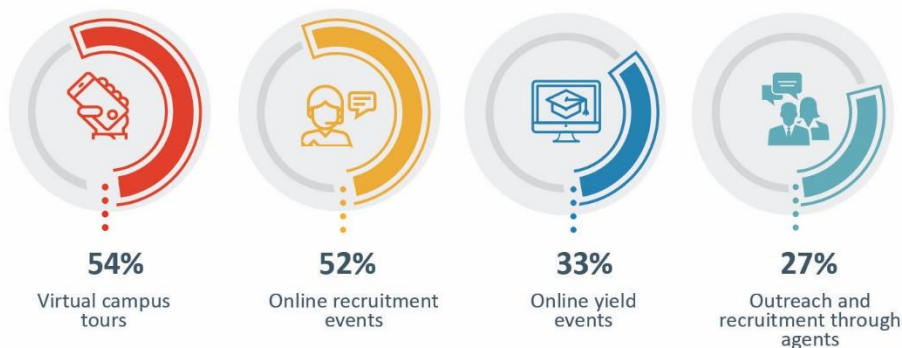
The future of international students on U.S. campuses is impacted by their ability to apply successfully, secure placement, and travel to the United States in order to attend classes.

These are all considerations that U.S. higher education institutions are now making in planning for international student enrollment, whether in-person on campus or virtual. This section includes data on the plans respondent institutions are making to conduct outreach and recruitment, process international student applications, and anticipate international students on their campuses in the semesters to come.

Outreach and Recruitment Effects of COVID-19

The spring months were a time to focus on extensive outreach and recruitment of international students around the world, however the COVID-19 pandemic impacted much of the planned travel for outreach and recruitment. **Over 63% of institutions indicated that recruitment travel was canceled, and 57% of institutions canceled recruitment events.** To address these changes, many colleges and universities (78%) quickly pivoted to offering virtual means to reach international students and providing ways for students to learn about their institutions despite the inability to recruit in-person.

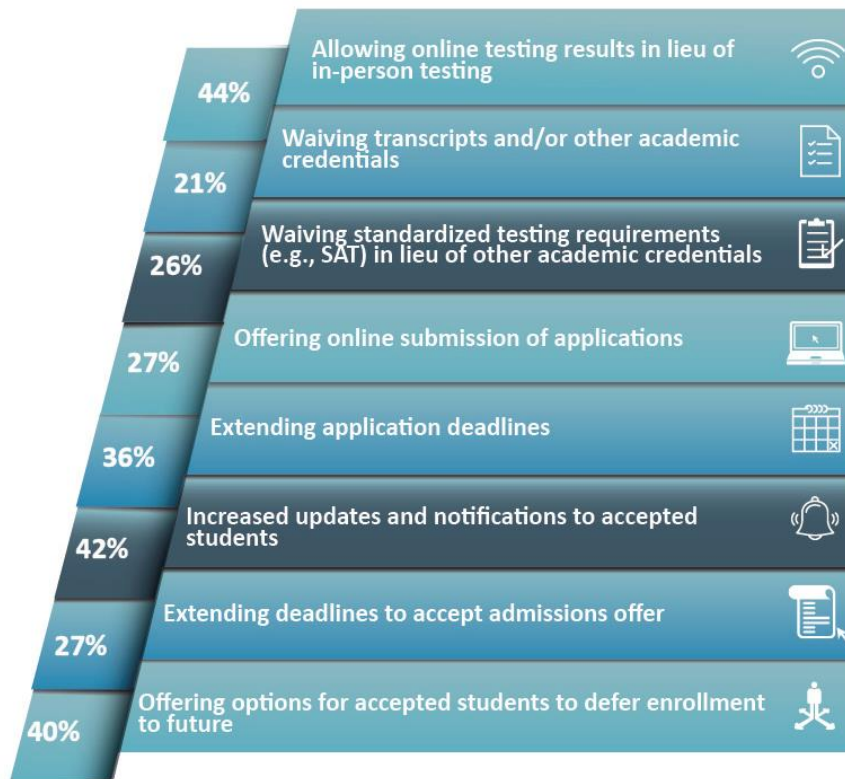
78% of institutions have conducted virtual outreach to future students globally



Application and Selection of International Students in Summer and Fall

As early as February, U.S. institutions were putting measures in place to ensure that international students would be able to apply to their campuses, and that, once they applied and were selected, they would have opportunities for admission. This has come even more into focus as all campuses may face decreasing enrollment numbers in the face of an economic downturn. Other concerns included students not being able to obtain official transcripts for applications due to school closures, and students not being able to attend visa interviews. To address some of these concerns, 84% of institutions enacted new measures to assist in international student recruitment.

84% of institutions have put **new measures** in place for international student recruitment



In addition to the measures reported, institutions also indicated that they were waiving application fees, acceptance fees and deferment fees, giving students more flexibility to apply and confirm enrollment. Other institutions also extended their deferment deadlines to give students more time to come to a decision.

Will Students Come to Campus in the Summer?

Respondent institutions shared their outlook on international students being able to come to their campuses in-person in summer 2020. Most institutions indicate that at least some of their international students will not be able to attend in-person this fall, primarily due to delays in obtaining visas in time to travel, or continuing travel restrictions. It is important to note that this analysis focuses specifically on attendance in-person.

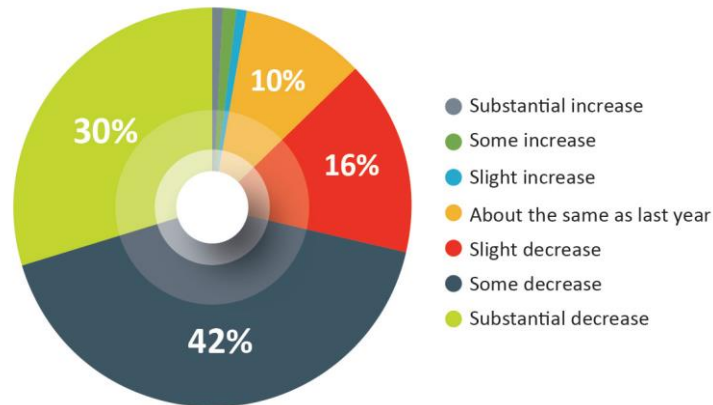
68% of respondent institutions who plan to have international students enrolled in summer 2020 anticipate some students will not be able to come to their campus.

For the summer semester or term, **78% of institutions plan to offer online enrollment to these students**, while **72% are allowing students to defer enrollment until the fall 2020 semester**. A smaller proportion (19%) are offering deferment to summer 2021 or beyond. Only 13% are offering refunds.

Will Students Enroll and Come to Campus in the Fall?

While international offices are making a concerted effort to promote international student opportunities on their campus, **88% of respondent institutions anticipate that international student enrollment will decrease in the 2020/21 academic year.**

International Student Enrollment, Academic Year 2020/21



70% of respondent institutions indicated that they anticipate that some international students will not be able to come to their campus in-person in fall 2020, primarily due to ongoing COVID-19-related travel restrictions or visa delays. It is important to note that this question asked specifically about students being able to attend classes in-person.

A smaller subset of institutions provided specific estimates of *how many* international students they expected to be impacted. Our analysis indicates that these **institutions anticipate that approximately 16% of their international student body will not be able to come to campus in-person in fall 2020.**

Most institutions (75%) are giving students the option to defer enrollment to later in the fall or to spring 2021. While respondent institutions plan to give options for online enrollment, the relatively lower numbers in comparison to the summer semester indicate that institutions may still be unsure how many of their course offerings will be online in the fall. As a result, 52% of reported institutions indicate that they plan to offer students online enrollment in the fall, whereas 42% indicate that they will offer online instruction until the student can come to campus in-person.

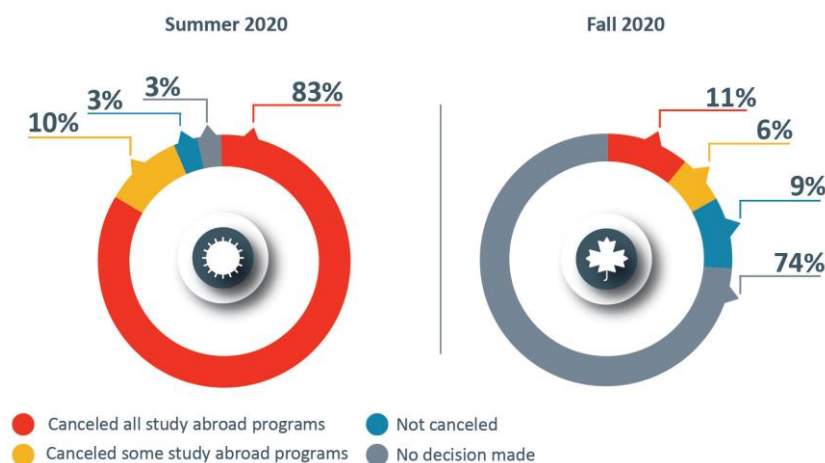
Study Abroad in Summer and Fall 2020

Study abroad among U.S. students will be determined by the duration of COVID-19 and student interest to pursue academic study following the health crisis.

IIE's historical analysis has indicated that despite health crises in the past—including pandemics such as Ebola, Zika, and SARS— study abroad has been resilient.^{xiii} However, the outcome of COVID-19 may be further complicated by the economic implications of the health crisis.

Study Abroad Outlook in Summer and Fall

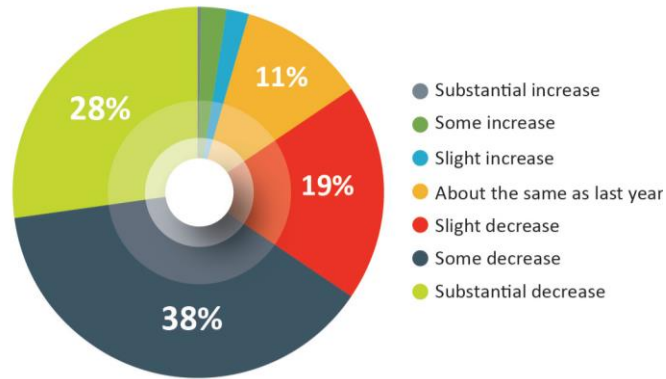
Most respondent institutions (83%) have proactively canceled summer study abroad programs, likely due to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the U.S. Department of State's Global Health Advisory.^{xv,xvi} Similar to how institutions have not finalized decisions on whether fall 2020 classes will be held on campus or virtually, colleges and universities are still waiting to decide whether fall study abroad programs will proceed. A relatively small proportion (17%) of institutions has made the decision to cancel all or some of their study abroad programs in the fall.



Will Students Study Abroad in the 2020/21 Academic Year?

Many colleges and universities will likely continue following guidance from the CDC and the U.S. Department of State to assess study abroad risks for the 2020/21 academic year to protect the health and wellbeing of students. **With global travel advisories in effect, a pandemic that may still be ongoing throughout regions globally, and concerns from students, parents, faculty, and staff, approximately 85% of institutions anticipate a decline in the interest of students to go abroad in the coming academic year.** These potential declines could be exacerbated by a global recession, which would make study abroad more financially difficult for students.

Student Interest in Study Abroad, Academic Year 2020/21



While it may take time for U.S. study abroad interest to rebound, there are many study abroad benefits that institutions can highlight to students once the global health crisis abates. Many colleges and universities have developed institutional partnerships spanning the globe, curriculums focused on global learning objectives, and research that demonstrates how study abroad can improve academic outcomes, generate employment benefits, and positively impact citizenship.^{xvii}

Other Considerations and Long-term Impacts of COVID-19

U.S. higher education institutions have taken proactive and extraordinary measures to support the students, faculty and staff at their institutions. In a health crisis of unprecedented scale, the immediate and short-term decision-making of institutions has allowed instruction to continue. Yet when asked about the long-term challenges of international education on their campus, most respondents considered several areas.

- **Clarity on travel restrictions and options for in-person mobility in future semesters.** Most respondents noted that they would benefit from clearer information regarding travel restrictions to and from the United States, status of U.S. embassies and visa issuance, as well as information on other COVID-19 restrictions in other countries. While most respondents know that some of these factors remain uncertain, their desire to have more data and information to make decisions was clear.
- **Financial implications on international education.** Respondents not only feel the pressure of future international and study abroad enrollment, but face challenges related to the broader future of internationalization on campus. While advocating for student mobility, several respondents noted the risks their departments or universities face financially. It is critical to remain vigilant of the financial precarity that all departments, and particularly international student and study abroad programs, face. It is critical to continue to support international students on campus, and to continue to advocate for the benefits—intercultural, academic, and financial—of having international students on U.S. campuses.
- **Support for campus internationalization.** The current health pandemic allows institutions to consider opportunities for international education exchange on campus beyond in-person mobility. Several institutions noted that best practices for virtual internationalization will be critical to demonstrating the importance of the global exchange of knowledge and ideas. Institutions can also leverage international partnerships in place prior to COVID-19 to support internationalization efforts.

Collecting data amid the pandemic, with rapidly evolving news and many unknowns, has brought to light the need for a continuous and thorough documentation of the response over time. It allows us to study not only the evolution of the crisis but also how we can learn from the decisions made by the U.S. higher education community. IIE will continue the COVID-19 Snapshot Series in the coming months, with a third survey in June to understand plans U.S. institutions have made for fall 2020. The COVID-19 Snapshot Survey Series will also include the 2020 Fall Enrollment Survey of International Academic Exchange in October 2020. We hope that these surveys will continue to inform the field and shed light on international educational exchange trends.

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Cases in the U.S.*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/index.html>

ⁱⁱ World Health Organization, *WHO Timeline: COVID-19*, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

ⁱⁱⁱ White House, *Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak*, www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-declaring-national-emergency-concerning-novel-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak

U.S. Department of State, *Global Level 4 Health Advisory*, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel.html>

^{iv} The *IIE Network* is a membership-based community of over 1,300 higher education institutions and other organizations in the United States and abroad. *Open Doors, 2019*. For more information, visit www.iie.org/opendoors

^v 30 respondents branched out of the survey because they were not affiliated with a U.S. higher education institution

^{vi} National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/index.asp>

^{vii} *Open Doors, 2019*

^{viii} *Ibid*

^{ix} *Ibid*

^x *Ibid*

^{xi} Using estimate of total number of international students enrolled at institution according to *Open Doors 2019*

^{xii} *Ibid*

^{xiii} *Ibid*

^{xiv} Institute of International Education, *Open Doors® Infographics*, <https://www.iie.org/Connect/COVID-19/Infographics>

^{xv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education with Students Participating in International Travel or Study Abroad Programs*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/student-foreign-travel.html>

^{xvi} U.S. Department of State, *Global Level 4 Health Advisory*, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel.html>

^{xvii} Farrugia, C. & Sanger, J., *Gaining an employment edge: The impact of study abroad on 21st century skills and career prospects in the United States*, www.iie.org/publications

The Consortium for Analysis of Student Success through International Education, Results, <https://www.usg.edu/cassie/results>

Mitic, R., *Learning Abroad and Engagement at Home for First-Generation College Students: The Relationship of Study Abroad Participation to Civic Outcomes*, <https://search.proquest.com/openview/0eb7bc245ee1b770904df2f5fa3a534c/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>