

Fall 2021 International Student Enrollment Snapshot

Introduction

The Fall 2021 International Student Enrollment Snapshot includes the findings of over **860 U.S. higher education institutions** on current patterns in international student enrollment as of fall 2021 (2021/22 academic year). The findings reflect how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the U.S. higher education sector and global student mobility to the United States. The report, conducted by IIE and nine partner higher education associations, is released jointly with and complements *Open Doors 2021*, which provides a comprehensive view of international students from the previous year (2020/21). As the Snapshot Survey represents a subset of the almost 3,000 institutions surveyed by *Open Doors*, the full picture of 2021/22 enrollment will be analyzed in *Open Doors 2022*.

Key Findings

The findings of the Fall 2021 International Student Enrollment Snapshot reflect the resilience of U.S. higher education institutions and student mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 860 institutions, accounting for 59% of all international students in *Open Doors 2021*, participated in the Fall Snapshot.

- **New enrollments of international students at U.S. colleges and universities:**
 - Higher education institutions report a 68 percent increase in the number of new international students enrolling for the first time at a U.S. institution in the United States or online from abroad, a surge from the 46 percent decline reported in fall 2020 (*Open Doors 2021*).
 - 70 percent of institutions report an increase in new international student enrollment, 10 percent indicate the number to be the same as last year, and 20 percent report a decrease.
- **International students at U.S. colleges and universities:**
 - The total number of international students (all enrolled and OPT) increased by 4 percent. This is a rebound from the 15 percent decrease due to the COVID-19 pandemic in fall 2020.
 - The total number of enrolled students (undergraduate, graduate, and non-degree students) at U.S. colleges and universities increased by 8 percent. This indicates a marked improvement over the prior year when total international student enrollments fell by 17 percent (*Open Doors 2021*).
 - The number of international students pursuing employment opportunities following their academic studies on Optional Practical Training (OPT) continues to decrease (-10 percent). As in last year, this is in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also due to a shrinking OPT base as lower numbers of students have been eligible for OPT after the surge from the STEM Extension.
- **U.S. higher education institutions are committed to international students' studying in-person:**
 - 99 percent of responding institutions are holding classes in-person or implementing a hybrid model. Only one percent of institutions are offering online classes only in fall 2021.
 - At least 65 percent of the reported international students are on campus in the United States.
- **International student outreach and recruitment a priority in the U.S. and abroad:**
 - U.S. institutions are prioritizing international student outreach in India (56 percent) and China (51 percent) and to international students at U.S. high schools (44 percent).
 - For outreach and recruitment to prospective international students, responding institutions are leveraging current international students (64 percent), online recruitment events (56 percent), and social media outreach (55 percent).
 - 77 percent of reporting institutions indicate that financial support for their student recruitment efforts is the same or higher than in previous years.