



**opendoors**<sup>®</sup>  
SPECIAL REPORT

**PROMOTING ACCESS TO  
U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION:  
INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES**

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## SPECIAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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# Foreword

Inclusion is in the fabric of our campuses and communities, and the United States continues to host international students from all backgrounds.

The United States is the leading higher education destination for students around the world, and maintaining that top ranking is key to supporting broader U.S. foreign policy goals. Our commitment to students and international education is re-affirmed in the Joint Statement of Principles in Support of International Education. Robust exchange of students between the United States and other countries strengthens relationships between current and future leaders, and we strive to be a welcoming environment for all students.

As Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken stated on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities: “Today we recommit to making disability an integral consideration in all foreign policy endeavors. We do so knowing that societies are more secure, innovative, and productive when all people are valued and empowered to fully participate in society.” Inclusion is in the fabric of our campuses and communities, and the United States continues to host international students from all backgrounds. The diversity of the United States is one of our greatest strengths, and we want to be a model and leader for diversity in every aspect of our society.

International students, including those with disabilities, join their American peers on campus to be exposed to a broad range of thought and experiences – a hallmark of the U.S. education system. We are encouraged that international students see and experience the United States as inclusive and accessible, and the data collected in this report outlines that international students with disabilities are continuing to take advantage of educational opportunities in the United States.

Thank you to the Institute of International Education for leveraging their expertise and networks to develop this preliminary study, and the hundreds of colleges and universities who generously shared their data. We look forward to welcoming even more international students, including more students with disabilities, to U.S. college and university campuses in the future.

*Lee Satterfield*  
*Assistant Secretary of State*  
*Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs*  
*U.S. Department of State*

# Introduction

This report provides an initial foundation for stakeholders across the United States to understand the national landscape of information on international students with disabilities.

In recent years, many U.S. industries, organizations, and institutions have shown an increased focus on and commitment to the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). This includes the field of higher education, where U.S. colleges and universities have invested in additional institutional supports for a diversifying population of students. In particular, focusing on the intersection of DEIA with international education can yield transformative results with diverse cohorts of students engaged in international educational exchange, including international students with disabilities.

Even though many U.S. institutions collect data about the international student body in the United States and about students with disabilities in higher education, there is relatively limited research related to international students with disabilities at U.S. colleges and universities. This knowledge gap is a pressing issue as international students with disabilities may experience a combination of challenges that may be distinct from international students without disabilities or U.S. students with disabilities. As institutions seek to build inclusive best practices to serve international students with disabilities, leaders in the field must be well-informed about this student body to best advocate for their needs. This can include understanding the data available on international students with disabilities, identifying the obstacles they face, developing best practices for student advising or referrals to additional resources, and creating opportunities to improve organizational processes to bolster student support services.

To address this need, the Institute of International Education's (IIE) Research, Evaluation, and Learning team designed a research study, with the support of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), to review the current state of data on international students in the United States with disabilities. The findings in this report reflect information from interviews and survey responses from 386 colleges and universities, which hosted 35 percent of the international student population in 2021/22. Based on their responses, this report provides the most current data on international students with disabilities at U.S. colleges and universities as of the 2021/22 academic year and a detailed analysis of the availability of data on these students. Furthermore, it explores the unique challenges institutions noted in working with international students with disabilities and U.S. colleges and universities' commitment to serving international students with disabilities. The research team designed this report to provide an initial foundation for institutional leaders across the United States to understand the national landscape of information on international students with disabilities. We hope institutions can use this information to further elevate and bring greater awareness to inclusively serving these students. These data and insights can also inform future research and recommendations for the field.

# Key Findings

## DATA ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

40 percent of surveyed institutions reported data on international students with disabilities as of fall 2021, with an additional 15 percent of institutions noting the ability to provide this information in the future. Based on a survey of 386 U.S. higher education institutions, this reflects a significant proportion of institutions able to provide data.

Responding institutions reported 1,693 international students with a disclosed disability in the 2021/22 academic year. This reflects approximately 1.6 percent of the international student population among reporting institutions. Institutions reporting by academic levels noted that approximately three-quarters (76 percent) of international students with disclosed disabilities were undergraduate students.

Institutions reported that approximately one-third (34 percent) of disabilities disclosed by international students were mental health or psychological disabilities. Institutions also reported significant populations of students who disclosed attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (19 percent), learning disabilities (15 percent), and chronic health disabilities (14 percent). There was a smaller population of students with mobility or physical disabilities (4 percent), sensory disabilities (4 percent), autism spectrum disabilities (2 percent), and other types of disabilities (8 percent).



Responding institutions reported **1,693** international students with a disclosed disability in the 2021/22 academic year.



**88 percent** of reporting institutions plan to use data about international students with disabilities to support multiple initiatives, including advocacy, resource planning, training, and more.

## INSTITUTIONAL ABILITY TO COLLECT AND REPORT DATA ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Most U.S. higher education institutions (83 percent) reported the need to consult with a disability resource office to report on data regarding international students with disabilities. More than half of all institutions (64 percent) noted that this would require collaboration across multiple offices or departments to collect and report data on international students with disabilities.

The vast majority of respondents who were able to estimate the amount of time it would take to report on international students with disabilities (84 percent) noted it would take fewer than three hours. This level of effort to report on this data varied by institutional type, with a higher proportion of doctoral institutions (36 percent) indicating that it would take more than three hours to compile information. The estimated time to report data by each category of disability did not significantly differ from the time it would take to report the overall level of international students with disabilities.

## INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION, SUPPORTS, AND RESOURCES

Colleges and universities reiterated their support for international students with disabilities. Institutions noted that international students with disabilities are supported in the same manner as U.S. students and in alignment with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. These acts state that U.S. colleges and universities must provide appropriate and reasonable academic adjustments as necessary for all students who disclose a disability. The majority of institutions (74 percent) noted using multiple formats to inform international students about disability resources, including websites about disability services, orientation seminars, student services or academic support fairs, print resources, and social media.

**The overwhelming majority of institutions (88 percent) plan to use data on international students with disabilities in multiple initiatives across campus.** Institutions noted plans to use this information in advocating for students (76 percent), resource planning (63 percent), advocating for resource and staffing needs (55 percent), training faculty and staff (54 percent), and compliance (47 percent).

**More than two-thirds of responding institutions (69 percent) noted that this survey prompted the consideration of further collaboration between disability resource offices and offices that serve international students.** This may result in new joint efforts among offices that have not yet collaborated, as



**69 percent** of responding institutions noted that this survey prompted the consideration of further collaboration between disability resource offices and offices that serve international students.

well as the potential for expanded connections or ideas for the nearly three-quarters of institutions (73 percent) that already actively collaborate between international student and disability offices.

**Institutions noted that international students with disabilities may face unique barriers or concerns.** Of the respondents who have worked with international students with disabilities, institutions noted that international students may have limited knowledge about disabilities as defined in the United States (55 percent), challenges in documenting a disability (49 percent), limited knowledge about academic accommodations (47 percent), limited knowledge of one's own disability (45 percent), and concerns around the stigma of disabilities (41 percent), among others.



The majority of institutions (**74 percent**) noted using multiple formats to inform international students about disability resources, including websites about disability services, orientation seminars, student services or academic support fairs, print resources, and social media.

# Methodology

## SURVEY BACKGROUND AND DATA COLLECTION

This research study aims to provide an initial landscape review and an understanding of the state of international students with disabilities in the United States using a mixed methods approach. The study consisted of qualitative interviews and quantitative data collected via a national survey of U.S. higher education institutions to provide a baseline understanding of data on international students with disabilities.

This research was guided by three key areas of focus:

1. Assess the known scale of international students with disabilities attending U.S. colleges and universities
2. Identify the availability of institutional data on international students with disabilities
3. Understand how U.S. higher education institutions support international students with disabilities

In the qualitative component of the research study, the research team interviewed over a dozen practitioners and experts familiar with both international student services and disability services within the U.S. higher education field in the summer of 2022. These semi-structured interviews highlighted institutional perspectives, informed further background research, and helped the team develop a quantitative survey to disseminate to the broader field.

The research team paired insights from these interviews with data from the International Students with Disabilities Survey conducted in August 2022. The survey was sent to U.S. institutions surveyed in the *Open Doors* International Student Census and included representatives from 2,687 accredited U.S. higher education institutions hosting international students. Responses were either directly input by the recipient or collaboratively completed with support from the disability resource office. The survey captured 386 valid responses from higher education institutions. This sample of institutions represents more than one-third

(35 percent) of the international student population in *Open Doors* (2022).

## DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

To allow for direct data comparison, this research study used the *Open Doors* definition of an international student (IIE, n.d.). *Open Doors* collects data on international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions, including

- Students on temporary, nonimmigrant visas, regardless of if the student was physically located in the United States.
- Students from outside the United States enrolled in coursework through a U.S. institution, regardless of visa status.

The research team based the definition of a student with a disability on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which includes a person who

- Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,
- Has a history or record of such an impairment (such as cancer that is in remission), or
- Is perceived by others as having such an impairment (such as a person who has scars from a severe burn) (ADA.gov, 2023).

National datasets vary in how information is collected and reported by types of disabilities. The research team based the classifications used in this report on a review of datasets, such as those from the U.S. Department of Education, and on conversations with experts in disability resources (Appendix II).

Bearing in mind potential differences among datasets at each college or university, the survey provided the ability for institutions to provide additional context and information if the structure of the given classifications did not align with their data. Only seven survey respondents indi-



DISABILITY	DESCRIPTION
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	
Autism Disability	Includes autism, Asperger syndrome, developmental disorder, etc.
Chronic Health Disability	Includes asthma, arthritis, chronic fatigue, Crohn's disease, diabetes, epilepsy, immune system disorders, long-COVID, etc.
Learning Disability	Includes dyslexia, auditory processing disorder, etc.
Mental Health/Psychological Disability	Includes anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, schizophrenia, etc.
Mobility/Physical Disability	Includes limb difference, cerebral palsy, paraplegia, spina bifida, spinal cord injury, etc.
Sensory Disability	Includes hard of hearing, d/Deaf, low vision, blind, deafblind, etc.
Other Disability	Includes traumatic injury, speech disability, intellectual disability, etc.

FIGURE 1  
Disability classifications

cated using additional classifications or classifications not aligned with the provided categories.

The research team recognizes the importance of using language throughout this report that respects students with disabilities. Both person-first language and identity-first language are accepted according to the ninth edition of the University of Kansas' *Guidelines: How to Write About People with Disabilities* (2020). Person-first language acknowledges the person before the disability, such as "student with a disability," which has been used by advocates since in the 1970s. Identity-first language, such as "disabled student," allows the individual to claim the identity and is often used to express culture and pride. Given that international students may come from different contexts, this report follows the United Nation's Disability Inclusive Language Guidelines (n.d., Disability Inclusive), which currently recommends using people-first language. The team acknowledges that language may shift over time and the importance of directly asking students if they prefer either person-first or identity-first language.

### LIMITATIONS

Limitations to this data collection include voluntary response bias and challenges common to reporting on students with disabilities. It is important to note that institutions can only report on international students who disclose a disability. The research team recognizes

that many students with disabilities do not disclose this information to their institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). As a result, the data represented in this report reflect an undercount of the number of international students with disabilities studying in the United States.

We also note that some students, such as those identifying as part of the Deaf community who share a culture and sign language, may not identify or be classified by an institution as a student with a disability.

Furthermore, we note that the responses to the questions, such as around the barriers that international students may experience, represent the opinions of institutional respondents. Further research is necessary to better understand perspectives on this topic directly from international students with disabilities.

### RESPONDENT PROFILE

The research team conducted interviews with experts and practitioners representing international student services and disability resource offices. In order to gain insights and understand best practices in data collection on disabilities, we also interviewed members of organizations and authors whose work focused on serving students with disabilities or providing resources to disability practitioners.

Data collection efforts for the national survey reflected a broad range of colleges and universities throughout the United States (Fig. 2). The survey captured responses from across the United States, with responses from colleges and universities in 49 states, two U.S. territories, and Washington, D.C. Notably, the International Students with Disabilities Survey respondent profile closely mirrors the profile of the institutions that completed the *Open Doors* 2022 International Student Census. Doctoral universities, which comprised nearly one-third of the respondents (31 percent), are slightly overrepresented

in comparison to the *Open Doors* dataset. As doctoral institutions host the majority of international students in the United States, the perspective of these institutions is important to consider.

Furthermore, the research team collected data about which administrative office completed the survey. Approximately half (52 percent) of respondents were international student service professionals. Additionally, 19 percent of respondents were from institutional research/effectiveness offices, and 10 percent were from disability resource offices.

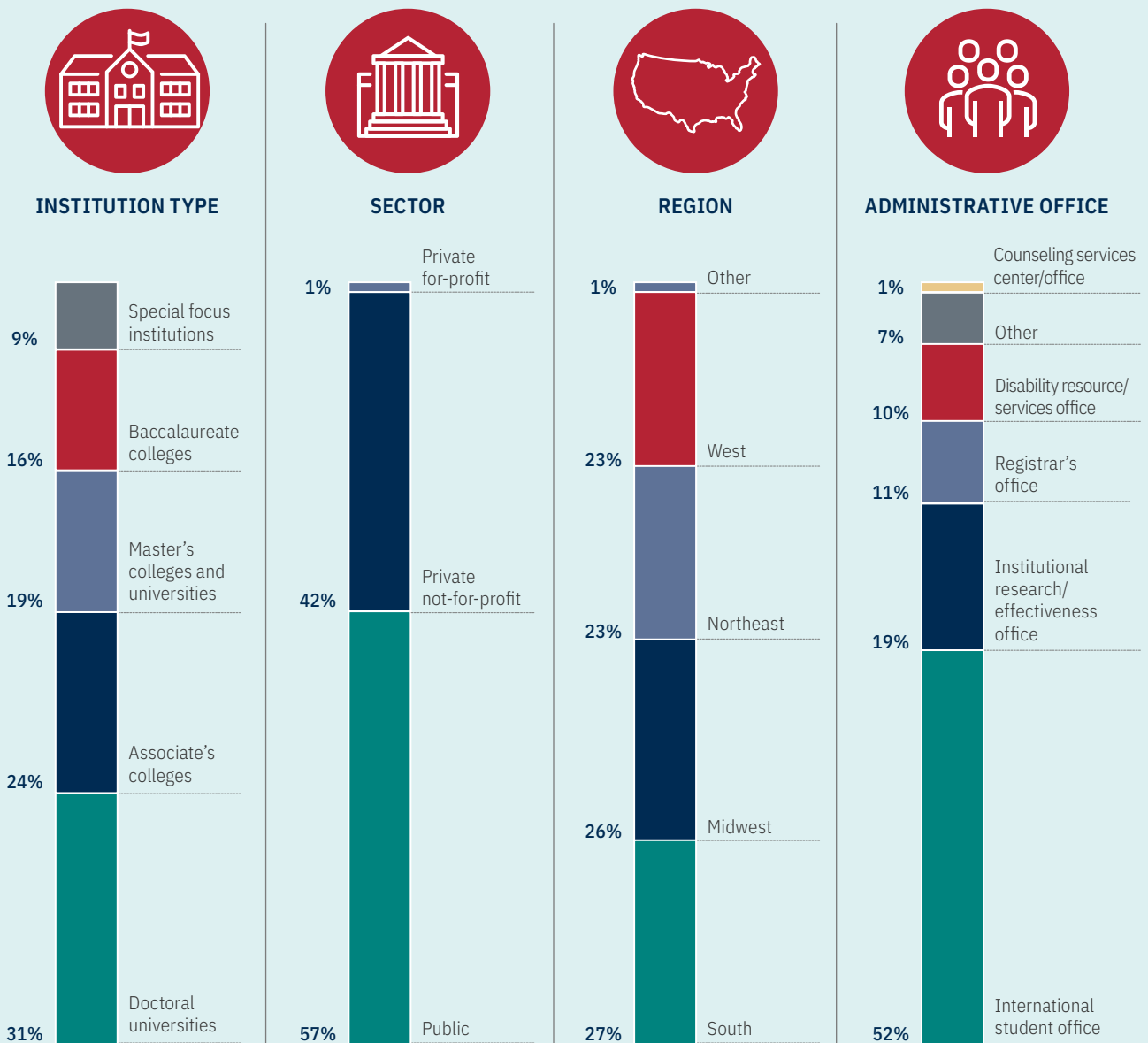


FIGURE 2  
Respondent profile

# Data on International Students with Disabilities at U.S. Colleges and Universities

*Part one of this report examines the current data that U.S. colleges and universities were able to provide about international students with disabilities as of the 2021/22 academic year. It examines the profile of the more than 1,600 international students with disclosed disabilities noted by responding institutions.*

## International Students with Disabilities

To understand the current landscape of international students with disclosed disabilities, the research team asked survey respondents to identify their institution’s ability to provide data on these students as of the fall 2021 semester. A notable 40 percent of institutions reported data on international students with disabilities within the survey, with responses ranging from zero students with disclosed disabilities to over a hundred at larger responding institutions (Fig. 3). While this represents less than half of the reporting institutions in the sample, it nonetheless reflects a significant proportion of respondents. In fact, this level of institutional response is in line with the proportion of institutions that reported data on U.S. students studying abroad with disabilities in the most recent *Open Doors* U.S. Study Abroad Survey.<sup>1</sup>

An additional 15 percent of respondents anticipated having the ability to provide this information in the future. While the majority of institutions provided details about institutional capacity to provide data, nearly one-third of

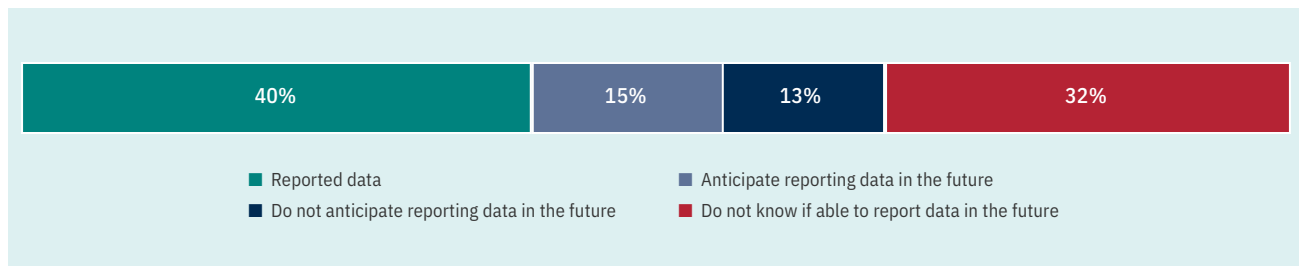


**55 percent** of institutions noted the ability to provide data on international students with disabilities as of 2021/22 or in future reporting cycles.

respondents (32 percent) were not able to report data at this point in time and did not know if they would be able to provide data in the future.

Among the 40 percent of higher education institutions able to provide data, colleges and universities reported that 1,693 enrolled international students had disclosed a disability in the fall of 2021.

Based on a comparison with *Open Doors* data of the overall number of international students reported for the same period, approximately 1.6 percent of international students at responding colleges and universities disclosed a disability.



**FIGURE 3**  
Institutional ability to report data on international students with disabilities in fall 2021

<sup>1</sup> The first year that data was collected on U.S. study abroad students with disabilities (2006/07), the variable response rate was 14 percent. As institutions improved on their ability to collect and report data, there have been steady increases in institutional reporting. In the *Open Doors 2022 Report*, 31 percent of students were included in this variable analysis.



Colleges and universities reported **1,693** enrolled international students with a disclosed disability in the fall of 2021.

The majority of these students attended doctoral institutions (75 percent), which aligns with *Open Doors* data that indicates that 78 percent of all international students are at doctoral universities (2022). Notably, 13 percent of students with disclosed disabilities were reported at associate's colleges (community colleges). In comparison, only 5 percent of all international students attended associate's colleges in 2021/22.

In the International Students with Disabilities Survey, institutions also provided data about the number of international students with disabilities by academic level. According to responding institutions, the majority of reported students with disclosed disabilities were studying at the undergraduate level (76 percent). In comparison, approximately 23 percent of students with disclosed disabilities were enrolled at the graduate level, and 1 percent were non-degree students.

In interpreting this information, we hypothesize that this data reflects an undercount compared to the overall total of international students with disabilities in the United States. Among the U.S. student population, the Institute of Education Sciences reported that only 13 percent of students with a disability in high school noted a disability present during college and had disclosed that disability to their college or university (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Based on this research, it is possible that a far larger percentage of international students have a disability that is either undocumented or undisclosed. This hypothesis

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*“I can tell you how many people have requested accommodations at our university. But I can’t tell you how many people with disabilities are out there, because not everyone may disclose if they don’t need something.”*

is also supported by the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) (2016a, 2016b), which estimates that 13 percent of enrolled international undergraduate students and 4 percent of international graduate students self-reported a disability in 2015/16.<sup>2</sup>

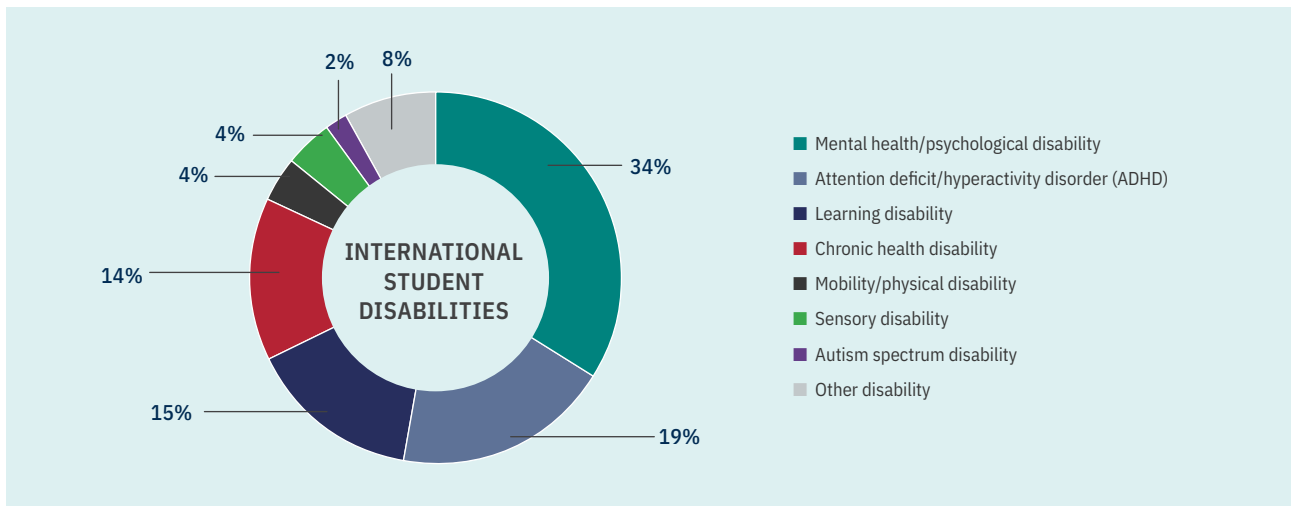
Given this information, it is important for professionals working with international students to recognize that a significant proportion of students may have a disability, whether or not it is disclosed to their institution. As such, making students aware of disability resources and implementing best practices in communicating information is imperative to support students.

## Types of Disability

Respondents also provided information about classifications of disclosed disabilities (Fig. 4). The largest classification of disclosed disabilities for international students was mental health or psychological disabilities, with approximately one-third (34 percent) of disclosed disabilities falling into this category. This aligns with the trends noted overall in U.S. higher education and written about by the American Psychological Association (2022). Scholarly research indicates that over 60 percent of U.S. college students have met the criteria for at least one mental health problem and that almost three-quarters of students have reported psychological distress (Ketchen Lipson et al., 2022; American College Health Association, 2022). Particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic, college and university presidents ranked student mental health concerns as the number one most pressing issue, according to the American Council on Education’s Pulse Point Survey (Cecil & Melidona, 2022). Providing resources on mental health is critical to supporting many international students, as international students may often encounter sources of stress and heightened anxiety in comparison to

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<sup>2</sup> Technical notes that examine estimates of disability indicate that self-reported data should also be reported with caution as self-reported data by students can “reflect individual perceptions of their functioning, rather than more objective measures of functioning that use standardized criteria such as those used in clinical studies of disability” (National Science Foundation, 2019).



**FIGURE 4**  
Percent of international students disabilities reported by disability classification  
*Note: Students with more than one disability were included in each respective category.*

students studying in their home country. Sources of stress may include challenges in adapting to a new culture, language proficiency, perceived discrimination, and social isolation, in addition to academic stress (Chen et al., 2020, Alharbi & Smith, 2018).

While the largest proportion reported was for students with disclosed mental health disabilities, there were also significant populations of students who disclosed attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (19 percent), learning disabilities (15 percent), and chronic health disabilities (14 percent). There was also a smaller population of students with mobility or physical disabilities (4 percent), sensory disabilities (4 percent), autism spectrum disabilities (2 percent), and other types of disabilities (8 percent). As institutions work to serve all international students with disabilities, collecting and reporting this information can help administrators better understand students' needs and how to plan and allocate resources to serve them.

## Factors Impacting Institutional Data Collection

Institutions unable to report data on international students with disabilities as of 2021 cited various reasons. Approximately half of these colleges and universities (51 percent) noted that this information was not currently collected within their institution. Related to this, approximately one-third of respondents (33 percent) indicated an inability to access data on international students with disabilities. Survey participants



**53 percent** of disabilities disclosed to institutions by international students were mental health disabilities or ADHD.

from disability offices cited that disability services databases may not be populated with a student's international student status. Conversely, respondents from international student services offices cited that student accommodation information was only available through the university's disability resource office.

Nearly half of the institutions noted privacy concerns (46 percent) or a lack of staff time to complete the request for information (38 percent). The concerns around privacy are notable, particularly among the several hundred institutions with ten or fewer international students, as institutions must uphold student confidentiality.

Given responses from institutions around reporting data on international students with disabilities, it is important to better understand the specific challenges and departmental practices to collect, analyze, and report on this data. Insights into these processes will bolster the field's efforts to support student advocacy, identify opportunities for collaboration, and strengthen the ability of institutions to learn about student populations while preserving data privacy.

## Institutional Ability to Collect and Report Data on International Students with Disabilities

*In an acknowledgment of the sensitivities associated with information on international students with disabilities, part two of this report analyzes the ability of U.S. higher education institutions to collect and report data on these students. The section explores topics related to the processes for institutions to report data while protecting student confidentiality, the time commitment to report this information, and the classifications of international students with disabilities.*

### Data Collection Processes

Institutional data on students with disabilities is highly protected across U.S. higher education institutions to safeguard the confidentiality of students with disabilities. Due to data protection measures and variations on where information may be stored on campus, many departments have to coordinate to collect and report data on international students with disabilities.

#### COLLABORATION AND CONSULTATION ON DATA

To report information on international students with disabilities for this research report, 64 percent of U.S. colleges and universities noted that collaboration and consultation are critical to collecting and reporting data related to this student population.

The overwhelming majority of interview participants and survey respondents (83 percent) noted that to report information, they would need to consult the campus disability resource office (Fig. 5). This is because, to protect student confidentiality, data on students with disabilities is often restricted within systems to authorized users in the disability office. Among survey participants, all respondents who work within the disability resource office noted that their office should be consulted in fulfilling requests for data on students with disabilities. Furthermore, the vast majority of professionals who worked directly in international student offices (89 percent) recognized the need to consult and collaborate with colleagues in the disability office to report on this data. Fewer respondents from other offices, such as institutional research offices or registrars, noted the need to directly consult the disability resource

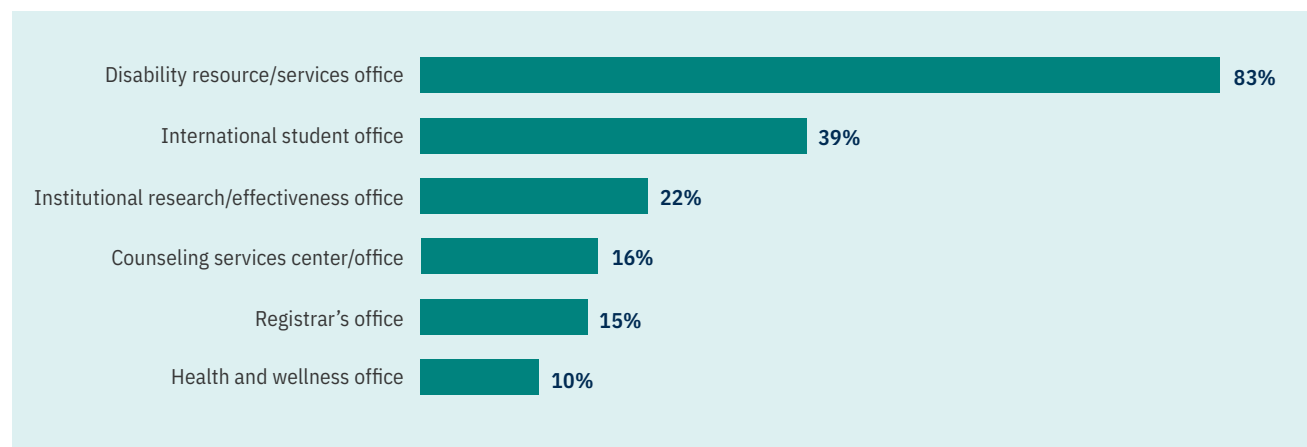


FIGURE 5  
Offices consulted for data collection



**64 percent** of U.S. colleges and universities noted that collaboration and consultation are critical to reporting data related to international students with disabilities.

office, likely because they have access to internal systems that may allow them to pull this information directly.

Outside of the disability office, institutions noted variations in which offices they would need to consult, likely due to the different reporting structures across U.S. higher education institutions. A smaller proportion of institutions cited the need to consult with the international student office (39 percent) or the institutional research office (22 percent). This indicates that in curating data for reporting, the principal points of collaboration would be between the disability resource office and the office that houses data on international students, which may be the international student, institutional research, or registrar’s office, depending on the institution’s structure.

### INTERNAL PROTOCOLS FOR COLLECTING AND REPORTING DATA

In addition to collaboration, institutions identified additional internal steps needed to report on international students

with disabilities (Fig. 6). The majority of institutions (61 percent) indicated the need to cross-reference a list of international students with a list of students registered with disabilities services. This aligns with institutional practices noted by Mobility International USA (MIUSA) (n.d., Track Students) on collecting aggregate data on study abroad students with disabilities. One example of the successful application of this practice is when the international student office provides a list of student IDs to the office that houses data on disabilities for cross-referencing. This enables the disability office to provide an aggregate number of international students with disabilities back to the international student office for reporting purposes without including identifiable student information.

How easily institutions can facilitate this transfer of information varies greatly depending on the sophistication of data systems at the college or university. Approximately 21 percent of institutions noted that identifying this specific type of combined data would be a manual process of counting student records by hand. Other institutions

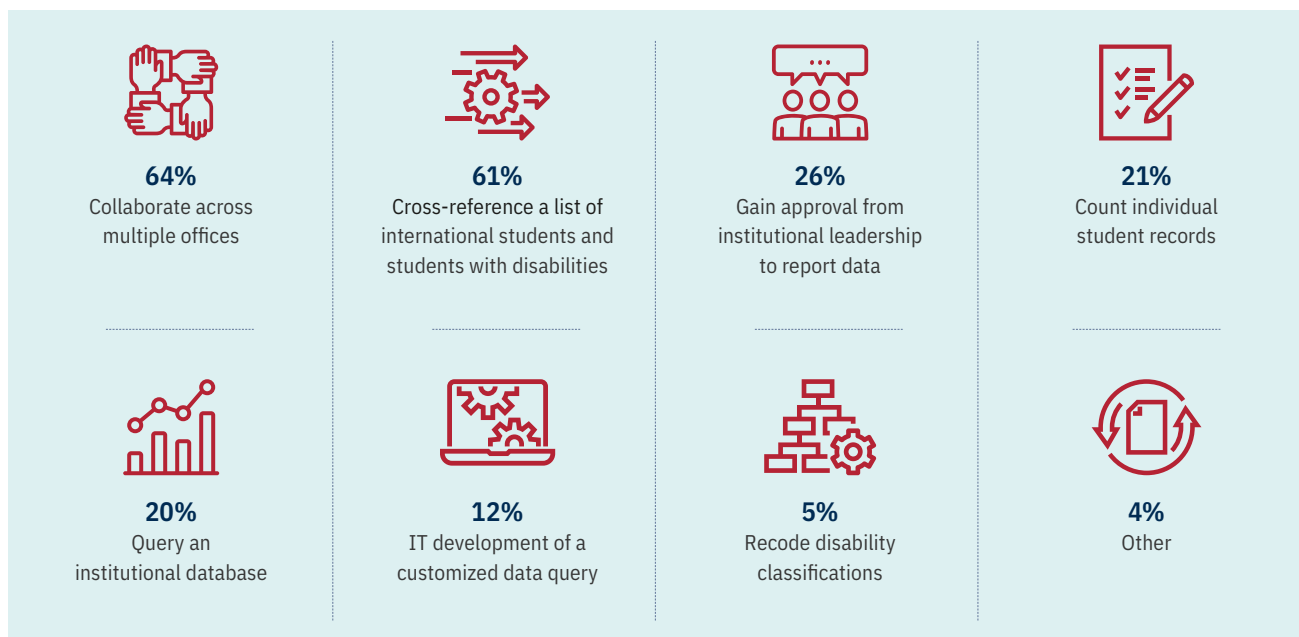


FIGURE 6  
Data collection processes

*“More and more [disability offices] have electronic database systems where they can track their services and their students and would be able to pull pretty quickly the number of students that they're aware of ... Others are still [using] hard copy Excel tables, hand recording, and so it's going to vary by education [institution]. It's going to vary by resources and sophistication.”*

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noted the technology they would need to utilize, such as querying an institutional database (20 percent) or seeking assistance from database administrators to develop a query that could pull this information (12 percent).

Given the sensitive nature of this data, a quarter of institutions (26 percent) cited the need to gain institutional leaders' approvals to report this information to external sources. It is important to note that institutional knowledge of these processes varied across respondents, with just over 70 institutions indicating they did not know the process needed to collect data on international students with disabilities.

As institutions and organizations consider requesting this information for future usage, it is critical to recognize the level of approval and collaboration between offices needed to develop a method of reporting. As such, any requests for collecting aggregated data on international students will likely need advance notice and ample time to develop reporting.

## Institutional Reporting Level of Effort

Given the collaborative nature of collecting and reporting on data for international students with disabilities, it is important to acknowledge the time and effort it would take staff to provide data on this topic. When asked how much time an institution would take to report on international students with disabilities, 84 percent indicated that it would take less than three hours, with 54 percent of institutions noting that it would take less than one hour (Fig. 7).

Interestingly, this finding held true across different offices, with the majority of respondents from international student offices (77 percent), disability resource offices (85 percent), and institutional research offices (88 percent) reporting that it would take fewer than three hours to compile and report data on international students with disabilities. There was also a notable 11 percent of respondents reporting that it would take more than five hours to collect and report on this data.

When examining the time commitment to report data by institution type, the vast majority of respondents at associate's colleges, baccalaureate colleges, master's colleges and universities, and special focus institutions indicated it would take less than three hours to report the total number of international students with a disability. Respondents at these institutions may have confidence in their ability to report because of the smaller number of international students that attend most of these institutions or because of close relationships or collaboration with the disability services team.

Among doctoral institutions, nearly a third (31 percent) indicated it would take more than five hours of staff time to provide data on international students with disabilities. This more significant time commitment is likely a result of siloed departments or institutions working with larger student bodies, as a majority of doctoral universities in the United States host more than 500 international students. As doctoral institutions host approximately 78 percent of

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*“There are certainly important parameters around confidentiality with disability information and some disability resource offices understand better than others how to respect that and still share data. Sometimes you'll get a wall of confidentiality — ‘we can't share any information’ — which is not the case. You can't share any personally identifiable information.”*





**84 percent** of institutions indicated it would take less than three hours to report on international students with disabilities. The estimated time to report data by each category of disability did not significantly differ from the time it would take to report the overall level of students with disabilities.

all international students according to *Open Doors* (2022), future requests for information on this topic should be aware of the additional level of effort that many of these universities would need to undertake to report robust data on the number of international students with disabilities.

In addition to the time commitment of collecting the overall number of international students with disabilities, institutions also provided insights on the level of effort to report on the classification of types of disabilities. The estimated time to report data by each category of disability did not significantly differ from the time it would take to report the overall level of students with disabilities.

Nearly half of reporting institutions (45 percent) indicated that providing international student totals by disability type

would take less than an hour, and approximately 12 percent indicated it would take more than five hours. This indicates that once an institution has established the data collection and aggregation process, the level of effort to pull supplemental data by type of disability may not be a significant additional burden on colleges and universities.

While most institutions were able to estimate the level of staff time to report on this information, a significant population of respondents (135 institutions or 35 percent of the total sample) remained unsure of the time commitment to curate this information. As institutions consider their ability to report on this data in the future, it will be critical to develop an understanding of best practices to streamline the process and minimize staff time to aggregate information.

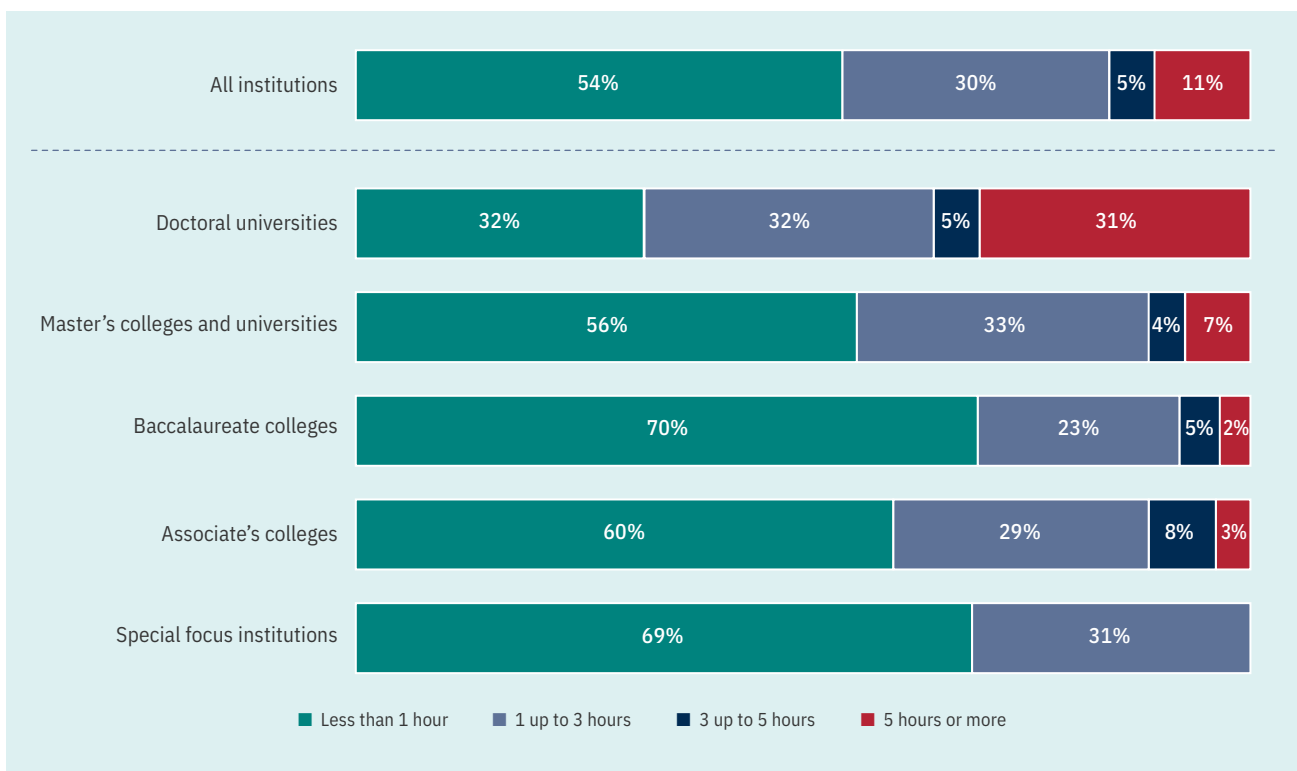


FIGURE 7  
Institutional time commitment to report data on international students with disabilities

## Institutional Collaboration and Resources to Support International Students with Disabilities

*Part three of this report explores how U.S. colleges and universities leverage data on international students with disabilities and collaborate on an institutional level to support these students. Additionally, it delves in greater detail into the unique barriers that international students with disabilities may encounter and how U.S. higher education institutions work to actively support these students.*

### Using Data to Support International Students with Disabilities

While it is important to understand how higher education institutions collect data on international students with disabilities, it is also critical to understand how these institutions can leverage the aggregate data to further support the field. As part of the research study, institutions indicated distinct ways they could use this data to inform advocacy, train employees, and improve campus diversity (Fig. 8). Among institutions collecting data on international students with disabilities, 88 percent of colleges and universities use or plan to use this data to support multiple initiatives.

A common theme noted was the use of data for advocacy on behalf of international students with disabilities (76 percent) as well as for resources (63 percent) and staffing needs (55 percent). For example, data on the types of students with disabilities can inform the allocation of resources. With this knowledge, a college or university could assess students' technology needs, budget resources to meet the needs of students on campus, and advocate for future needs based on the profile of students being served.

Just over half of the reporting institutions (54 percent) noted the importance of using this information to train faculty and staff to better serve international students with disabilities. As highlighted by an interview participant, this type of training must extend past just the international student offices to include other employees on campus, such as residence life staff, faculty, and academic advisors. Including a broader range of institutional employees in this training can also encourage additional collaboration



**88 percent** of reporting institutions plan to use data about international students with disabilities to support multiple initiatives, including advocacy, resource planning, training, and more.

between offices, establishing more robust support structures for international students with disabilities. One institution cited how additional training with the disability services office led to increased referrals and collaboration.

Institutions also cited using this data to promote student diversity, with over one-third of colleges and universities (38 percent) noting how this data can be used to highlight student diversity across campus. This data showcases how colleges and universities serve and support many types of international students as part of their broader focus areas of diversity, inclusion, equity, and access.

### Collaboration

As noted in Part 2, the collaboration between offices that serve international students and students with disabilities is critical to collecting data. Encouragingly, 73 percent of respondents noted that there were already active

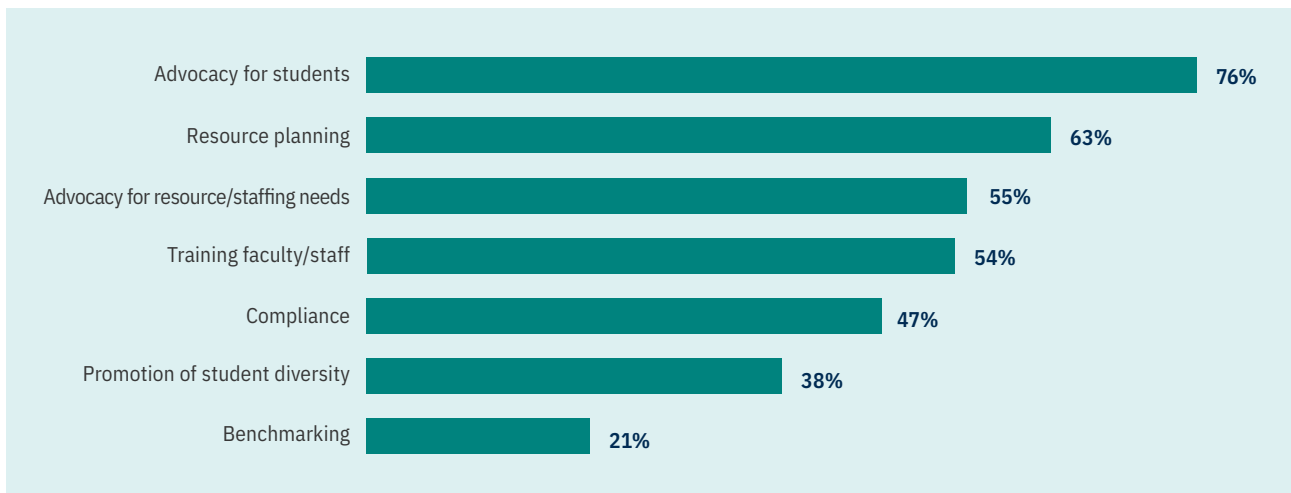


FIGURE 8  
Institutional usage of data on international students with disabilities

collaborative efforts between international student and disability resources offices.

This engagement between offices was highest within doctoral universities (78 percent), master’s colleges and universities (75 percent), and liberal arts colleges (75 percent).

### INSTITUTIONAL SIZE AND STRUCTURE’S IMPACT ON COLLABORATION

Across respondents, there were varying levels of collaboration, which may be due to institutional size and structure. At smaller institutions with fewer staff, individuals may have multiple roles and responsibilities to handle both international students and students with disabilities within the same department, leading to collaborative initiatives. For example, an interviewee noted that the international student service office is physically located close to the disability resource office. The proximity of the offices facilitated

additional opportunities for interactions and collaboration. The interpersonal knowledge from working closely with colleagues may lead individuals to liaise regularly, address the needs of specific students, and collaborate on initiatives such as collecting and reporting data. Larger institutions may have the combined challenges of different departments handling distinct student populations while potentially being separated by a larger campus. These offices may face challenges due to institutional silos, requiring a more proactive approach to create connections to discuss how to serve students. At larger institutions, one best practice is to identify a specific person within an international office to liaise with the disability services office to integrate best practices and trainings (MIUSA, n.d., *Creating a Culture*).

While the establishment of these collaborative working relationships between departments is crucial for supporting international students with disabilities, it is also critical for institutions to continually invest in those cross-functional teams. Interview participants noted the importance of continued engagement, particularly amid high staff turnover. Another interview participant highlighted that without close collaboration, outreach only tended to happen in emergencies when students needed support from an immigration perspective. These examples underscore the need for institutionalized plans and a commitment from leadership to continue communicating and collaborating.



**73 percent** of respondents noted active collaborative efforts between international student and disability resources offices.

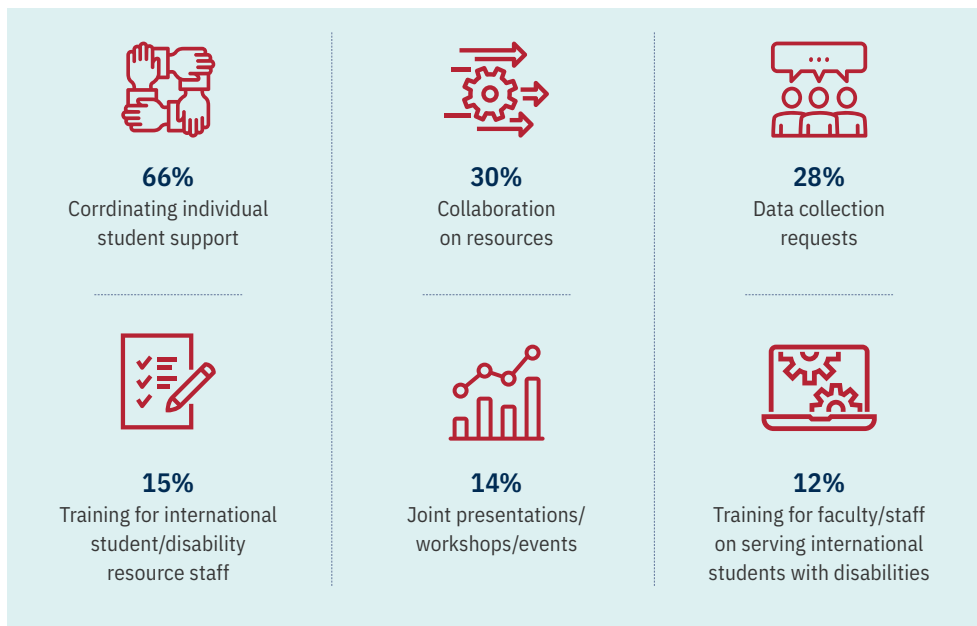


FIGURE 9  
Institutional collaborative efforts between international student and disability resource offices

### COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

Successful collaboration within institutions comes in different forms, with the greater mission of better serving international students with disabilities (Fig. 9). Among institutions already working across offices, the principal focus was direct coordination to support individual students as needed (66 percent). This could include everything from a student referral to a disability resource office to a multi-department assessment with a set plan to help a student succeed. Approximately one-third of respondents also noted working together on creating resources for

international students with disabilities (30 percent), such as developing flyers or websites to provide information. Interestingly, a slightly smaller number of institutions also noted collaborating across offices to respond to data requests (28 percent).

As institutions look to the future, many colleges and universities noted their commitment to collaborating across teams to work with international students with disabilities. It is particularly significant that more than two-thirds of survey respondents (69 percent) noted that participating in this survey had prompted them to consider reaching out to colleagues with ideas for building future collaboration.



**69 percent** of respondents noted that participating in this survey had prompted them to consider reaching out to colleagues with ideas for building future collaboration.

### Barriers for International Students with Disabilities

As documented in previous research, people with disabilities can face environmental and attitudinal barriers, stigmas, and discrimination (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020, Trammell, 2009).

*“Some campuses have very strong collaborative relationships between their Disability Resource Office and their International Education [office], their Study Abroad [office], or however they’ve framed it on their campus. Not every campus has that level of cooperation and connection.”*

As such, international students with disabilities studying in a new context in the United States, with disclosed or undisclosed disabilities, may face additional challenges (Fig. 10).

### LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF DISABILITIES IN THE U.S. CONTEXT

Many colleges and universities reported on the limited knowledge that international students may have due to not being familiar with the definition and rights of persons with disabilities in the United States. While many countries around the world have created legislation or are signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (n.d., Convention), there may still be difficulties in enforcing laws that protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, with attitudinal and environmental barriers persisting within communities. Though obstacles may also persist for students in the United States, there are strong legal protections in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of

1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 that require U.S. elementary and secondary schools to provide services and equal education opportunities to all students with disabilities.

As a result, students familiar with the U.S. K–12 school system may have a greater awareness of their disability and how to advocate for accommodations needed to be successful. For international students not coming from this cultural context, the majority of institutions (55 percent) noted they may have a more limited knowledge of rights and protections under the legal frameworks within the United States. Aligned with this, institutions noted how important it was for students with disabilities to have the familiarity and knowledge to be able to advocate for their rights within the U.S. context. As a result, several interview participants noted the importance of working with international students with disabilities on not only what accommodations are available in the United States, but how to advocate for the resources that best fit their needs.

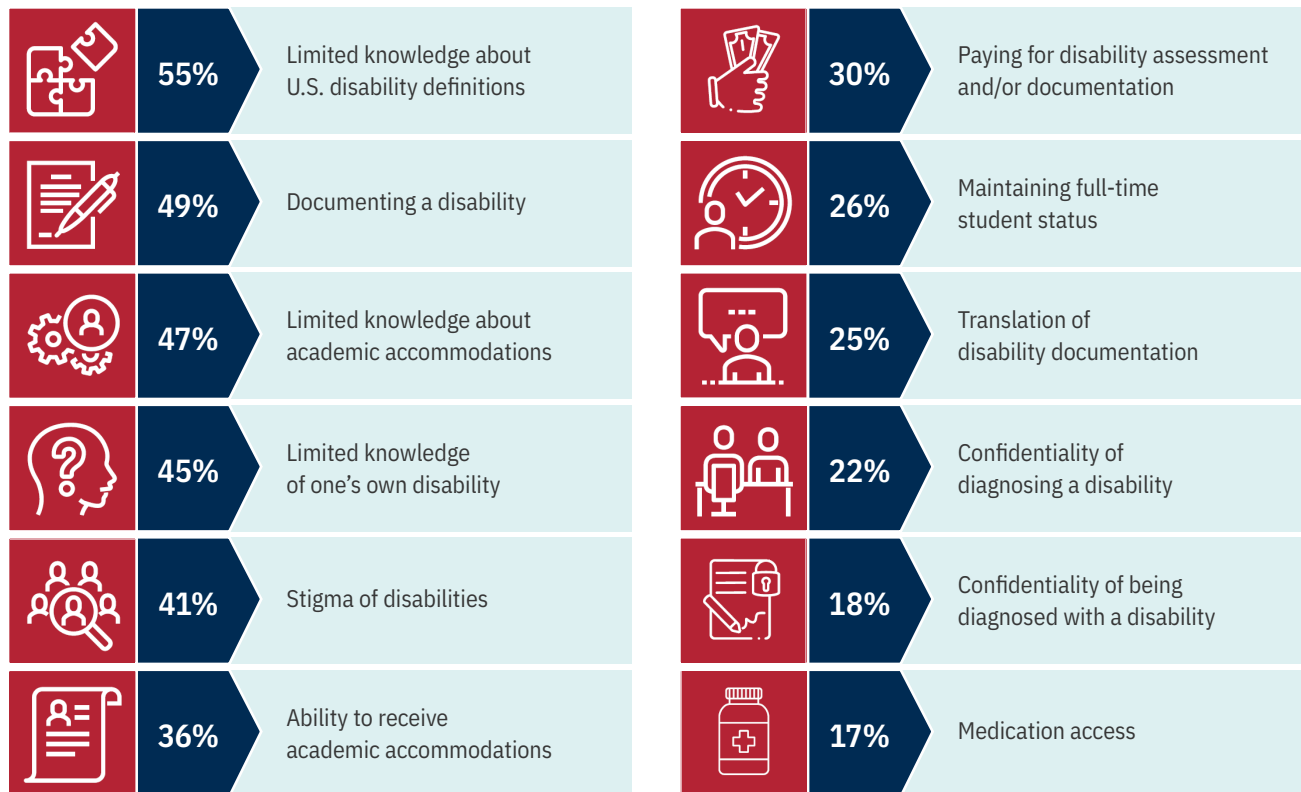


FIGURE 10  
Barriers for international students with disabilities noted by institutional staff

## DOCUMENTING DISABILITIES

While many international students are aware of their disability prior to enrolling at a U.S. higher education institution, a significant proportion of colleges and universities (45 percent) cited that international students may have had limited knowledge of their own disability and may develop an awareness of having a disability while enrolled. This can be due to a number of factors, such as students gaining an awareness of disabilities as defined in the U.S. context that may not have been recognized as a disability in their home country or the development of a disability while enrolled as a student.

In supporting students with disabilities, institutions often work closely with students, as official documentation of a disability is necessary to receive academic accommodations. Nearly half of the respondents (49 percent) noted difficulties in students being able to document a disability. For students with a known disability prior to arriving in the United States, a quarter of institutions (25 percent) noted challenges in needing to obtain a translation of medical documentation. Among students who develop an awareness of a disability, there are procedural processes in documenting a disability that can make it challenging to receive an accommodation (36 percent), along with concerns about affording the costs to gain an official assessment or diagnosis of a disability (30 percent).

## STIGMA AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Given that many students may come from countries where protections may not always exist in practice and there may be less of a conversation around disabilities, international students may have heightened concerns

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*“It can be complex, I suppose, for any student, but I think it can be magnified for international students, because they have so much to lose and that level of fear and anxiety interferes with learning.”*



**41 percent** of institutions noted that international students expressed concerns about the stigmatization of disabilities.

about the stigma of having a disability and the confidentiality of disclosing said disability.

Approximately 41 percent of institutions noted that international students expressed concerns about the stigma of disabilities. Stigma, defined as “a set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.), can have adverse effects on students and can also lead them to not seek resources for support (American Psychiatric Association, 2020). According to the American Psychiatric Association (2020), there can be different types of stigma, including public stigma, self-stigma, and institutional stigma, which are related to stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination. For international students, there may be increased concerns regarding stigma as students with disabilities work to navigate the U.S. cultural context related to disability and the context of how disabilities may continue to be regarded in their home country.

As students may have worries about stigmatization, a key area addressed by respondents was the concerns international students may have regarding the confidentiality of both disclosing a disability (22 percent) or being diagnosed with a disability (18 percent). International students with disabilities may be concerned about how information related to a disability could affect relationships with peers and faculty and need to know about the strict privacy guidelines that disability centers adhere to. Related to this, interview participants also noted that international students may have heightened fears about disclosing a disability before coming to the United States due to worries about not being admitted or losing a scholarship due to their disability.

# Institutional Insights on Barriers for International Students with Disabilities

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

*“So then what happens when they come to this country and then people are just talking about it freely. And there’s a culture shock moment of like, ‘Why are we talking about this?’ For example, think about an orientation program. It’s often very overwhelming. There’s so much information coming at you, and then what happens, if you’re an international student coming from a country or culture where these things are not talked about widely, and then here’s the ADA coordinator talking about neurodivergence. And you’re like, ‘How – we can’t talk about this?’”*

## DOCUMENTING DISABILITIES

*“It’s really tough when we make a referral for them to go get an assessment and [the estimated price is] \$800 or \$900. [International students] can’t work off campus. They can work on campus, but it may take a lot of time to come up with money for that.”*

*“We always do encourage applicants and selected candidates to disclose their disabilities as early in the process as possible so we can start all these preparations, but [students with disabilities may not disclose this information because] in certain countries, there still is a stigma that might be associated with certain disabilities and/or applicants might think that they might not get selected because of that.”*

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND STIGMA

*“They carry with them a strong stigma, a sense of stigma, about what it means to be a person with a disability. ... [International students may view disabilities as] a deficit, ‘I have something wrong with me,’ versus ‘I need to learn how to do things differently.’”*

*“The counseling center, student health center, are the two areas where we do spend a lot of time sharing with students that it’s confidential, it does not get reported back to their government or their family. Their use of those two offices primarily is available to them, encouraged, normal. But there’s still probably, I would say, a higher reluctance among international students than Americans in general.”*

## ACCOMMODATIONS

*“I think one thing is understanding the accommodations that are available in one country versus the other ... [We had a student using a wheelchair] not understanding that there would be transportation accommodations available that she could request, technology, and a lot of different things that were unavailable to her in her home country. So really understanding what types of accommodations are available here in the U.S. that may not be available in another country – there was a big learning curve there.”*

*“I think a lot about students that may get diagnosed and have medication prescribed in the U.S., then they go home for three months and they might not have access to that medication.”*

*“When you go home, are you going to share with them, or are you not ready to do that yet? What does that look like to you? Do you have a support system? Because that does come up quite a bit, especially if you’re from a country or culture where there’s a lot of stigmas. I see this particularly for students who are diagnosed with ADHD or are maybe autistic. ... U.S. students, we have so many resources available even online. There are hotlines you can call. But that’s not necessarily true for people in other countries.”*

*“There would be meetings that was myself, the academic advisor, and the director of disability resource services sitting down and creating a schedule and discussing progression.”*

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## ACCOMMODATIONS

Once a disability has been documented with disability services, survey respondents also noted that international students may encounter barriers related to knowledge of academic accommodations (47 percent). This can encompass the need to work with international students who are learning about academic accommodations that differ from their home country or to support international students recently diagnosed with a disability who may need time and support in learning about aids and resources.

As an example, interview participants also referred to instances of international students using a powered wheelchair having difficulties with voltage converters or transformers and the need to ensure that students have the appropriate plug adapters. Another interview participant noted the need to recognize that d/Deaf students may need sign language support in a language outside of American Sign Language given that there are more than 300 different sign languages according to the United Nations (n.d., International Day).

Outside of academic accommodations, international students may receive medical support, mental health support, or have prescriptions available to them in the United States. International students who travel home

during breaks or return home after graduation may then no longer have access to medical or mental health resources or prescriptions in their home country.

## REDUCED COURSE LOAD AND VISA STATUS

An additional unique area affecting international students noted by interview participants and more than a quarter of survey respondents (26 percent) was the regulatory framework of maintaining a full time student status for a student visa, which can be at odds with a disability accommodation that allows for a reduced course load. For international students who may need this accommodation, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2020) does permit international students to take a reduced course load for illness or medical conditions, but this is limited to only twelve months within a program level. There may be a need for advocacy or the exploration of policy change that support how international students who may need longer-term accommodations can remain in status.

## Supports and Resources

### SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

As institutions look to address the challenges that international students with disabilities encounter, U.S. colleges and universities provide many different types of supports. Many survey respondents noted their commitment to serve all students with disabilities, based on guidelines from Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibit discrimination based on a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). According to these laws, a college or university cannot deny a student admission because of a disability if they meet the requirements for admission. Additionally, higher education institutions are “required to provide appropriate academic adjustments as necessary to



**26 percent** of institutions noted international students were affected by the regulatory framework of maintaining a full time student status for a student visa, which can be at odds with a disability accommodation that allows for a reduced course load.



ensure that it does not discriminate on the basis of disability” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), academic adjustments can include granting priority registration; reducing course load; providing notetakers, recording devices, sign language interpreters, and extended time for testing; and equipping school computers with screen reading, voice recognition, or other adaptive software or hardware. In addition to the legal requirements that U.S. higher education institutions must meet, many colleges and universities are utilizing tools such as universal design and the social model of disability to address barriers for students (Reardon et al., 2021, Thornton & Downs, 2010, Scott et al., 2003).

As the services that students with disabilities need vary based upon the needs of each student, this report does not focus on the full body of specific accommodations and best practices. However, several institutions did identify additional resources and processes provided based on the needs and challenges noted by international students with disabilities.

Given the higher proportion of students with mental health disabilities (pp 13), several institutions noted the importance of health insurance for international students that includes mental health coverage. Furthermore, some institutions provide access to multilingual mental health and counseling services for students to speak to someone in their home country’s language. Another element of support provided to international students was the translation of medical

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*“I am a big proponent of sharing important information numerous times in numerous ways because people learn in different ways and I want it to stick. ... Make it an actual session and then do a follow up. All the touch points are really important because you never know how that information is going to land.”*



**74 percent** of colleges and universities used multiple formats to inform international students about disability resources, including websites, orientation seminars, and peer groups.

documentation for accommodation requests with the disability services office.

This broad level of support from institutions can help students have a positive and enriching experience on campus. This is supported by research from i-graduate’s 2015 International Student Barometer survey, which found that the overwhelming majority of international students with disabilities (89 percent) had a high level of satisfaction with learning, living, and support services provided by U.S. colleges and universities (MIUSA, n.d., Statistics: International Students). This high satisfaction level was comparable with international students who did not use disability services (90 percent). Furthermore, students with disabilities studying at U.S. institutions noted high levels of satisfaction with health centers (96 percent), counseling services (95 percent), disability support (94 percent), and learning support (92 percent).

#### **DISSEMINATING INFORMATION ABOUT RESOURCES**

While institutions may have the capability to provide these services, they still need to make international students with disabilities aware of these services and resources and of how to best take advantage of them. Respondents noted multiple ways to provide information about disability resources and services to international students, using various methods and communication channels to reach the broadest population (Fig. 11). Notably, the majority of institutions (74 percent) used multiple modalities to inform international students about disability resources, including websites, orientation seminars, and peer groups. Since students may learn or retain information in differing ways,

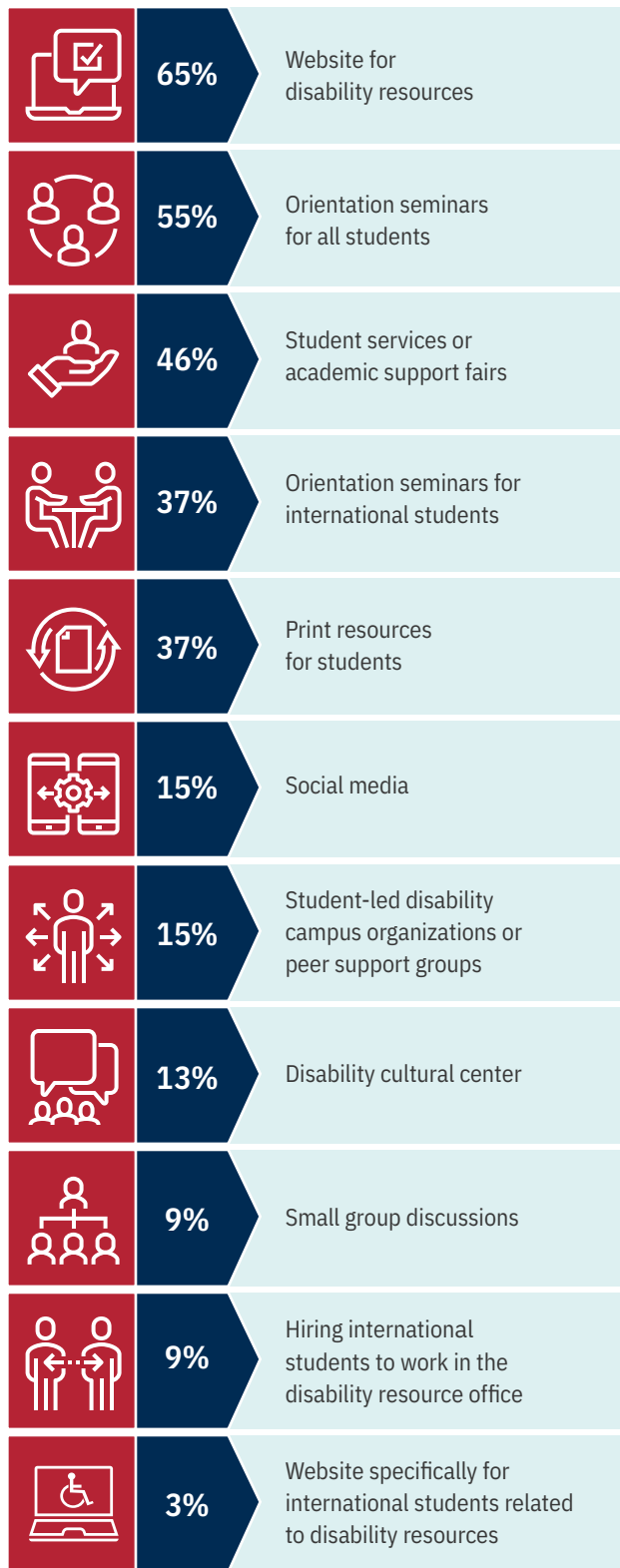


FIGURE 11  
Institutional dissemination of resources for international students with disabilities

providing resources about disability services in a number of formats is important as institutions look to make this information broadly accessible.

Many institutions noted that information dissemination about disability services to international students was through in-person engagement. Most colleges and universities provided this information at orientations for all students on campuses (55 percent), and just over a third (37 percent) provided dedicated sessions about disability services during international student orientations. As international students may not have the same familiarity with the concepts around disabilities and disability rights in the United States, many colleges and universities cited having sessions on disabilities during orientations, providing campus tours that included showing students where the disability office was, introducing the disability support office team to international students, and providing explanations of facilities and resources, such as ADHD coaching and sensory rooms. Another way of engaging with students in person is through student services or academic support fairs, which nearly half of responding colleges and universities noted (46 percent).

Given the accessibility of online information coupled with concerns for student privacy, a majority of responding institutions also noted developing dedicated websites to provide information on disability resources and services (65 percent), while a smaller proportion of institutions also promoted resources through social media channels (15 percent) and websites dedicated specially for international students related to disability resources (3 percent). This level of online outreach can begin before a student arrives on campus through welcome messages to admitted students that introduce the disability resources and notes institutional commitments to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (MIUSA, n.d., A Sign).



**65 percent** of institutions noted developing dedicated websites to provide information on disability resources and services.

*“That’s often going to happen at a level where there is a **personal connection**, because they don’t know the accessibility coordinator. They’re not going to immediately go there if they’re coming from a culture where that’s stigmatized or is frowned upon, or they don’t even know that those services exist. Because again, if they’re getting that information during orientation, it’s just so much information, you’re jet-lagged, it’s not going to stick. And again, if these are words that you’re not familiar with, if you hear the word accommodation but English is not your first language, you might be thinking apartment or hotel.”*

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At the same time, over a third of colleges and universities (37 percent) noted the continued investment in printed resources for students, including flyers or business cards, giving students another way to access information at a later time. Institutions also cited other ways of engagement, including disability services information included on all faculty syllabi, in required first-year classes, and in international student newsletters.

Both interview participants and survey respondents noted peer networks’ significant value in assisting international students with disabilities. Other students, who may have faced similar obstacles, can often be excellent resources for having open conversations about shared experiences, providing information on how to access resources, and creating an understanding of how to advocate for their needs. As such, several colleges and universities noted the establishment of student-led campus organizations or peer groups related to disabilities (15 percent) or facilitating small group discussions about disabilities with international students (9 percent). Another creative way of developing peer understanding noted by 9 percent of institutions was hiring international students to work in the disability services office, which may increase engagement, promote understanding, and reduce stigmas across these two cohorts of students on campus.

While not specific to international students, respondents and articles have noted the importance of spaces dedicated to students with disabilities (Weintraub, 2020; Herder, 2022; Elmore et al., n.d.). Approximately 13



**9 percent** of responding institutions noted hiring international students to work in the disability services office to increase engagement, promote understanding, and reduce stigmas.

percent of institutions noted having a disability cultural center, which is often a physical space where students can come together to share experiences and develop pride in a disability identity and culture. Others also noted the development of sensory rooms that provide aids for neurodiverse students and allow students to relax.

As institutions work to make supports available and accessible to international students with disabilities, it is important to work collaboratively across departments to provide these students with information on the many accommodations and services available. When institutions bear in mind the unique barriers that international students may face coming from different cultural contexts and recognize the need to make information available through a multitude of approaches, they help international students with disabilities access resources that can serve them well while on campus.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

Across the United States, many colleges and universities have a renewed focus on ensuring an inclusive environment for the diverse array of students on their campus, including serving international students with disabilities.

This research contributes to a critical initial understanding for leaders and practitioners in the fields of both international education and disability services on the availability of data about international students with disabilities at U.S. higher education institutions. It further contributes to the knowledge that more than 1,600 international students with disclosed disabilities attended U.S. colleges and universities in 2021/22.

As institutions work to better understand and serve this population, continued focus on this topic is necessary to collect institutional data, recognize barriers that international students with disabilities may encounter, and develop resources that can help international students with disabilities have a positive and enriching experience in the United States. Based on the insights from institutions and organizations noted throughout this report, key recommendations are listed below as the field works to support international students with disabilities.

This research contributes to the knowledge that more than 1,600 international students with disclosed disabilities were supported by colleges and universities in 2021/22.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Increase academic research and national data collection initiatives on international students with disabilities.**

This report provides a robust analysis based on a sample of U.S. institutions surveyed and qualitative interviews. To understand the broader population of international students with disabilities across the United States, the field needs further and sustained research on this topic, particularly as institutions build data collection processes. It is recommended that a question on international students with disabilities is added to the *Open Doors* International Student Census, which can track this information on a yearly basis and report on overall trends to the field.

In addition to quantitative data provided through projects such as *Open Doors*, there continues to be the need for additional research on the perspectives of international students with disabilities, best practices for serving international students with disabilities, and the success of international students with disabilities in completing their programs of study. This continued research can elevate the perspectives of international students with disabilities so that institutions meet their needs and can show prospective international students with disabilities how the United States welcomes them within higher education.

### **Encourage U.S. colleges and universities to create data collection protocols for international students with disabilities.**

As U.S. higher education institutions seek to serve all international students and all students with disabilities,

U.S. colleges and universities must continue to advance internal data collection on the intersection of these two populations, while safeguarding student data and taking privacy concerns into account. While this may take an initial investment in staff time and resources, it will yield a better understanding of this population of students on campus. Institutions can then use this information to advocate for international students with disabilities, allocate resources, and seek support to help these students succeed.

### **Support collaboration across campus offices that serve students with disabilities and international students.**

While many U.S. institutions already have active collaborative efforts among offices that serve international students and those that serve students with disabilities, continuing to examine best practices for collaborative partnerships may expand outreach and support efforts. Developing institutionalized plans for consistent interoffice collaboration can improve support for international students with disabilities, increase training across teams on advising, and provide additional resources for international students on how disabilities are understood in the U.S. context and how to access disability services. Critically, through the development of plans that foster collaboration in a formalized manner, institutions can record best practices and institutional insights in the event of staff turnover. It may also be valuable for national organizations to support efforts to recognize and facilitate the sharing of best practices across institutions.

### **Improve guidance from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on reduced course load options for international students with disabilities.**

One of the key areas of need that U.S. institutions identified was the need for clarification related to international students with disabilities and their ability to pursue a reduced course load. While international students can take advantage of a reduced course load for illness or medical

As the field looks forward to the future, IIE remains committed to assisting U.S. higher education institutions through this research and continuing the conversation to support international students with disabilities.

conditions for up to twelve months within a program, institutions would benefit from additional guidance from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on how international students who may need longer-term accommodations can remain compliant on a student visa.

### **Sustain dialogue on supporting international students with disabilities.**

As U.S. institutions work to build collaborative practices and provide innovative resources that serve international students with disabilities, it is imperative to continue to disseminate this information throughout the field. Continued dialogues on this topic can provide additional clarity and insights to practitioners in the field through resource guides, roundtable discussions, or conference panels. These forums for discussion will offer opportunities to share resources with professionals across both international student offices and disability offices. It is also critical to provide opportunities for professionals to ask questions and seek guidance from experts in the field as institutions build resources and circulate knowledge that can benefit all international students with disabilities.

As the field looks forward to the future, IIE remains committed to assisting U.S. higher education institutions through this research and continuing the conversation to support international students with disabilities.

# Appendix I: Additional Resources

This report focused on the current ability of U.S. colleges and universities to collect and report data on international students with disabilities. For more information about best practices and resources for serving international students with disabilities, there are a number of resources available for practitioners working in international education.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND DISABILITY

**Mobility International USA (MIUSA)** is a disability-led nonprofit organization that is working “to empower people with disabilities around the world to achieve their human rights through international exchange and international development.” MIUSA supports the implementation of the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs’ National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (n.d., MIUSA National), which is designed to increase the participation of people with disabilities in international exchange between the United States and other countries. Resources include best practices for collecting data on students with disabilities, facilitating international student orientations to students who are disabled, and collaborating between international exchange and disability services offices.

- [www.miusa.org](http://www.miusa.org)

*Advising International Students with Disabilities* (2020) is a report authored by Cory Owen and published by NAFSA: Association of International Educators to provide practitioners with resources on how to work with international students with disabilities in the United States. This report provides information on visible and invisible disabilities, academic and facilities accommodations, on-campus collaborations, service animals, and insurance.

- [www.nafsa.org](http://www.nafsa.org)

## EducationUSA Resources for Students with Disabilities

provides a list of resources and information for prospective international students with disabilities interested in studying in the United States.

- <https://educationusa.state.gov/resources-students-disabilities>

## DISABILITY RESOURCES

### Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)

is a leading professional membership association for individuals committed to equity for persons with disabilities in higher education.

- [www.ahead.org](http://www.ahead.org)

**National Center for College Students with Disabilities** is a federally funded center for U.S. higher education students with disabilities, supported by the University of Minnesota’s Institute on Community Integration and AHEAD. It includes a clearinghouse of information for students, research briefs, a training center, and a campus disability resource database that catalogs disability information from degree-granting colleges and universities across the United States.

- [www.nccsdonline.org](http://www.nccsdonline.org)

### *Higher Education’s Next Great Challenge: Ensuring Full Inclusion for Students with Disabilities* (2020)

is a report authored by Eve Hill, Dahlia Shaewitz, and Jessica Queener that outlines policies and best practices to create an inclusive environment for students with disabilities.

- <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED615532>

# Appendix II: Disability Classification Resources

There is not one single standard for the classification of disabilities around the world. To prepare the data collection for this report, the research team considered a number of classifications in developing categories. In addition to the resources below, the research team also conducted interviews with higher education institutions directly to ascertain classifications of disabilities in U.S. college and university databases.

## EDUCATION-RELATED DATABASES

### National Center for College Students with Disabilities

The NCCSD at AHEAD published a 2017 research brief, *National Databases with Information on College Students with Disabilities*. This report describes eleven federal and university-based databases with information about the disability data collected in each survey instrument. The report outlines information collected in the NPSAS, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, and the National Survey of Student Engagement, among others.

- <https://www.nccsonline.org/research-briefs.html>

### U.S. Department of Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates the provision of a free and appropriate public school education for eligible students ages 3–21 at the preprimary, elementary, and secondary levels. The IDEA database lists disability types and includes specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, other health impairment, autism, development delay, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, multiple disabilities, and hearing impairment.

- <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities>

### Institute of International Education

The *Open Doors* U.S. Study Abroad Survey began collecting data on U.S. students with disabilities abroad in 2006/07 and developed the following disabilities classifications in coordination with MIUSA: ADHD or learning disability, autism spectrum disability, mental disability, physical disability, sensory disability, and other disabilities.

- <https://opendoorsdata.org/about/about-u-s-study-abroad-survey>

### American College Health Association

The National College Health Assessment is a national research survey of higher education students that examines information about students' habits and behaviors related to health topics. This survey of students uses the following classifications: ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, deaf/hearing loss, learning disability, mobility/dexterity disability, blind/low vision, and speech or language disorder. The survey also collects information about chronic conditions in a separate question.

- [www.acha.org](http://www.acha.org)

## CENSUS BUREAU

### The American Community Survey (ACS)

The ACS began in the early 1990s as a vision for continuous measurement of the U.S. population and to reduce the scope, cost, and complexity of the decennial census. The current questions cover six disability types: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty.

- <https://www.census.gov/topics/health/disability/guidance/data-collection-acs.html>

## WASHINGTON GROUP QUESTIONS

### The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG)

The WG promotes and coordinates international cooperation in the area of health statistics focusing on the development of disability measures suitable for census and national surveys.

- <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com>

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We thank you all for your support and hope that this report will serve as a valuable information resource for those interested in serving international students with disabilities.



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## SPECIAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Cover: Yueyang He, *Shades of Water*

**YUEYANG HE** pursues her passion as a Chinese American businesswoman and artist. Born in Northeast China, Ms. He moved to the United States at age 15 and later pursued a degree in mathematics at the University of Denver. In 2017, Ms. He received the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship to study at Waseda University in Tokyo. As an artist, she has volunteered with the Denver Art Museum and the Child Rescue Foundation. Ms. He hopes to bring people new perspectives in her two fields of interest: business and art.

