

# THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## Global

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### Foreign Students Aren't Edging Out Locals, Numbers Show

By Karin Fischer

**I**nternational enrollments in American colleges may have soared in recent years, but despite public concern, there's little to indicate that students from Beijing and Shanghai are displacing those from Buffalo or Santa Fe.

A *Chronicle* analysis of enrollment data reported to the U.S. Department of Education by 69 state flagship universities and top public research institutions found no evidence of widespread crowding out of in-state undergraduates by students from abroad.

While the number of incoming international students at these institutions swelled 155 percent between the fall of 2006 and the fall of 2012, the latest year data are available, they rarely appeared to take seats away from resident students. Enrollments of in-state freshmen rose, too, albeit by a more modest 0.7 percent.

Put another way, top publics, on average, enrolled 21 more state residents in 2012 than six years earlier. Foreign students, meanwhile, claimed an additional 140 seats in the average freshman class.

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## Changes in Enrollment at 69 Top Public Institutions

In most cases, more international students doesn't mean fewer locals, suggests a *Chronicle* analysis of enrollment data. But at a handful of institutions, the number of first-time degree-seeking undergraduates from overseas increased sharply between the fall of 2006 and the fall of 2012, while the number of state residents in the freshman class declined.

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College ▼	International students	In-state students
Arizona State U.	340	787
Auburn U.	11	-180
Clemson U.	-1	230
Colorado State U. at Fort Collins	-30	295
Florida State U.	20	-376
Georgia Institute of Technology	253	-149
Indiana U. at Bloomington	421	289
Iowa State U.	172	428
Kansas State U.	107	337
Louisiana State U. at Baton Rouge	-1	653

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Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, U.S. Department of Education [Get the data](#)

Still, among this group are a handful of institutions that have reduced places for local students while sharply increasing international enrollments, sometimes by hundreds of students.

And public perceptions, founded or not, that students from overseas are elbowing aside homegrown talent has led to culture clashes on campuses as well as efforts in some state capitals to limit international enrollments.

People feel ownership of their flagship university, says Michael V. Reilly, executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. That their children should have to compete with applicants from out of state or overseas strikes many as unfair. While most Americans pay little attention to their state colleges, "when it's your kid who doesn't get in," he says, "it's a different proposition."

### From 'Zero to Tsunami'

Students, of course, have long traveled across state lines for college, paying tuition typically two to three times higher than their in-state classmates.

Today, though, a rising number of students are crossing international borders, particularly at the undergraduate level.

For American institutions, the interest could not have come at a better time. As the recession lay waste to state budgets and taxpayer support dwindled, universities looked to tuition to make up the difference. Though many focused on recruiting from neighboring states, countries like China and Saudi Arabia, fast-growing and largely spared the downturn, have proved a new and welcome source of deep-pocketed applicants.

The destination of choice for these globe-trotting students: top-ranked institutions with cache abroad. Though American graduate programs have historically been stocked with students from overseas, half of international undergraduates also choose to study at research universities.

Fanta Aw, president of Nafsa: Association of International Educators, says the rapid growth in foreign-student numbers, compressed into just a few years, was bound to lead to tensions. Some universities, she says, went from "zero to tsunami."

The fear, as Ms. Aw, assistant vice president for campus life at American University, sees it, is that people will think international students are "just sitting in this seat because they can pay for it, not because they earned it."

No other public flagship has had a greater increase in international enrollments than Michigan State University. During the six-year period studied, the Midwestern university enlarged the size of its freshman class by 914. Of that number, 910 places went to foreign students, most from China.

The shift hasn't always been easy. The new crop of students has brought unexpected needs, in and out of the classroom. At one point, several cars belonging to foreign students were vandalized, spray-painted with the words, "Go back to China."

#### **A Swinging Pendulum**

Still, Michigan State was able to avoid displacing locals by admitting more students over all, though its in-state enrollments did dip slightly, by 3.4 percent.

Michigan also has fewer high-school graduates—from a high of 124,000 in 2008, graduate numbers in the state are projected to fall to 86,000 by 2028, says James W. Cotter, Michigan State's director of admissions. So even though it now enrolls fewer state residents, the share of Michigan high-school seniors who head to Michigan State, about 5 percent, has held constant, Mr. Cotter says.

It's a different dynamic in places like Washington, where the number of high schoolers is on the rise. There, the University of Washington went from having about 130 foreign students in 2006 to upwards of 1,000 in 2012.

Washington parents were angered when resident enrollment declined by several hundred. Tina Orwall, a state representative, heard from constituents whose children had been denied admission by the university, despite strong SAT scores and stellar grades. The rejections seemed to run counter to the state's efforts to produce a more-educated work force, Ms. Orwall, a Democrat, thought.

"It's positive to have international and out-of-state students," she says, "but I think the pendulum may have swung too far."

Ms. Orwall succeeded in adding a requirement that each freshman class at the University of Washington have at least 4,000 home-state students to 2012 legislation giving public colleges greater flexibility in setting tuition rates. The university says it has kept its commitment, with any additional international students coming on top of resident enrollment.

But Marguerite Roza, director of the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University and senior research affiliate at the Center on Reinventing Public Education, argues that increased international enrollments still come at a cost to Washington residents because some of the new seats could have gone to them. Ms. Roza, who has studied university admissions in the state and is a parent herself, says she knows Washington families who would have gladly paid higher out-of-state tuition rates to secure their child a spot at the University of Washington. "A slot is a slot," she says.

Washington isn't the only state to consider measures to reset the balance between in-state enrollments and those from outside the state or abroad. In Iowa, public-university regents last year adopted a plan to allocate a larger share of state funding to colleges that enroll more in-state students. While the regents have said the goal is not to reduce international enrollments, some observers worry it could discourage or punish universities for bringing in more foreign students.

At least one other state has moved in the opposite direction. The Colorado legislature in 2010 exempted international students from a longstanding cap on nonresident students.

### 'As Maximum as They Can Be'

Nowhere has the issue proved more contentious than in California, where efforts by the state's most prestigious institutions, the University of California campuses at Berkeley and Los Angeles, to enroll more foreign students have gotten caught up in a broader debate about college cost and access.

Faced with a precipitous decline in state support—Berkeley has lost \$200-million in state funding since 2008, says John Wilton, the university's vice chancellor for administration and finance—both institutions struck a deliberate strategy to recruit larger numbers of students from outside the state, and especially from abroad. This was a sharp departure from practice for the universities, which, even more than many of their public-flagship peers, enrolled few foreign undergraduates.

The approach has been successful: Since 2006, the number of international students in Berkeley's freshman class has increased by more than 350 percent. At UCLA, growth topped 640 percent.

At both universities, the new tuition revenue has been critical to the bottom line. Berkeley collected \$134-million in tuition from international and out-of-state undergraduates this past year, up from \$36-million in 2007, Mr. Wilton says. One-third of that money is recycled back into financial aid, largely for Californians.

Students from outside the state effectively subsidize those from within, administrators say. "The impetus behind opening our doors more broadly," says Youlonda Copeland-Morgan, UCLA's

associate vice chancellor for enrollment management, "is to keep our commitment to Californians." (Recent research, however, suggests that growth in the share of nonresident students at prestigious public universities is associated with a decline in low-income and minority students.)

But many California students and parents see college admissions as a zero-sum game, with every spot going to an international applicant coming at the cost of state residents, Asian-American students especially.

Admissions officials say they are aware of families' concerns.

"Every single day I have that discussion in one form or another," says Amy Jarich, Berkeley's assistant vice chancellor and director of undergraduate admissions. "And at certain times of year, I have it many times a day."

Lately, the issue of international and out-of-state enrollments has been sucked into a spat between the university system and elected officials over a proposed tuition increase. Janet Napolitano, the University of California president, has called the plan to raise fees on all students, by as much as 5 percent, a financial necessity, given inadequate state funding.

Critics have held up the tuition hike as further evidence that the University of California is increasingly out of reach for many in the state. Fuming lawmakers introduced several measures, including a proposed constitutional amendment, that would, among other things, cap nonresident enrollment and direct public universities to focus their recruitment on Californians.

Gov. Jerry Brown, a Democrat, suggested that institutions like Berkeley are no longer accessible to "ordinary, normal students."

"You got your foreign students and you got your 4.0 folks," he told a local public-radio station. Average Californians, the governor said, are "getting frozen out."

Even if politicians and university leaders resolve their impasse, it's likely that the steep international enrollment growth of recent years will moderate. Ms. Napolitano said this fall that she and campus chancellors would study whether some universities were

enrolling too many nonresident students and try to determine "what is the right balance of out-of-state and international enrollment."

At UCLA and Berkeley in particular, she said, the numbers of non-Californians "may be at about as maximum as they can be."

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How to Mislead With Statistics

Sometimes looking at the change in numbers is misleading relative to the total numbers. For example, no mention is made of Illinois where the numbers have been high for a long time in a state that has horrible budget deficits and still manages to invest a lot in foreign students, especially in graduate students returning to China.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2014 enrolled 4,898 students from China, more than any other American university. They comprise the largest group of international students on the campus, followed by South Korea (1,268 in fall 2014) and India (1,167). Graduate enrollment of Chinese students at UIUC has grown from 649 in 2000 to 1,973 in 2014 ---

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U...>

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The aggregate trend here (asserted in the article's headline) blunts the reality, shown through examples cited (Berkeley, UCLA, Michigan State, U Washington) and others listed in the table (Georgia Tech, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Penn State, and Purdue) of selective flagships where there have been steep increases in international students and large declines in in-state students. The authors and some of the officials quoted (most comically, the enrollment chief at UCLA) can rationalize all they want, but this is further evidence that the compact with the public, underlying America's great public university systems, is broken.

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But who broke the compact? Not the universities. The public, as represented by the state legislators that they elect, have abdicated their responsibility to actually fund the flagships. As the percent of operating budget coming from the state government declines below 50% and in some cases even below 30%, the taxpayers have made it clear they don't believe they have to