



## Note from the Chair

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed how we recruit international students. Early on, we quickly pivoted to deliver all recruitment activities online (see *UMN Recruitment Changes and Pivots* on p. 3). We remain committed to connecting with prospective students and their families, but the challenges are daunting. Our partner schools and organizations were undergoing their own dramatic transitions, with much uncertainty in the air. While we've settled into our new reality, prospective students are dealing with "Zoom fatigue" and are increasingly harder to reach. The opinion the U.S. mishandled the pandemic makes students and families skittish about studying here and has led to research options in countries with better responses.

Despite this precarious situation, Barbara Kappler, assistant dean of International Student and Scholar Services, reminds us the University "responded well in keeping residence halls open, providing emergency aid, communicating messages of support and resources, and offering webinars."

In 2021, we are hopeful the new presidential administration will project a more friendly attitude toward international exchange, and vaccines will bring the pandemic under control. While this will take time, we recognize the University's strengths and appeal to international students will help us recover, maintaining our reputation as a global university in a highly interconnected world.

— Aimee Thostenson,  
Committee Chair

## Fall 2020 Enrollment and Trends

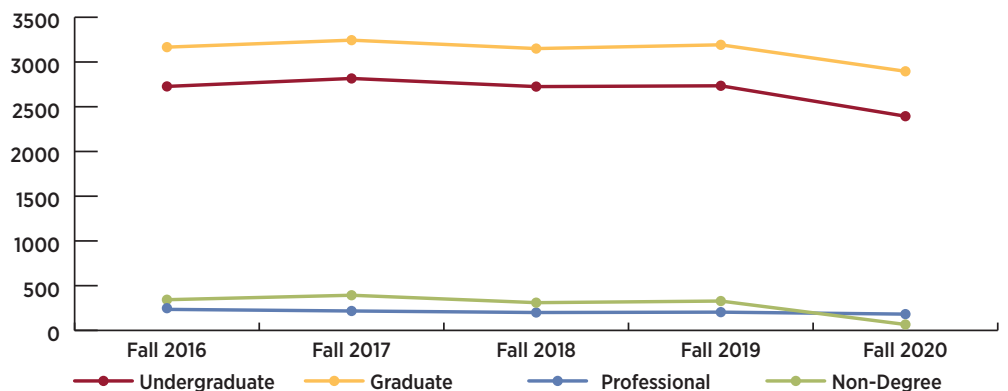
### Overall U.S. Enrollment

The total number of international students studying at U.S. universities, whether from within the U.S. or online from abroad, decreased by 16% this fall, while enrollments of new international students decreased by 43%, according to a survey of more than 700 colleges conducted by 10 major higher education organizations. (Source: "Fall International Enrollments Snapshot Reports," IIE)

### UMTC Enrollment

While UMTC declines in overall international enrollment were not as dramatic as national averages, other enrollment data causes concern for the future. Enrollment of new international freshmen was down 42% and transfers down 44% from 2019. Enrollment in "feeder" programs was down significantly: Minnesota English Language Program's Intensive English program declined 70% and GO MN declined 80%.

	International Enrollment	% Change Over 2019	Total UMN Enrollment	% of UMN Enrollment
<b>Undergraduate</b>	2,394	-12.4%	30,907	7.7%
<b>Graduate</b>	2,896	-9.3%	11,883	24.4%
<b>Professional</b>	182	-10.8%	3,885	4.7%
<b>Non-Degree</b>	66	-79.9%	5,342	1.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,538</b>	<b>-14.2%</b>	<b>52,017</b>	<b>10.6%</b>



Source: UMN Office of Institutional Research website, 1/19/21

### Big 10 Undergraduate Benchmarking

International undergraduate enrollment declined across our Big 10 peers. Of those reporting results, all but two had declines in international freshmen (ranging from -5% to -47%), international transfers (-6% to -57%), and overall international undergraduate enrollment (-5% to -26%). At the Twin Cities campus, total international undergraduate enrollment declined by 12.4%, putting us in the middle of our peers. We attribute this to several factors including a strong virtual and webinar presence with students and families, a new "UMN in Beijing" program for first-year freshmen in China, a flexible deferral policy, and student-friendly decisions, such as keeping residence halls open.

# An Unprecedented Environment: Top Factors Affecting International Recruitment

## COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic put all international students in an especially challenging situation.

Current students faced a tough decision. If they returned to their home countries, they risked not being allowed to study online and possibly not being able to get back to the U.S. to complete their studies. If they stayed in Minnesota, they would be far away from family and friends on a campus where most domestic students had left. Anti-Asian sentiment and fear of harassment added to the concerns.

New students were generally unable to come to the U.S. due to travel restrictions and the inability to get visas from closed U.S. embassies. The U.S.'s perceived poor handling of the pandemic further added to the anxiety of students considering whether to study from the U.S. or at home. A larger-than-usual number of new undergraduates chose to defer their enrollments citing COVID-19 and health issues, lack of a visa interview, and concerns over online instruction as top reasons.

As a result of the pandemic, prospective international students worldwide are considering staying closer to home. They also continue the pre-COVID trend of shifting away from traditional major markets like the U.S., United Kingdom, and Canada. BridgeU cites China, South Africa, and Italy as up-and-coming destinations.

**“Being able to hug my friends, my teachers, work on scenes in person – there is such a beautiful and intimate aspect of sharing a space in person that we're trying to replicate on Zoom, and that everyone is really doing their best with. But it'll never be the same.”**

– Isabella Condo-Olvera, a theater major taking courses online from home in Costa Rica

## U.S. Immigration Policy Threats

The four years of the Trump administration saw a barrage of immigration policy changes and threats that both directly and indirectly affected international students. These changes—and the threat of changes—brought on insecurity whether students could finish their studies, and repeated disruptions to students and the faculty and staff who support them.

Below are selected immigration-related executive orders, actions, and rules (out of 12 issued during the year) that negatively impacted international students in 2020 alone:

- **January 31:** Proclamation expanding Travel Ban 3.0 to nationals of Burma (Myanmar), Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania
- **May 29:** Proclamation suspending entry to the U.S. for certain Chinese graduate students and scholars
- **July 6:** U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement announces intent to issue a rule requiring international students to leave the U.S. if they will take all of their courses online in the fall (even if their school is only offering online courses due to COVID) [Aug. 7: Guidance rescinded following several lawsuits; flexibility for online courses allowed to continue]
- **August 6:** Executive order banning WeChat, the primary communication tool for Chinese people [Sept. 20: Preliminary injunction by federal judge to block ban, which was never enacted]
- **September 25:** Proposal to eliminate "Duration of Status," which grants students permission to be in the U.S. for the length of their academic program; new proposal would require students (including doctoral students) to reapply after four or two years with no guarantee they would receive an extension [Rule change was not implemented before end of Trump administration]

*(Adapted from: "Executive and Administrative Immigration and Higher Education Actions," Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration)*

**“...there has been a sustained assault against the vibrant exchange with the international community that over the years has contributed so greatly to making our universities and colleges the envy of the world. ...these changes erode a profound and basic strength of the American system of higher education: our ability to attract the greatest academic and scientific talents from around the globe, whether in the form of promising students or gifted faculty members.”**

– Lee C. Bollinger, President of Columbia University in an open letter to incoming President Biden

## Social Unrest

The murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer—just miles from campus—set off protests around the world. Photos and video of the ensuing social unrest, which included violence, destruction, and controversial police responses, were seen worldwide. These events added to the ongoing concerns of prospective students and parents about the safety of studying in the U.S.

## Decline in Yield of Admitted Students

Our “yield,” or the number of admitted students who ultimately enroll, continues to decline at the undergraduate level. In the last five years, the yield of international students has gone from 21% (2015) to 9% (2020). This is a problem faced nationally as students confirm at multiple institutions. To enroll the same number of undergraduate

international students, we have had to generate many more applications. This means increased pressure on our recruitment and admissions staff. We should note the application pool has, for now, remained strong with quality applicants.

## Other Factors

While the COVID-19 pandemic and immigration policy changes dominated the recruitment landscape, other factors listed in the 2018-19 report are still valid and of concern to prospective students and parents, including:

- Gun Violence and Personal Safety Concerns
- Competition from Other Countries
- Lack of Work Opportunities
- UMN Rankings

## UMN Recruitment Changes and Pivots Due to the Pandemic

### *International Undergraduate Recruitment*

- Held limited in-person yield events in Brazil hosted by alumni and parents
- Recorded presentations for admitted students
- Participated in virtual Global Gopher Events for confirmed students
- Produced new 90-second promotional video
- Welcomed new staff members to the UMN China Office; created new WeChat group for counselors
- Provided flexibility and options for application and admissions: allowed freshmen to defer to spring 2021, offered flexibility in submitting final documents, added three additional English proficiency tests for access, went ACT/SAT not required, and added application deadline for fall 2021 for freshmen to complete their applications
- Hosted virtual commencement ceremony for international students
- Offered Summer in the Cities activities for students who were in Minnesota over the summer
- Created UMN in Beijing program for new freshmen in China who couldn't get to Minnesota in fall, spring

### *Sponsored Student Recruitment*

- Met virtually and communicated with sponsoring organizations to address the University's course modalities and immigration concerns
- Participated in virtual sessions with Saudi Aramco

### *Minnesota English Language Program (MELP)*

- Ran summer intensive English program fully online; offered online and hybrid options for fall 2020
- Adopted new remote English language testing options for incoming students; worked with undergraduate and graduate admissions to review new online English proficiency tests
- Developed new marketing materials for online courses for spring 2021
- Partnered with GO Minnesota to offer non-credit "success" course for prospective students

### *GO Minnesota*

- Created the "GO Minnesota from Home" program to allow students from partner schools to take 1-2 online courses from their home countries
- Added virtual cultural events to keep students engaged
- Engaged in virtual recruitment activities, such as Zoom presentations in China and Germany

### *Law School's LLM Program*

- Developed a spring start date to accommodate students who were unable to obtain visas for fall
- Converted LEAD program and Intro to Law orientation course to online
- Hosted virtual recruitment and community-building events
- Supported students who needed to defer to fall

## Student Concerns During the Pandemic

A survey conducted by ISSS in April 2020 confirmed that UMN international students faced many challenges as a result of the pandemic. Top concerns cited were:

- Travel restrictions and immigration regulations
- Academic performance; lack of motivation
- Career outlook
- Safety; physical and mental health
- Housing
- Financial wellness
- Feeling of isolation (students living in the U.S.)
- Time zone challenges (students living outside the U.S.)

An August 2020 survey by the Office of Undergraduate Education found UMN international students were generally satisfied with the overall online experience (65%) and the University's response to helping students navigate change (67%)—both higher than domestic students.

## Looking to the Future

Some indicators predict international student recruitment will improve in 2021, bringing optimism to universities, prospective students, and their families. In early 2021, the Biden administration reversed or refused to proceed with many of President Trump's harmful immigration initiatives. Jill Biden, the First Lady, is an outspoken advocate for international education and has been a featured speaker at international education events, such as the EducationUSA Forum in Washington D.C.

As the COVID-19 vaccine rollout continues, universities are hopeful that travel restrictions may be lifted, U.S. embassies will open, and visa appointments will become more readily available. If this is the case, the students who have elected to study online from their home countries will be able to come to campus for the full university experience. It's also possible there may be pent-up demand with students who were waiting out the pandemic before starting their studies.

“...when pandemics end, there's tremendous pent-up demand. All of our records show in the past that when it's safe to resume travel, we're dealing with surges of students that have deferred, that set their plans aside, that were granted deferments and want to come. I think there's no reason to suspect that at the end of this pandemic we won't see the same thing.”

— Allan E. Goodman, president of the Institute of International Education

## Financial Impact of International Students

*Note: These numbers reflect tuition revenue from the 2019-20 academic year. The decline in international students will likely have a significant impact on the 2020-21 figures.*

In the 2019-20 academic year, international student enrollment generated **more than \$134 million in tuition revenue\*** for the Twin Cities campus:

- Undergraduate Students: \$71,959,404
- Graduate Students: \$50,940,348
- Professional Degree Students: \$9,016,322
- MELP Intensive English Program: \$900,081
- GO Minnesota: \$743,831

*\*tuition and program fees only; does not include student fees, housing, health insurance, etc.*

In 2019-20, international students on the Twin Cities campus **contributed \$467.7 million to the Minnesota economy** and supported 4,202 jobs. *Source: NAFSA Association of International Educators*

## About the International Recruitment Committee

### Mission

The International Recruitment Committee provides expertise, shares information, and brings constituents together to ensure the Twin Cities campus enrolls a diverse and academically strong international student body. Under the auspices of the Global Programs and Strategy Alliance, the International Recruitment Committee includes key representatives from across the Twin Cities campus to provide visibility and ensure a collaborative recruitment strategy.

### Committee Members

- **College of Continuing and Professional Studies:** Michael Anderson
- **GPS Alliance:** Jennifer Schulz, Sara Ludtke
- **GO Minnesota (GPS):** Leah Brink, Cathy Huber
- **International Student & Scholar Services (GPS):** Aimee Thostenson (chair), Barbara Kappler, Chelsea Keeney, Sarah Krueger
- **Office of Admissions:** Jenny Mealey
- **Graduate School:** Jim Rowan, Dean Tsantir
- **China Center (GPS):** Fran Liu, Haiyan Wang
- **Law School:** Kara Galvin

### Contact the Committee

The International Recruitment Committee invites opportunities to engage with the campus community. Please contact Aimee Thostenson with inquiries or requests at [thos0005@umn.edu](mailto:thos0005@umn.edu).

[global.umn.edu/about/irc.html](https://global.umn.edu/about/irc.html)