



The state of international student enrollment in 2025

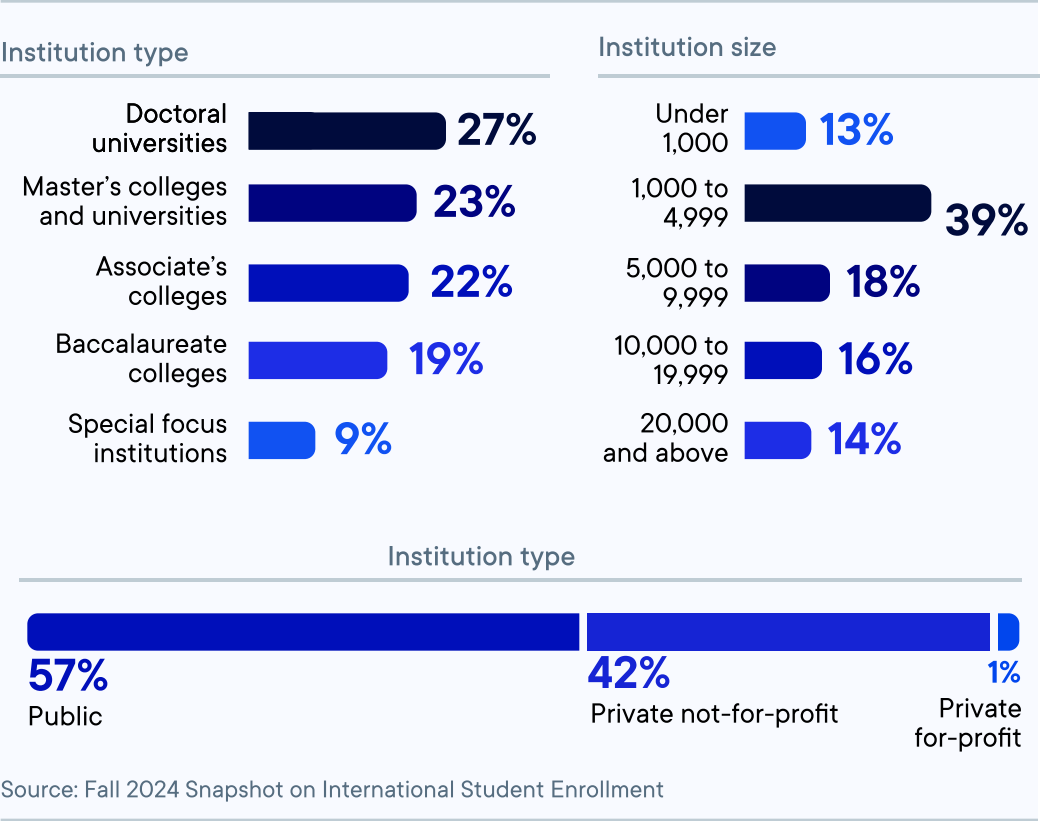
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The state of international student enrollment in 2025

The [Fall 2024 Snapshot on International Student Enrollment](#), a report by the Institute of International Education (IIE), provides key insights into international student enrollment trends for the 2024–2025 academic year. The report is based on data from survey responses from 693 US colleges and universities, representing institutions across all regions and including both public and private schools.

Fall 2024 snapshot: Institutional representation

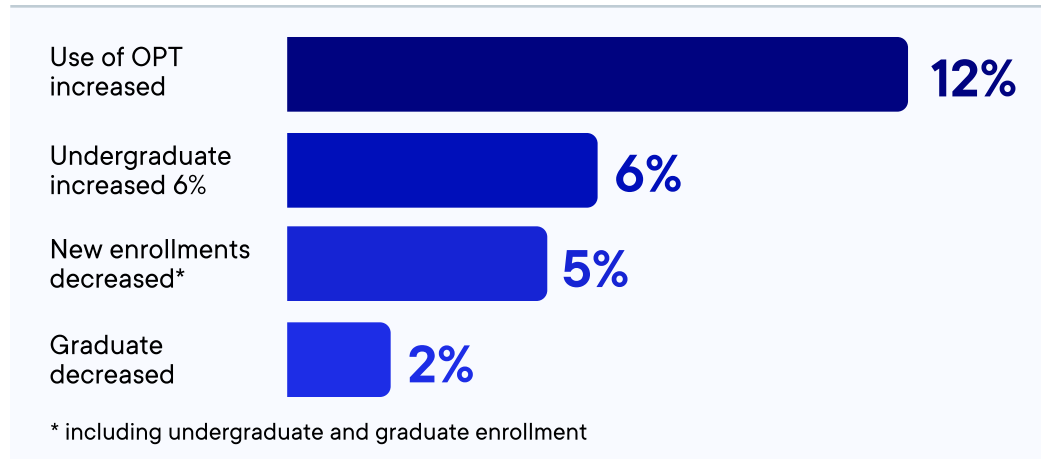




Key findings: Growth in international student enrollment

International student enrollment in the US continues to rise. In the 2024–2025 academic year, total **enrollment grew by 3%**, reaching 1,160,490 international students in higher education. Unlike in previous years, when growth was primarily driven by graduate programs, **this year's increase was led by undergraduate enrollment**.

International student enrollment increases from 2023–2024 to 2024–2025



Economic contributions and institutional investment

According to the US Department of Commerce, international students **contributed approximately \$50 billion to the US economy** as of 2023. This financial impact reinforces the value of international student recruitment for US colleges and universities. Recognizing this, institutions continue to invest in international student outreach:

- **84% of institutions report maintaining or increasing financial support** for international recruitment efforts compared to the previous year.
- Schools also emphasize the **cultural and academic diversity** that international students bring to campus communities.



What admissions professionals need to know

To help institutions stay informed, we have broken down the **Fall 2024 Snapshot** into the most important trends affecting international student enrollment and recruitment.

International student enrollment trends: A closer look

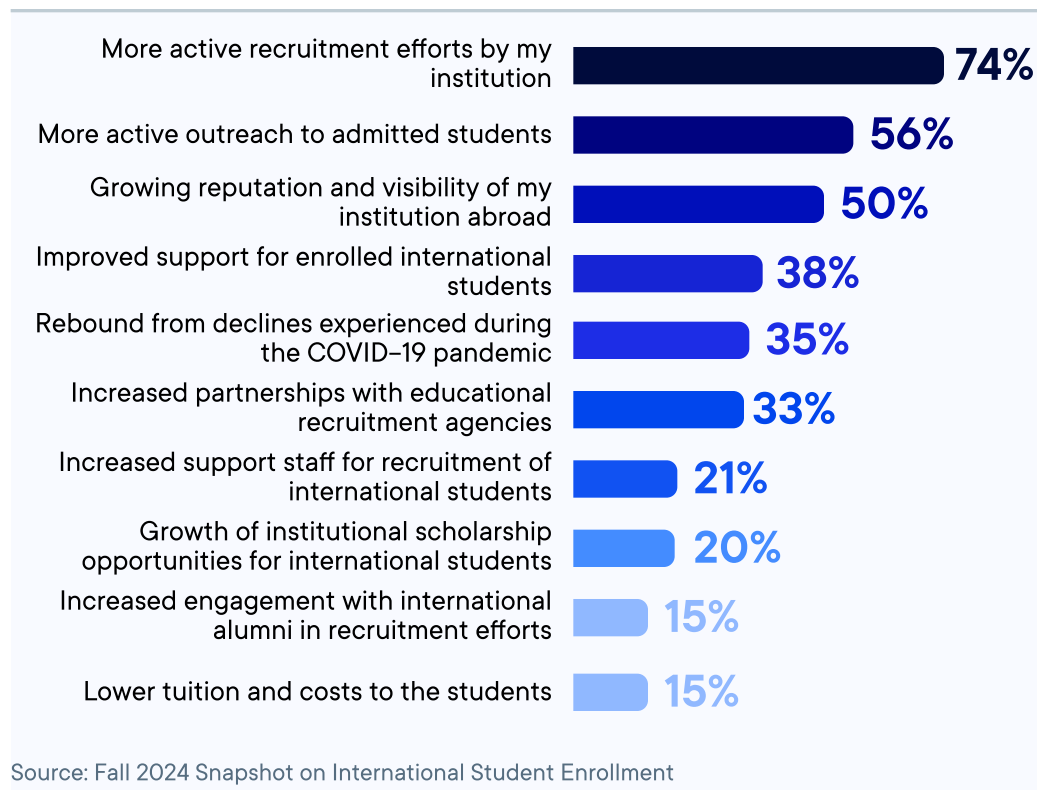
1. Undergraduate enrollment rebounded by 6%

For the first time in four years, international undergraduate enrollment has fully recovered. The 6% increase in undergraduate students suggests a strong rebound following the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted long-term degree plans.

Institutions attribute this increase to several key factors:

- **74%** credit **active recruitment efforts** for growth.
- **56%** highlight **improved outreach to admitted students** as a major driver.
- **50%** cite **increased global visibility and institutional reputation**.
- **38%** point to **better support for new international students**.

Top reasons for increases in new international student enrollment in 2024–2025





2. Graduate enrollment decreased by 2% but remains strong

After three years of rapid growth, with a **52.5% increase from 2021 to 2024**, international graduate enrollment **declined by 2% this year**. However, this is viewed as a natural stabilization rather than a downturn, following last year's record-high graduate student enrollment of over **half a million students**.

Why graduate enrollment rebounded quickly after the pandemic:

- Graduate programs, particularly master's degrees, are shorter in duration, allowing for a faster recovery.
- 64% of international graduate students pursued STEM degrees, and were eligible to apply for STEM OPT Extension.

Despite this year's slight decrease, graduate-level international enrollment still exceeds undergraduate levels.

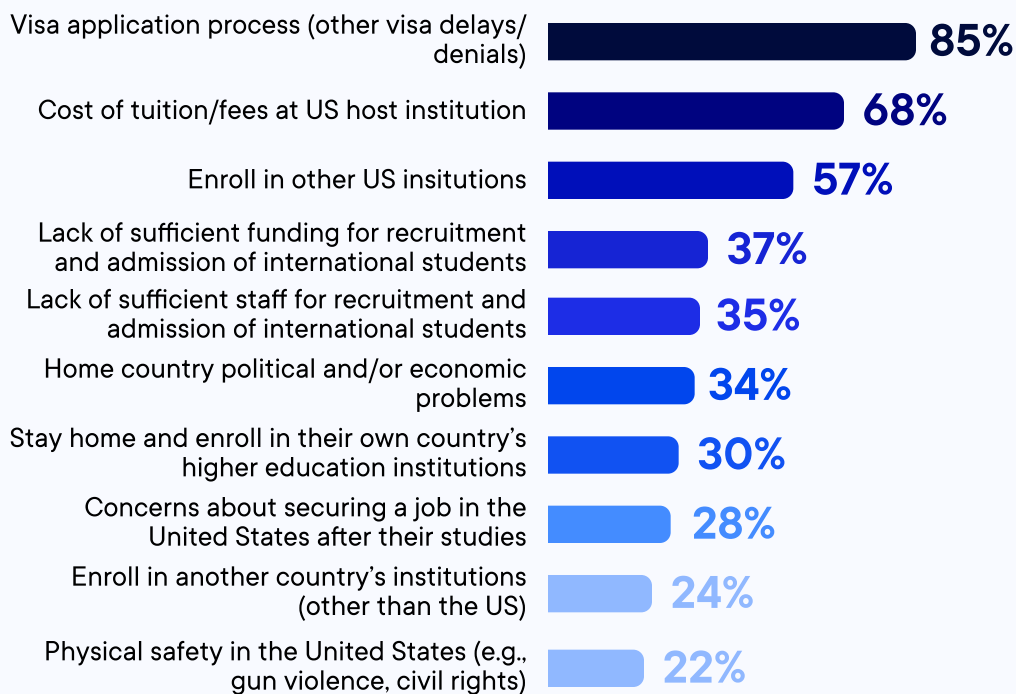
3. New international student enrollment declined by 5%

While total international enrollment grew, **new student enrollments (both undergraduate and graduate) declined by 5%**. Several challenges contributed to this dip:

- **Increased global competition** – Students may opt to study in countries such as Canada, the UK, or Australia.
- **Complicated US visa processes** – Visa delays and denials continue to deter prospective students.
- **Rising costs of US education** – Some students may choose to study in their home country instead.
- **Lack of adequate institutional support** – Some schools may struggle with funding, staffing, or effective outreach strategies for international students.



Top reasons for decreases in new international student enrollment in 2024–2025



Source: Fall 2024 Snapshot on International Student Enrollment

OPT participation hits a record high

One of the most significant trends is the continued growth in **Optional Practical Training (OPT) participation**. This is primarily driven by the boom in international graduate students over the past few years.

- **271,916 international students** participated in **OPT in 2024–2025**, a **12% increase from last year**.
- This follows a **22% increase in 2023–2024**, when **242,782 students** used OPT.

Why OPT matters for institutions

OPT is a **major factor in attracting international students**, and institutions recognize its importance:

- **77% of institutions emphasize OPT opportunities** when recruiting students.
- **76% provide informational sessions** on applying for OPT.
- **69% offer one-on-one application assistance**.
- **58% regularly check in with students** during their OPT period.



Interstride tip!

To stand out in recruitment, **highlight career readiness and post-graduation employment data**. Prospective students want to understand their career opportunities and visa options, so providing clear, digestible statistics can make a difference. Consider sharing:

- Percentage of international students who use OPT (including pre- and post-graduation OPT)
- Percentage of international students who secure full-time jobs after OPT
- Percentage of international students working on campus
- Percentage of international students participating in CPT programs
- Internship participation rates for international students
- The annual average salary for international alumni in various fields
- Top employers hiring international graduates

International student recruitment: Key insights

1. Where are institutions focusing their outreach?

While **India and China** continue to be the top sources of international students, many institutions report **significant growth** from other countries:

- **Nepal and Vietnam** – Over **50% of institutions** report an increase in new enrollments.
- **Bangladesh, Brazil, the UK, and Canada** – Over **40% of institutions** report rising enrollments.
- Other key recruitment markets include **South Korea, Ghana, and Nigeria**.

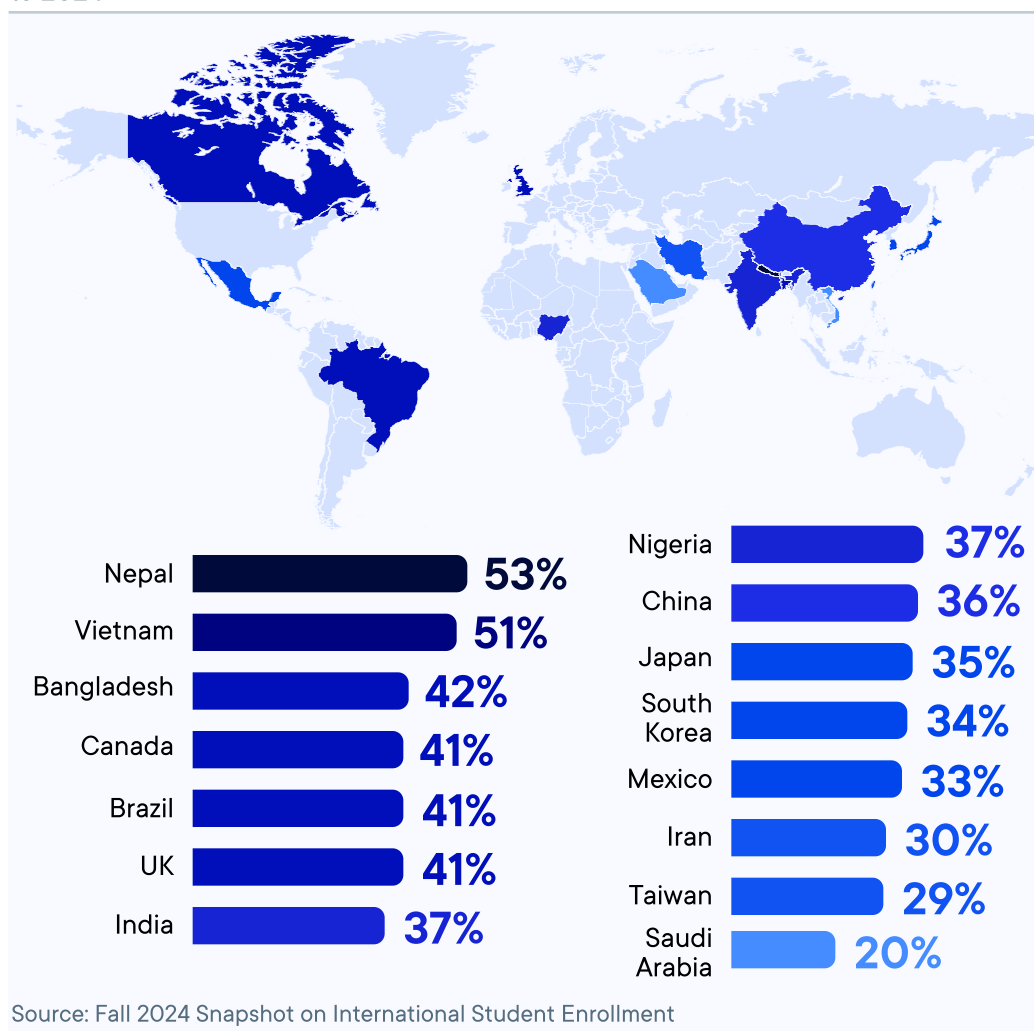
Shifting recruitment priorities

46% of institutions reported increases in new international student enrollment, highlighting the impact of strategic recruitment efforts. Schools that actively prioritize international student recruitment and retention were more likely to see gains.

Institutions are using enrollment trends to refine their outreach strategies. In **2023-2024, enrollment of students from India surpassed that of students from China**, leading more schools to **shift their recruitment focus toward India**. Other emerging priority markets include **Vietnam, South Korea, Ghana, and Nigeria**.

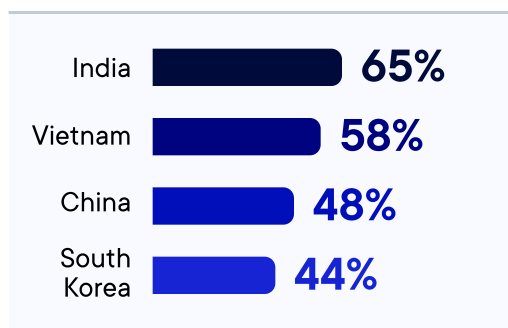


Percentage of institutions reporting new enrollment from these countries from 2023 to 2024

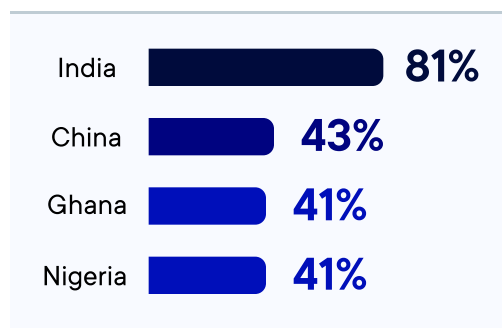


Because enrollment patterns differ at the **undergraduate and graduate levels**, institutions are tailoring their recruitment strategies accordingly. Some countries may have higher demand for undergraduate programs, while others send more students for master's and PhD programs. Understanding these patterns helps schools allocate resources effectively and **maximize international student engagement**.

Where institutions are focusing their **UNDERGRADUATE** recruitment efforts



Where institutions are focusing their **GRADUATE** recruitment efforts





2. How are US institutions recruiting international students?

With global competition and rising education costs, US institutions cannot assume students will come to them. Active outreach and engagement are essential.

Top undergraduate recruitment strategies

With increased global competition, US institutions are using a variety of strategies to actively recruit international students. These approaches help institutions expand their reach, improve engagement, and convert prospects into enrolled students.

- **In-person recruitment events (63%)** – Colleges and universities are shifting back to in-person engagement after the surge in virtual recruitment events during the COVID-19 pandemic. While virtual events remain an option, only 52% of institutions used them this year, signaling a strong return to face-to-face outreach. Meeting students in person allows for deeper engagement and a more personalized experience.
- **Leveraging current international students (62%)** – Many institutions rely on their existing international student community to help with recruitment. Student ambassadors provide authentic, relatable guidance to prospective students, especially when they share a cultural or linguistic background. Peer-to-peer connections can build trust and offer real-life insights into the student experience.
- **International partnerships and educational recruitment agencies (60%)** – Institutions are increasingly collaborating with partner schools, international organizations, and recruitment agencies to generate leads and build global visibility. These partnerships help institutions establish a reputation abroad and create pipelines for steady student enrollment.
- **EducationUSA resources (58%)** – This US Department of State network promotes American higher education to students worldwide. It provides prospective students with accurate, comprehensive information about US institutions and helps colleges connect with international applicants through advising centers, recruitment fairs, and country-specific reports. Many institutions use EducationUSA's Global Guide, student mobility fact sheets, and regional recruitment strategies to shape their outreach efforts.
- **Social media outreach (52%)** – The majority of college-age people are heavily online, and many social media platforms are global. The very successful #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign is an example of how powerful social media outreach can be. Originally popularized by Temple University, it is now used by more than 400 higher education institutions to send the message that this country is a welcoming place for international students to study and live.



Top graduate recruitment strategies

Graduate students have different priorities than undergraduates, so recruitment strategies must reflect their needs. Prospective graduate students are typically further along in their professional journey and focused on the **return on investment (ROI)** of their degree. Rather than needing guidance on the application process, they want clear insights into **career outcomes, job placement rates, and alumni success stories**.

Unlike undergraduate recruitment, graduate admissions professionals rely more on alumni and current international students and less on EducationUSA and recruitment agencies.

The top strategies institutions use for graduate recruitment are:

- **Leveraging current international students (67%)** – Prospective students value hearing from those who have already navigated the graduate experience. Current international students serve as ambassadors, offering first-hand insights and guidance.
- **International partnerships (64%)** – Universities collaborate with institutions abroad to establish pipelines for graduate student enrollment, particularly for master's and PhD programs.
- **Social media outreach (58%)** – Digital engagement remains key, with platforms like LinkedIn and YouTube used to showcase research opportunities, faculty expertise, and career outcomes.
- **Alumni engagement (56%)** – Graduate prospects are highly interested in where alumni have landed post-graduation. Featuring alumni success stories and career trajectories can significantly influence decision-making.
- **In-person recruitment events (56%)** – While less common than at the undergraduate level, in-person engagement is still important, particularly for networking with faculty, research advisors, and prospective employers.

To effectively recruit graduate students, institutions should focus on demonstrating ROI, emphasizing career pathways, post-graduate employment rates, and salary outcomes. Sharing data-driven success metrics can make an institution stand out in an increasingly competitive market.



Final thoughts: What this means for the future

International student enrollment in the US continues to **grow overall**, but **new enrollment declines** and **intensifying global competition** signal the need for **proactive recruitment strategies**.

The 2025 Open Doors Report, to be released in November 2025, will offer further insights into these trends. Until then, institutions must remain strategic and data-driven in their international student recruitment efforts.

Source list:

- [Fall 2024 Snapshot on International Student Enrollment](#)
- [2024 Fast Facts on International Students in the United States](#)
- [NBC News: “Indians become biggest international student group in U.S., surpassing Chinese for first time since 2009”](#)



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