
ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM INDIA

AN IIE BRIEFING PAPER
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I. Executive Summary

Institute of International Education (IIE)

An independent nonprofit founded in 1919, IIE is among the world's largest and most experienced international education and training organizations.

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India is currently the top place of origin international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities. Over the past decade, the number of Indian students in the U.S. has increased more than 175 percent, from just under 37,500 students in 1998/99 to over 103,000 in 2008/09. India has, in fact, been the leading place of origin since 2001/02, when it surpassed China. Since 2007/08, students from India have comprised over 15% of all international students in the United States.

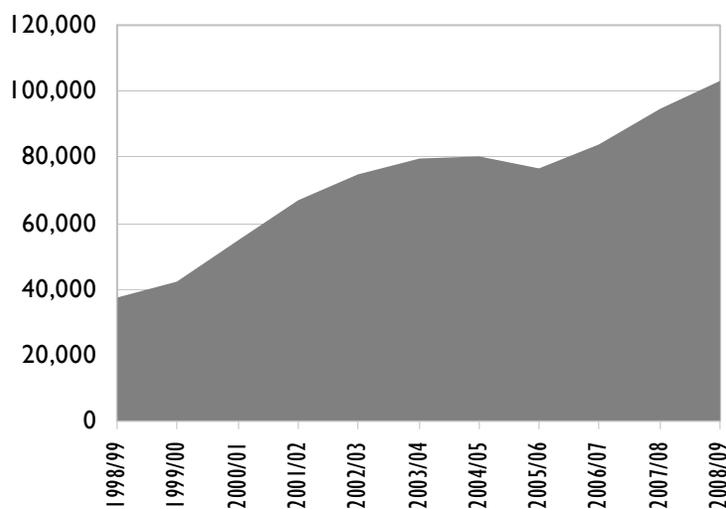
This IIE Briefing Paper examines the attitudes and perceptions of the U.S. of prospective international students from India, and is the second report in a series of attitudinal surveys of students from key sending countries. Students were surveyed on their preferred study abroad destinations, their reasons for studying abroad, the major obstacles they faced and their main sources of information on study abroad as well as their opinions of the U.S. as a potential study abroad destination compared to five other key host destinations. Findings include:

- the U.S. is the destination of choice for the majority of respondents, with 97 percent reporting the U.S. as either their 1st or 2nd choice study abroad destination;
- the U.S. is perceived to have the highest quality higher education system and widest range of schools and programs compared to the United Kingdom, Australia, Continental Europe, Southeast/East Asia and the Middle East, as well as being a safe place to study which welcomes international students, and offers a good lifestyle, good student support services and many scholarships opportunities;
- cost was cited as the primary obstacle to study abroad.

II. Prospective Student Profile

There were 103,260 students from India studying at U.S. colleges and universities in 2008/09, up 9.2 percent over the previous year (fig. 1). However, due to the global economic downturn as well as other factors, anecdotal evidence suggests a drop in Indian student enrollment for the coming year.¹ In response, IIE conducted a survey in India during the summer 2009 of over 1,000 prospective Indian students regarding their attitudes and perceptions of the U.S. compared to other key host destinations.²

Figure 1: Number of Students from India in the U.S., 1998/99 - 2008/09



Source: *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*.
New York: Institute of International Education.

Respondents represented four cities in India: **Mumbai** (31 percent), **Chennai** (27 percent), **Delhi** (23 percent) and **Kolkata** (19 percent). Sixty percent of respondents were male and 40 percent were female. About two-thirds (64 percent) were currently enrolled undergraduates or had completed an undergraduate degree but no graduate degree. Just under one-fourth (24 percent) were enrolled at the graduate level or had completed a graduate degree. Eight percent were secondary school students and about 2 percent were enrolled in two-year colleges or technical schools.

Over two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) indicated that they had **already decided to study abroad** at the time of the survey, while 28 percent were just beginning to think about studying abroad. More women than men were at the early stages of exploring study abroad (36 vs. 28.5 percent). More students from Chennai and Kolkata were also just beginning to think about study abroad (41 and 36 percent, compared to 18 percent in both Delhi and Mumbai).

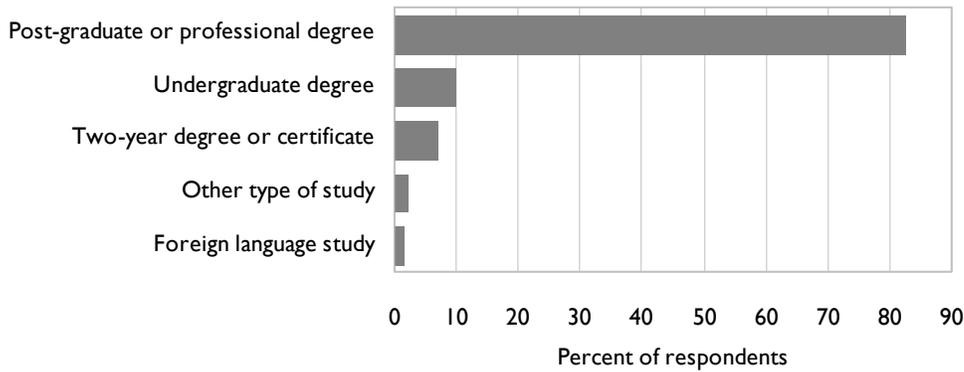
The majority of respondents (83 percent) were interested in pursuing **graduate and/or professional studies** abroad (fig. 2). Ten percent were interested in pursuing undergraduate studies, 7 percent were interested in a two-year degree or certificate program, and 1.5 percent were interested in pursuing language studies/ESL.

¹ This is supported by a drop in visa issuance rates. However, as there is no one-to-one correspondence between the number of visas issued and the number of students in the U.S., this cannot be taken *a priori* as an indicator of a drop in enrollment.

² A total of 1,044 valid responses were received from visitors to the EducationUSA advising centers in the cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai.

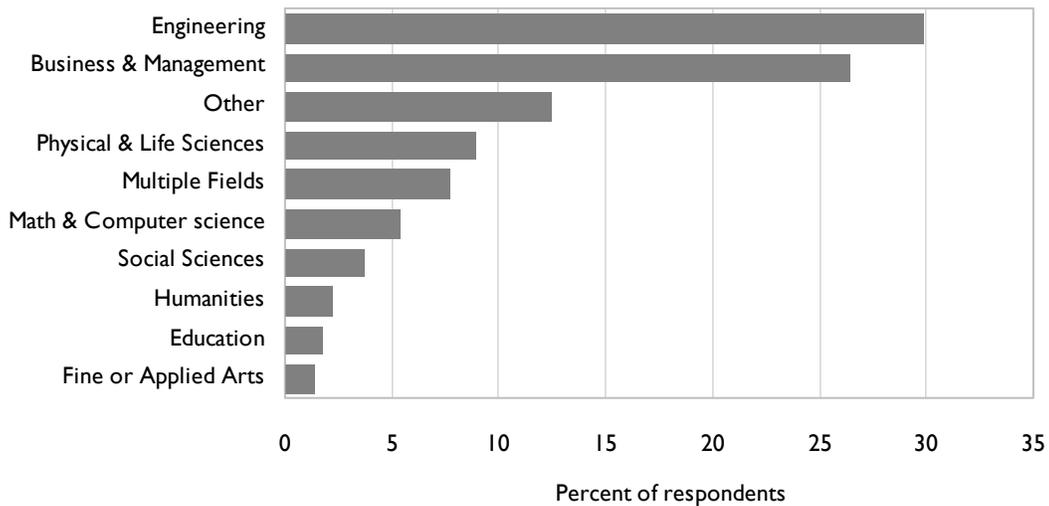
Slightly more men than women were interested in pursuing undergraduate studies (11 vs. 8 percent) and more students from Delhi were interested in undergraduate study (20 percent vs. 6-8 percent in the other cities). Students from Chennai were most likely to be interested in a two-year degree or certificate (12 percent vs. 4-7 percent in the other cities). Students from Kolkata were primarily interested in graduate studies (92 percent vs. 76 percent in Delhi and Chennai and 88 percent in Mumbai).

Figure 2: Types of Study Abroad



Overall, 30 percent of respondents indicated that **engineering** was their intended field of study, followed by **business and management** (26 percent) (fig. 3). A higher proportion of men than women were interested in studying engineering (36 vs. 21.5 percent). Among women, business and management and engineering were equally popular. Business and management was more popular than engineering among respondents from Mumbai and Delhi (33 vs. 27 percent for Mumbai and 26.5 vs. 25 percent for Delhi, respectively).

Figure 3: Intended Field of Study



III. Preferred Destinations

Students were asked to indicate their first- and second-choice study abroad destinations in two separate open-response questions. The overwhelming first-choice destination for study abroad was the **United States**. More than nine out of every ten respondents (91 percent) listed the United States as their first-choice destination (fig. 4). The United Kingdom was the second most popular first-choice destination, with 4 percent of the total, followed by Canada with 2 percent and Australia with 1 percent. A number of continental European countries were also mentioned (Germany, France, Norway and Russia), for a total of 1 percent, as well as Singapore in Southeast Asia and the United Arab Emirates (classified under “Other”).

Figure 4: Preferred Study Abroad Destinations

	1st Choice	2nd Choice
United States	90.7%	6.7%
United Kingdom	3.7%	35.8%
Canada	1.6%	13.5%
Australia	1.2%	10.5%
Continental Europe	1.1%	17.7%
Southeast/East Asia	1.0%	12.3%
Any country/Undecided	0.5%	0.2%
Other	0.2%	1.8%
None/India	0.0%	1.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

There was very little difference between men and women in their preferences for first-choice study abroad destination. At the city level, respondents in Chennai were more likely to choose the United Kingdom as their first choice (7 percent vs. 1-3 percent in the other cities) and less likely to choose the United States (84 percent vs. 91-95 percent in the other cities), although the vast majority of students from Chennai still preferred the United States as their first-choice destination for study abroad.

The **United Kingdom** was the most popular second-choice destination, with 36 percent of the total, followed by Canada (13.5 percent) and Australia (10.5 percent). The United States was the fourth most popular second-choice country, with 7 percent of the total. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents who did not select the United States as their first-choice destination did select it as their second-choice destination, and a total of 97 percent of respondents selected the United States as either their first- or second-choice destination.

Men were more likely than women to choose Canada and countries in continental Europe as their second choice destination (15 vs. 11 percent for Canada and 20 vs. 14 percent for Europe), while women were more likely than men to choose Australia as a second-choice destination. (15 vs. 8 percent).

Students from Mumbai and Chennai were more likely to choose Southeast/East Asia as a second-choice destination, while students from Delhi and Kolkata were more likely to choose Canada. Continental Europe was more popular as a second-choice destination for students from Chennai and Kolkata than for students from Mumbai and Delhi. Students from Chennai were more likely to choose Australia as a second-choice destination than students from the other cities.

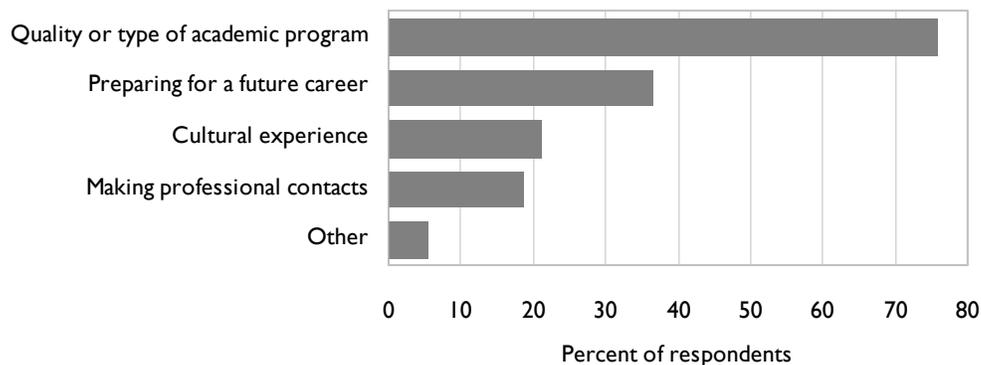
IV. Reasons for Studying Abroad

Students were asked a multiple-choice question regarding their reasons for studying abroad. The choices listed were: *quality or type of academic program*; *cultural experience*; *making professional contacts*; *preparing for a future career in a foreign country or foreign-based company* and *other*. Respondents were allowed to select as many reasons as applied, thus percentages do not total one hundred.

The most frequently cited reason for studying abroad was **quality or type of academic program** (fig. 5). Over three-fourths (76 percent) of respondents indicated that this was one of their main reasons for wishing to study abroad. Over one-third (37 percent) chose preparing for a future career in a foreign country and about one-fifth chose cultural experience and making professional contacts (21 and 19 percent, respectively).

Men were slightly more likely than women to choose making professional contacts (21 vs. 17 percent), while students from Delhi were least likely (16 percent vs. 19-20 percent in the other cities). Students from Kolkata were most likely to choose preparing for a future career in a foreign country (46 percent vs. 33 percent in Delhi and Mumbai and 38 percent in Chennai) and least likely to choose cultural experience (16 percent vs. 22-23 percent in the other cities).

Figure 5: Main Reasons for Studying Abroad

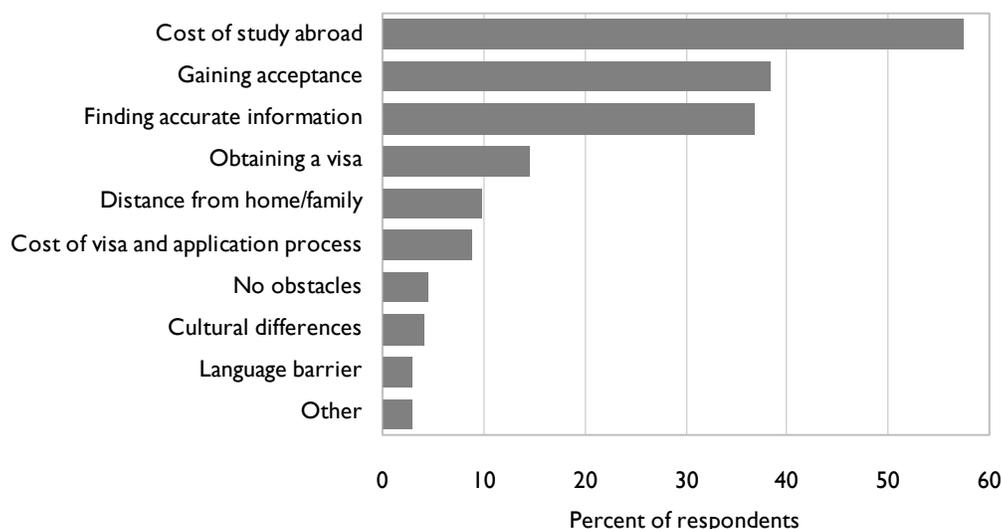


V. Major Obstacles to Studying Abroad

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the following factors they felt were major obstacles to studying abroad: *finding accurate information*; *gaining acceptance to the institution of your choice*; *obtaining a visa, cost of the visa and application process*; *cost of studying abroad*; *language barrier*; *cultural differences*; *distance from home or family* and *other*. Respondents were allowed to check as many factors as applied, thus percentages do not total one hundred.

The highest proportion of respondents (58 percent) listed **cost** as a major obstacle to studying abroad, followed by gaining acceptance (38 percent), finding accurate information (37 percent), obtaining a visa (14.5 percent), distance from home and family (10 percent) and the cost of visa and application process (9 percent) (fig. 6). In addition, 4.5 percent of respondents indicated that there were no obstacles to study abroad facing them.

Figure 6: Major Obstacles to Studying Abroad



Women were more likely than men to cite distance from home and family as a major obstacle (14 vs. 7 percent), and men were more likely than women to cite no obstacles (6 vs. 2 percent). Respondents in Kolkata were more likely to cite cost as a major obstacle (69 percent vs. 54-57 percent in the other cities). A higher proportion of students from Chennai cited obtaining a visa as a major obstacle (21.5 percent vs. 11-12 percent in the other cities). The majority of respondents (87 percent) had never applied for a visa to study in the U.S. However, among those who had applied, 16 percent reported encountering difficulty, with students from Chennai and Delhi reporting the most difficulty (26 and 22 percent, respectively, compared to zero percent in Mumbai and 11 percent in Kolkata).

The majority of respondents (87 percent) had never applied for a visa to study in the U.S. Among those who had previously applied, only 16 percent indicated that they had had difficulty obtaining a student visa. Those having difficulty were split evenly among men and women, and came primarily from Chennai (73 percent).

VI. Perceptions of Key Host Destinations

This section discusses the attitudes and perceptions that respondents have of the following six key study abroad destinations: the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Continental Europe, Southeast/East Asia and the Middle East. Students were asked to indicate whether they agreed that a particular statement (dimension) applied to the destination in question. The dimensions were: *high quality higher education system; wide range of schools and programs; costly school application process; offers many scholarships opportunities; expensive tuition; offers a good lifestyle; high cost of living; safe place to study; difficult entry visa process; too far from home; welcomes international students; offers good student support services; too culturally different and language barrier*. Respondents were allowed to select as many dimensions as applied to each country, thus percentages do not total one hundred. An average score was calculated based on the percentages of respondents agreeing with each of the individual dimensions.³

³ Scores for negative dimensions were inverted by subtracting them from 100% to convert them into positive scores. All dimensions were weighted equally for purposes of calculating the average (arithmetic mean).

Overall, the **United States** had the highest average score (63.7), followed by Southeast/East Asia (50.7), Australia (50.1), the United Kingdom (49.6), Continental Europe (48.8) and the Middle East (47.4) (fig. 7). The United States was rated as having an **excellent higher education system** by 88 percent of respondents (fig. 8), compared to between 1 and 32 percent for the other destinations. Seventy-five percent of respondents considered the United States to have a **wide range of schools and programs**, a much higher percentage than for the other destinations (1 to 23 percent). A very high percentage also felt that the United States **welcomes international students** (68 percent vs. 3 to 22.5 percent for the other destinations) and **offers a good lifestyle** to students (63 percent vs. 3 to 32 percent for the other destinations). The majority of respondents also felt that the United States **offers good student support services** (61 percent), **offers many scholarship opportunities** (60 percent) and is a **safe place to study** (60 percent).

Figure 7: Overall Average Score for Key Study Destinations

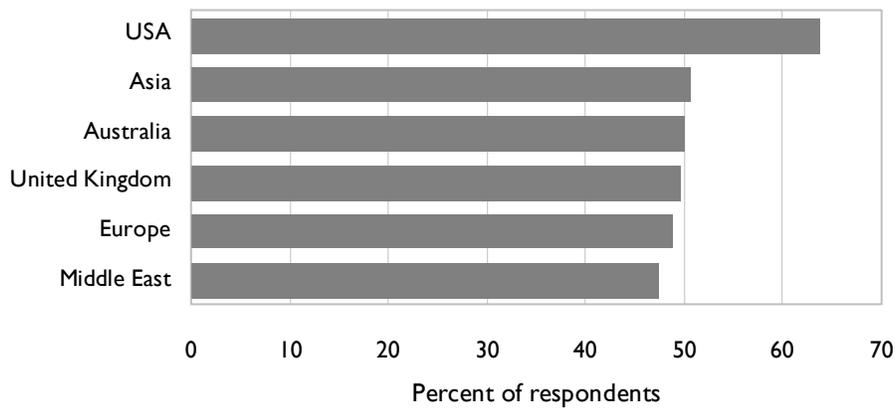
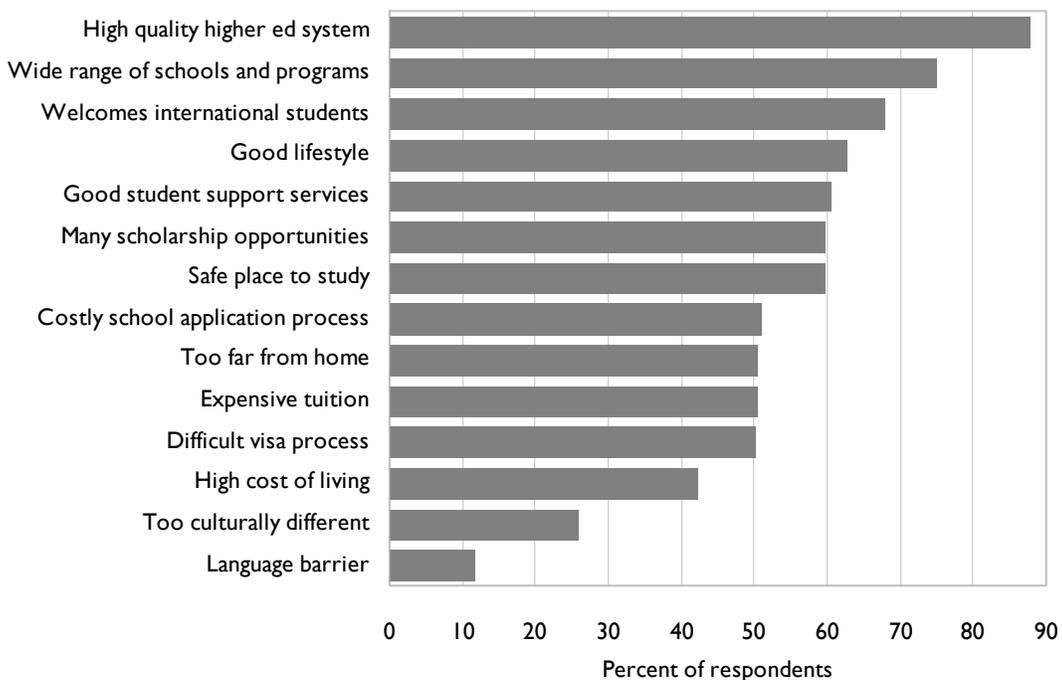


Figure 8: Impressions of the U.S. as a Potential Study Destination



However, over half of respondents indicated that the United States has a **costly school application process** (51 percent), that the United States is **too far from home** (51 percent), that schools in the United States have **expensive tuition** (50 percent) and that there is a **difficult entry**

visa process to obtain a student visa to study in the United States (50 percent). In addition, 42 percent indicated that the United States has a high cost of living and over one-fourth (26 percent) of respondents indicated that they felt the United States was too culturally different from India and 12 percent indicated that there was a significant language barrier.

Men were more likely than women to indicate that the United States was too far from home (47 vs. 56 percent), that the visa process was difficult (also 47 vs. 56 percent), that the cost of living in the United States is high (40 vs. 46 percent), that United States is too culturally different from India (24 vs. 29 percent) and that there is a significant language barrier (10 vs. 15 percent).

Respondents in Chennai were more likely than their peers to perceive the United States as being too culturally different from India (36 percent vs. 20 to 25 percent in the other cities) and to report a significant language barrier (24.5 percent vs. 6 to 9 percent in the other cities).

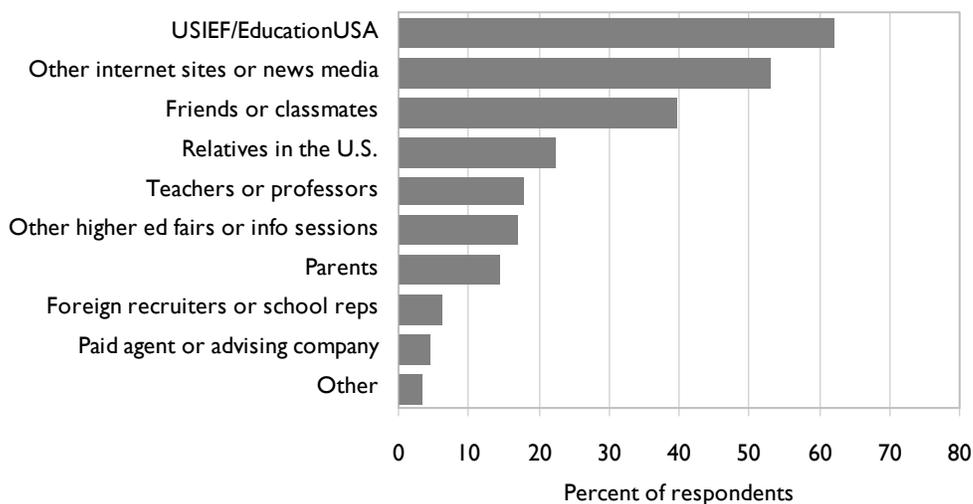
VII. Sources of Information and Most Important Influence

Sources of Information

Students were asked to indicate which of the following sources were their main sources of information about studying abroad in the U.S: *U.S.-India Educational Foundation (USIEF)/EducationUSA advising center, higher education fairs or online services; other higher education fairs or information sessions; other internet sites or new media; foreign recruiters or U.S. school representatives; paid agent or advising company; friends or classmates; teachers or professors; parents; relatives in the U.S. and other.* Respondents were allowed to select as many sources as they wished, thus percentages do not total one hundred.

The highest proportion (62 percent) of students reported **U.S.-India Educational Foundation (USIEF)/EducationUSA** advising center, higher education fairs or online services as one of their main sources of information on study abroad, followed by **other internet sites or news media** (53 percent) and **friends or classmates** (40 percent) (fig. 11). Top internet sites cited were google.com (23 percent), usnews.com (20 percent) and individual university websites (9 percent).

Figure 11: Main Sources of Information on Study Abroad



There was very little gender variations for source of information, although women were somewhat more likely than men to cite relatives in the U.S. as one of their main sources of information (25 vs. 21 percent).

A higher proportion of respondents in Delhi and Kolkata rely on the USIEF/EducationUSA advising center, higher education fairs and/or online services than in Mumbai and Chennai (74 and 80 percent vs. 50 and 54 percent, respectively). Other internet sites and news media were more popular in Mumbai and Delhi than Chennai and Kolkata (63.5 and 57 percent vs. 45 and 42 percent, respectively). Students in Mumbai were more likely to cite friends or classmates as an important source (50 vs. 31-40 percent in the other cities), while students in Chennai were more likely to cite parents (20 vs. 11-15 percent in the other cities). Students in Delhi relied less on teachers and professors than students in the other cities (13 vs. 17-22 percent in the other cities). Recruiters, both foreign and domestic, seemed to be most active in Mumbai, where more respondents cited foreign recruiters or U.S. school representatives and/or paid agents or advising company as a main source of information (10 and 7 percent, respectively vs. 3-5 percent for the other cities).

Most Important Influence

Students were also asked to indicate who of the following had the most important influence on their decisions regarding education: *teachers or professors; parents; relatives in study abroad country; friends or classmates; counselors or advisers; myself and other.*

The highest proportion of respondents (40 percent) indicated that they themselves were the decision makers regarding their own educational decisions. About one-fifth (19 percent) indicated that their parents were the most important influence in their educational decision-making, followed by friends or classmates (9 percent), teachers or professors (6 percent), relatives in study abroad country (6 percent) and counselors or advisers (2 percent). In addition, 13 percent of respondents chose “other”, listing siblings and significant others as the most important influence on their educational decision-making.

Men were more likely than women to consider themselves as the most important influence (43 vs. 35 percent). Women, on the other hand, were slightly more likely than men to indicate their parents as the most important influence (21 vs. 17 percent).

Respondents in Mumbai were more likely than respondents in other cities to indicate themselves as the most important influence on their educational decision-making (44 vs. 36-40 percent in the other cities), while respondents from Chennai were more likely to indicate their parents (24 vs. 15-20 percent), respondents in Kolkata were more likely to indicate teachers or professors (10 vs. 4-7 percent) and respondents in Delhi were more likely to indicate counselors and advisers (4 vs. 0-2 percent).

VIII. Conclusions

Overall, the survey results indicate that the positioning of the United States as a potential study abroad destination for Indian students is currently very strong compared to other possible destinations. Respondents in all four cities overwhelmingly chose the United States as their first-choice destination for study abroad, with second and third place United Kingdom and Canada only garnering single-digit percentages. Among respondents who did not select the United States as their first choice destination, almost 70 percent did select it as their second-choice destination. Less than 3 percent of respondents listed the United States as neither their first- nor their second-choice study abroad destination.

The survey results also revealed several strengths and weaknesses for the United States as a study abroad destination for students from India. Most respondents cited the quality or type of academic programs as their main reason for wishing to study abroad. Compared to the United Kingdom, Australia, Continental Europe, Southeast/East Asia and the Middle East, the United States was rated the most highly for its excellent higher education system and wide range of schools and programs, as well as for being welcoming toward international students, offering a good lifestyle and for being a safe place to study. However, the United States received the poorest ratings for the cost of tuition, an expensive school application process and distance from home. Furthermore, only the United Kingdom was perceived to have more difficult or complicated visa procedures. Addressing these issue will ensure that the United States remains the premier destination for students from India who wish to pursue higher education in another country.

Appendix A: Resource for Prospective Students

IIE-INDIA

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IIE India is a branch of the Institute of International Education, an independent non-profit organization headquartered in New York City, with branches around the world. IIE has been active in India since 1997 and has had an office in New Delhi since 2005.

Services include:

- organizes **U.S. higher education fairs** for prospective students
- administers several **scholarship and fellowship programs** for Indian students
- offers special services for U.S. and Indian colleges and universities seeking to establish **partnerships** with their counterparts in the other country

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WEBSITES

www.IIE.org – homepage for the Institute of International Education and its over 250 programs

www.IIE.org/India – IIE India's website

www.IIENetwork.org – online resource for IIE members, including publications, best practices, conferences, etc.

EducationUSA.state.gov – official U.S. State Department website for study in the U.S.

www.usief.org.in – U.S.-India Educational Foundation website (information on Fulbright and other grants)

FundingUSstudy.org – scholarships for international students who wish to study in the U.S.

IntensiveEnglishUSA.com – online listing of intensive English programs in the U.S.

opendoors.iienetwork.org – *Open Doors*: data on U.S. in- and outbound student mobility and background materials

atlas.iienetwork.org – *Project Atlas*: data on international student mobility for key destinations and sending countries

iiebooks.org – IIE's online bookstore