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**COVID-19
SNAPSHOT SURVEY SERIES**

**COVID-19 EFFECTS ON U.S.
HIGHER EDUCATION CAMPUSES**

***Academic Student Mobility
to and from China***

Mirka Martel, Ph.D.

March 2020

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COVID-19 Snapshot Survey Series

The Institute of International Education (IIE) is studying the effects of COVID-19 (coronavirus) on global student mobility on U.S. higher education campuses. Our aim in this series is to provide more information about the effects that COVID-19 has had on international student mobility, and the measures U.S. higher education institutions are taking regarding international students currently on campus and those abroad, international students interested in studying in the United States, and U.S. students planning to study abroad.

The first survey was launched on Feb. 13, 2020, and specifically focuses on the effects of COVID-19 with regard to academic student mobility to and from China. As the COVID-19 outbreak evolves, IIE will administer follow-on surveys to the U.S. higher education community to monitor the unfolding situation and to keep the international education community informed.

For more information, please visit www.iie.org or email press@iie.org.

Introduction

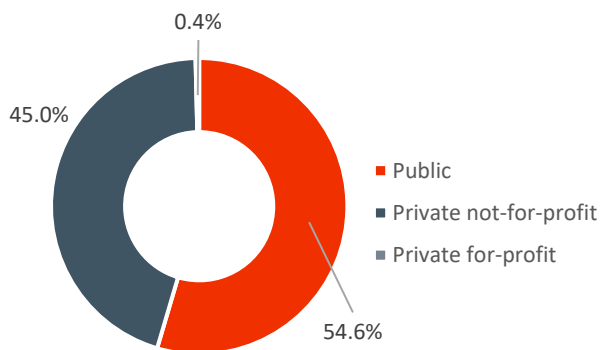
In 2017, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated that over 5.3 million students were studying globally, placing international student mobility at its highest level to date.¹ China is the number one sender of international students globally, as well as an emerging host of international students on its campuses.² The United States hosted 369,548 international students from China in 2018/19.³

Since January 2020, the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has affected the global travel of thousands of students, as well as the plans of U.S. higher education institutions to conduct outreach and recruitment efforts for future semesters. Since the end of February 2020, travel restrictions to several locations, including China, Iran, South Korea, and Italy, have impeded the flow of international students, faculty, and university staff worldwide.⁴ This Issue Brief explores the effects of COVID-19 travel restrictions on international student mobility to and from mainland China due to its high numbers of international students worldwide and because it is the country with the longest and largest COVID-19 caseload.⁵

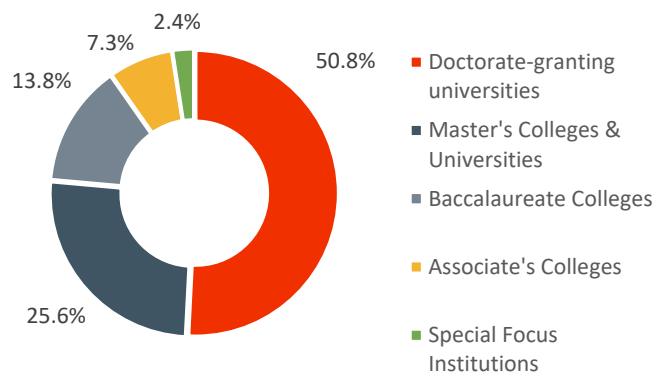
Survey Respondent Institutions

IIE administered the survey to the U.S. higher education community through the *IENetwork* newsletter from Feb. 13 to Feb. 26, 2020.⁶ The findings represent 234 institutional respondents from 43 states.⁷ Institutional characteristics indicate a broad representation of U.S. higher education institutions, 93% of which also participated in the *Open Doors 2019 Report on International Educational Exchange*.

Institution Sector



Institution Type



¹ OECD, *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*.

² *Open Doors*® 2019; *Project Atlas*® 2019. For more information, visit www.iie.org/opendoors and www.iie.org/projectatlas.

³ *Open Doors* 2019.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coronavirus Disease 2019 Summary*, www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.

⁵ The survey focused on international student mobility to and from mainland China, excluding Hong Kong and Macao.

⁶ The *IENetwork* is a membership-based community of over 1,300 higher education institutions and other organizations in the United States and abroad.

⁷ 98 respondents branched out of the survey because they were not affiliated with a U.S. higher education institution or they did not track inbound or outbound student mobility as part of their role at their university.

International Students from China in the United States

369,548 international students from China were in the U.S. in 2018/19 (*Open Doors 2019*)

According to the *Open Doors 2019 Report on International Educational Exchange*, one in three international students in the United States was from China.

The 234 institutions represented in the COVID-19 analysis hosted 175,398 students from China in 2018/19, or 47% of the total population of Chinese students in the United States. 19 of the top 20 hosts of international students from China completed the survey.

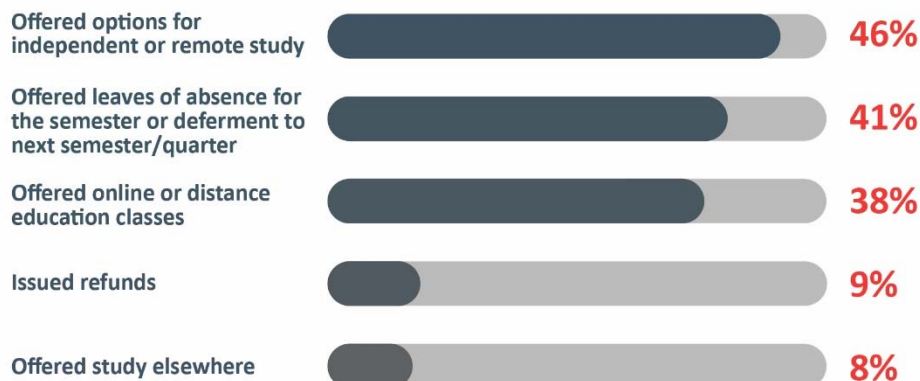
87 respondent institutions (37%) indicated **831 international students from China** enrolled at their institutions had been affected by travel restrictions related to COVID-19. These were Chinese students in their home country when the virus outbreak happened who have not been able to come or return to campus.

- Chinese students affected by the travel restrictions represented **less than 0.4%** of the total population of students from China at respondent institutions. As indicated by institutions, the vast majority of Chinese students were already on U.S. campuses, as they had never left for the winter holidays or had already returned to campus. The spring 2020 semester also included fewer new students to campus than the fall 2019 semester.
- 82% of the students impacted by travel restrictions were students attending the top 20 *Open Doors* institutions that hosted Chinese international students in 2019.

100% of all institutions that had students from China impacted by travel restrictions have been in communication with them.

94% of institutions have involved academic advisors, faculty, and various other departments to offer a comprehensive approach to these students. Regardless of how many students were affected by the travel restrictions, most institutions indicated frequent communications with students regarding their status on their U.S. campus.

Institutional Response to International Students in China



We have worked with each student individually to assess their status needs and their academic progress, and have worked with appropriate offices on campus to assist the students.

We have collaborated with their academic advisors; dormitory administrators; health, travel, and safety managers for university travel risk; as well as the student directly to determine the best course of action for their enrollment and maintenance of legal status.

We are working with each student's individual situation. Some are doing independent study, some online, and others taking a break.

Undergraduate students have withdrawn for the semester, some students are pursuing studies in another country, and graduate students are working with their academic programs accordingly to continue their coursework.

Institutions with more than 10 students affected were more likely to provide several options for students. Many institutions are offering online courses, independent study, or other arrangements to continue enrollment. Flexible arrangements were more likely the case for graduate students, as respondents noted that these students often have less rigid coursework and schedules. Undergraduate students were more likely to be deferred to a future semester or have their enrollment withdrawn and issued a refund.

40% of institutions specifically indicated they were working with students who were finishing their degree to ensure that they would be able complete their degree.

Responding institutions often indicated a strong commitment to supporting students affected by travel restrictions. In several cases, institutions were creating customized measures for a single student to help them continue with their coursework. *"[We are] allowing [the] student to work from China. We're not an institution set up to do online education, so this is extra work by the faculty for this student who [is] unable to return from China and in his last semester before graduation."*

Support for Chinese Students on Campus

Most institutions have been in communication with Chinese students currently on their campus to offer their concerns and support, and to provide advice on planned travel by:

	Offering counseling services and communications for Chinese students and their prospective current enrollment
	Supporting Chinese student groups on campus
	Offering a hotline to report any concerns Chinese students on campus may have or any instances of discrimination they are facing

We maintain close communication daily with our on-campus Chinese cohort, all of whom returned to our campus prior to the virus outbreak and subsequent restrictions. Our goal is to be supportive, concerned, and engaged partners during this rough spot for all of us.

We have checked in with every Chinese student enrolled here about their well-being since the report started, and we are monitoring their emotional well-being vis-à-vis family and friends back home.

We've been writing to Chinese students and to students with family in China to offer resources and support. We have been sure to let the Chinese students know of the financial support that IIE can offer.

Outreach and Recruitment of Prospective Chinese Students

58% of U.S. higher education institutions prioritized academic recruitment from China (Fall 2019 Snapshot Survey)⁷

According to the Fall 2019 International Student Enrollment Snapshot Survey, approximately 80% of institutions continued to have concerns about maintaining or increasing international student numbers from China.

These concerns have been now likely multiplied due to travel restrictions for outreach events and recruitment cycles, and there is the potential for the COVID-19 outbreak to affect not only the 2020/21 academic year but also future recruitment.

76% of respondent institutions noted that outreach and recruitment of future Chinese students has been affected.⁹



Other concerns included students not being able to obtain official transcripts for applications due to school closures, students not being able to attend visa interviews, and U.S. schools not being able to work with local recruitment agents and agencies. In addition, several respondents noted that outreach and recruitment have been affected not only for students but also for faculty opportunities or other university collaborations. Respondents were realistic that the impact of this disruption could have a long-term effect on their campus.

We were exploring the feasibility of targeting China as a high-priority country for global engagement across multiple sectors. This proposal is now on hold.

Recruitment travel in China [was] limited to fall semester. We are staying in contact with sending schools via email and will do a webinar for one school next month.

We've reached out to all applicants, encouraging them to communicate their needs or struggles with us to enable us to do our best to accommodate them.

As more and more U.S. universities cancel their Asia recruitment travels overall, our Admissions team plans to connect with peer universities to offer online admissions webinars in partnership with key international schools in China and other Asian countries...

⁸ Fall 2019 International Student Enrollment Snapshot Survey, <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Publications/Fall-2019-International-Student-Enrollment-Survey>.

⁹ In the infographic, IELTS and TOEFL refer to English language tests offered to international students. For more information, visit <https://www.ielts.org/en-us> or <https://www.ets.org/toefl>.

Institutions are relying on online communication with prospective students, hosting virtual webinars and yield events. Institutions that are taking outreach and recruitment measures are working with their in-country partners and agents to support continued on-site recruitment. Finally, several institutions were considering alternatives to application criteria as well as changes to application and enrollment timelines.

Measures Institutions Are Taking Related to Outreach/Recruitment in China



Most communications are now e-communications. We will head back to China once the crisis and isolation/quarantines have subsided.

We are focusing on our partner institutions in China to work with them on growing relationships and exploring any long-distance activities while we are unable to accept new students to campus.

[We are] accepting Duolingo on a case-by-case basis for undergraduate and law school applicants. Offering flexibility on document submission deadlines for students impacted. Sending out emails to first-year and transfer applicants and parents, ensuring them that if their school has transitioned to an online instructional model that their application will not be reviewed negatively or rescinded.

We have a crisis planning committee that has developed proactive messaging/correspondence to target our prospective student population and their concerns.

About one in five institutions (20%) indicated that **they do not have current plans in place for alternative recruitment, and many of these institutions indicated that they are waiting for the situation to evolve.** Most are hoping to travel once the restrictions lift, although they are aware that this will affect enrollment for the 2020/21 academic year.

We are in the process of discussing options. It is still too early to determine.

We are still working on a plan for this.

Looking for answers.

U.S. Study Abroad Programs to China: Spring 2020 Semester

Over 11,000 students studied abroad in China in 2017/18 (*Open Doors 2019*)

The 234 institutions represented in the COVID-19 analysis represent over 46% of these students. They also represent the largest proportion of U.S. institutions offering study abroad: 233 out of the 234 respondents had at least one student studying abroad in 2017/18.

17 of the top 20 institutions reporting on U.S. study abroad completed the survey.

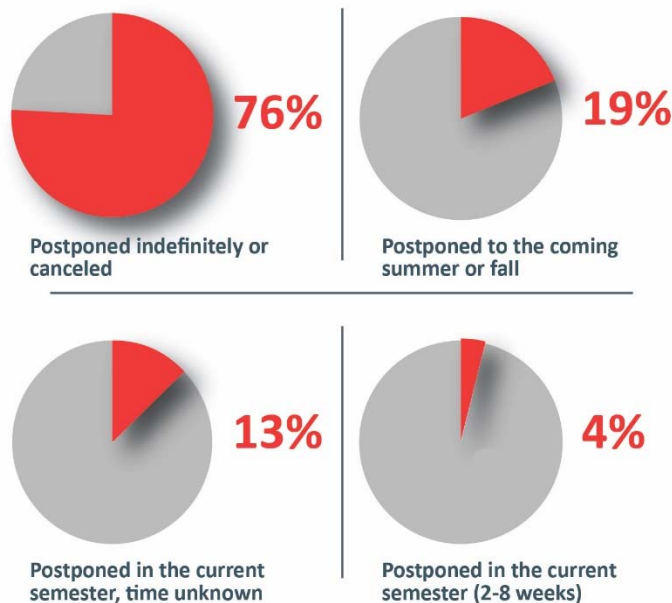
Current Students Studying Abroad in China

50 institutions reported 405 U.S. students in China at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak. At the time of the survey (which closed Feb. 26, 2020), **70% of institutions** were evacuating their students from China.¹⁰ Other institutions indicated that their students had chosen to stay in China; however, we expect that this proportion could have changed since this reporting.

Effects on Students Planning to Study Abroad in China

108 institutions (48%) reported students who were enrolled in a spring 2020 study abroad program to China. These study abroad programs include those sponsored by their own institution and those through other institutions or program providers.

The vast majority of the spring 2020 study abroad programs (94%) have been canceled or postponed.¹¹



Any and all students, faculty, and staff that wish to travel abroad to affected areas will need to be advised and given guidance from the Office of the Provost as well as our safety and travel risk specialist.

We are allowing students to cancel their plans to study abroad in Asia if they are concerned about potential exposure. The trips are not canceled, although some have been postponed due to delays in start dates.

¹⁰ The U.S. Department of State issued a Level 3 warning for travel to and from China on Feb. 22, 2020. It is possible that institutions that completed the survey prior to this date and indicated they were not evacuating their students may have changed their status.

¹¹ The listed options can include results for more than one student on campus.

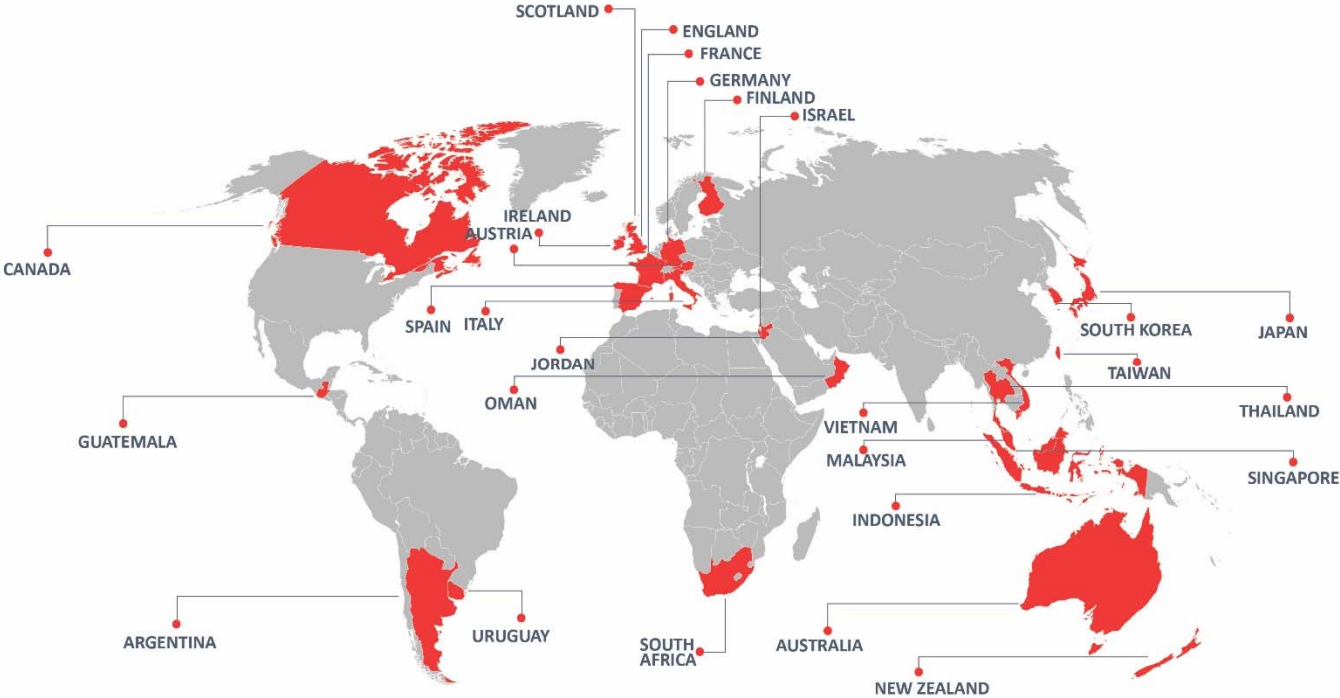
As of the time of the writing of this brief, respondents also indicated potential restrictions to travel to other locations in Asia, including South Korea, Hong Kong, Macao, and Vietnam. While restrictions were not necessarily in place to these other locations (with the exception of South Korea), institutions are still exercising great caution in planning travel to Asia as the situation evolves.

Options for Students Whose Study Abroad to China Was Affected



Institutions have been responsive to finding alternative study abroad destinations for students who had planned to study in China. Responding colleges and universities noted placing students in over 30 locations.

Alternative Study Abroad Locations for Students Who Had Planned to Study in China



20% of institutions reported students who do not have an alternative to a canceled China study abroad program for spring 2020. As a result, most of these students will likely be foregoing their study abroad opportunity.

How U.S. Campuses Are Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis

96% of institutions indicated that they have released university-wide communication regarding the COVID-19 outbreak and basic measures to be taken on campus.

37% of institutions indicated that information about COVID-19 is available on their website. Several colleges and universities have created specific webpages regarding the outbreak and the response on campus.

Travel Impacts to and from Other Countries

Respondents indicated that some travel (both inbound and outbound) had been postponed or canceled in other Asian locations, including Vietnam, Thailand, Macau, Japan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. During the administration of this survey, respondents were becoming aware of additional travel restrictions to other countries, including South Korea and Italy, and canceled study abroad programs in these countries.

One-third of institutions (32%) have contacted students or faculty who are planning to travel to affected areas, encouraging them to cancel or postpone travel. In addition, many institutions report that upcoming travel to any areas with Level 3 travel advisories from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is canceled.

We have formed a task force to share information about the college's preparations and to liaise with the local public health department. We've sent a brief message about these activities to students and parents.

We are monitoring the effects on partner institutions, especially in Japan, and have held off sending our exchange students for the next cycle until they give the approval to do so based on their national and institutional regulations.

Combating Fear and Retaliation against International Students on Campus

The support that U.S. campuses have offered extends beyond Chinese students. Some campuses are offering support to all international students and actively sharing resources, knowing that they may be directly impacted by the crisis due to developments in their home countries. Many campuses are also concerned about backlash against students from countries affected by COVID-19, particularly those that traveled recently.

Our ISSS office has sent out mass communications to our entire F-1, J-1, and H-1B populations to ensure them that we are here for them during this global health crisis, including to connect them to mental health resources or to discuss any instances of discrimination that they may have experienced, on or off campus.

We have established a working group to monitor this carefully and to make plans ... thinking especially about our international students who may not be able to travel home over spring and summer breaks.

Preparing for Future Impacts of COVID-19 Restrictions

Institutions are also facing concerns regarding the travel of their international students on campus over the summer holiday, and the reality that these students may face travel restrictions in the future. Many institutions with large international student populations are aware that the magnitude of this impact may be significant. As such, they are already reaching out to students to better understand and plan for the needs of students.

We are in the midst of a survey to all our current Chinese students to ascertain what the needs are. In less than 24 hours, we've had approximately 500 students respond, many of them saying they are affected in a direct way. Over 300 students have indicated that they intended to travel back to China within the next several months. We are just beginning to discuss how the university will respond to the variety of needs expressed by these students.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 health crisis will affect international student mobility in this academic year and possibly for years to come. U.S. higher education institutions are taking extraordinary measures to inform their campuses of developments as they happen, ensuring that international students on campus are safe, that international students overseas are able to continue their studies successfully, and that their study abroad populations have options for alternative study.

With the likelihood that more countries will impose travel restrictions to countries with COVID-19 cases, international higher education exchange will likely experience long-term effects, including decreasing numbers of students studying abroad, as well as inbound international students and global partnerships with universities.

At the same time, U.S. higher education institutions remain committed to internationalization and are finding ways to adapt to work with students, whether through online classes or finding alternatives to study abroad placements to provide students with global opportunities. While the severity of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis is still unknown, the measures taken by the higher education community in the United States and abroad ensure that international students will be able to travel safely and resume their studies as soon as possible.

About IIE

As an independent, 501(c)(3) not-for-profit founded in 1919, IIE's mission is to help people and organizations leverage the power of international education to thrive in today's interconnected world. IIE's work focuses on advancing scholarship, building economies, and promoting access to opportunity. IIE publications and white papers can be found at www.iie.org/publications.