

The Mobile International Student

Much of the analysis of trends in international student mobility comes from the perspective of individual countries. American academic groups worry about the relative ability of colleges in the United States to attract the best foreign talent. British groups do the same, and so forth. A new analysis from the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education — a think tank based in Britain and affiliated with the Association of Commonwealth Universities and Universities UK — attempts to take a broader perspective.

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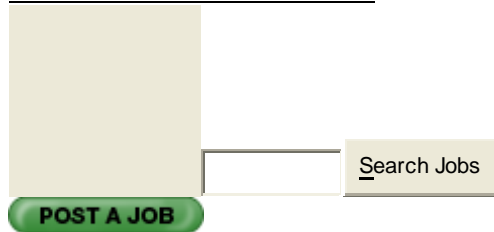
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The study examined trends in various countries’ top sources of foreign students over the last 10 years, grouping the countries into various categories, and created a grid of relative advantages. The dominant position of the United States remains clear — it continues to attract more students from other countries than anyplace else does. But the report identifies weaknesses for American colleges, as well as both strengths and weaknesses

for some of the competitors to the United States, including some whose raw numbers have attracted attention of American educators.

The data also point to the extent to which some countries — most notably the U.S. — have a broad range of countries sending foreign talent, while others have a much narrower range. The report offers the most data on three groups of countries: the “major players” (the U.S., Britain and Australia); the “middle powers” (Germany and France); and “evolving destinations” (Japan, Canada and New Zealand). Three other countries are identified as “emerging contenders”: Malaysia, Singapore and China.

American students appear only in a few places as a top source for students in other countries: Britain, Canada and New Zealand.

Here are some of the key data (which are from various sources in the countries involved and come from 2006, except for figures from France, Canada and New Zealand, which come from 2005).

Top Five Source Countries for Top Players in Educating Foreign Students

	U.S.	Britain	Australia	Germany	France	Japan	Canada	New Zealand
1.	India	China	China	China	Morocco	China	S. Korea	China
	76,503	50,755	65,543	27,390	25,782	74,292	12,505	26,546
2.	China	India	India	Turkey	Algeria	S.Korea	China	U.S.
	62,582	19,205	36,078	22,419	21,552	15,974	6,880	2,480
3.	S. Korea	Greece	Malaysia	Poland	China	Taiwan	Japan	S. Korea
	58,847	17,675	18,074	15,183	15,963	4,211	4,786	2,094
4.	Japan	Ireland	Hong Kong	Bulgaria	Tunisia	Malaysia	U.S.	Japan
	38,712	16,790	16,558	12,794	9,593	2,156	3,782	2,040
5.	Canada	U.S.	Indonesia	Russia	Senegal	Vietnam	France	India
	28,202	14,755	13,025	11,953	9,019	2,119	3,560	1,886

The data point to historic advantages of the United States as the long-time destination of choice as well as advantages based on geography (Germany’s attractiveness to Eastern Europe) and language (France’s attractiveness to Francophone Africa or Canada’s draw from France, which largely ends up in Quebec).

But the report notes strategic changes and vulnerabilities that go beyond those kinds of advantages. The United States, as has been reported by several education groups, is seeing smaller increases in foreign enrollments compared to those enjoyed elsewhere — a circumstance attributed to more competition, fallout from the post-9/11 security rules,

and other factors. Some of the competition is intense enough that it appears to affect the overall enrollment pictures in key countries, the Observatory report says. For example, Australia has conducted intense recruiting drives for students in Malaysia and Taiwan, leading to small but notable increases in enrollments in recent years — at a time that the U.S. has seen its Taiwanese enrollments drop and Britain has seen a major drop from Malaysia.

Both Germany and France, meanwhile, have managed to build Chinese enrollments in recent years, based in part on relatively low tuition rates. Chinese enrollments, which account for a majority of foreign students in Japan, are falling, in part because of improvements in China’s higher education infrastructure.

Malaysia, Singapore and China — which have historically been key players in sending students abroad — are all now seeking to attract more to their own countries, in part through building up university systems. Offering more programs in English is a central part of the strategy, the report says.

A table in the report offers comparisons of the various countries on some desirable qualities sought by international students.

Comparing Competitive Advantages of Countries

	Student visa not required for study of less than 3 months	Low tuition (up to \$5,000 a year)	Moderate tuition (\$5,000 — \$15,000 a year)	Low living costs	Moderate living costs	Programs to prepare foreign students before they start classes
Australia					X	X
Britain						X
Canada	X		X		X	X
China		X		X		
France	X	X			X	
Germany	X	X			X	
Japan		X				
Malaysia		X		X		
New Zealand	X		X		X	X
Singapore		X		X		
U.S.					X	X

The report is available to subscribers to [the Observatory’s research series](#).

— [Scott Jaschik](#)