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Matching International Enthusiasm With Diversity Commitment

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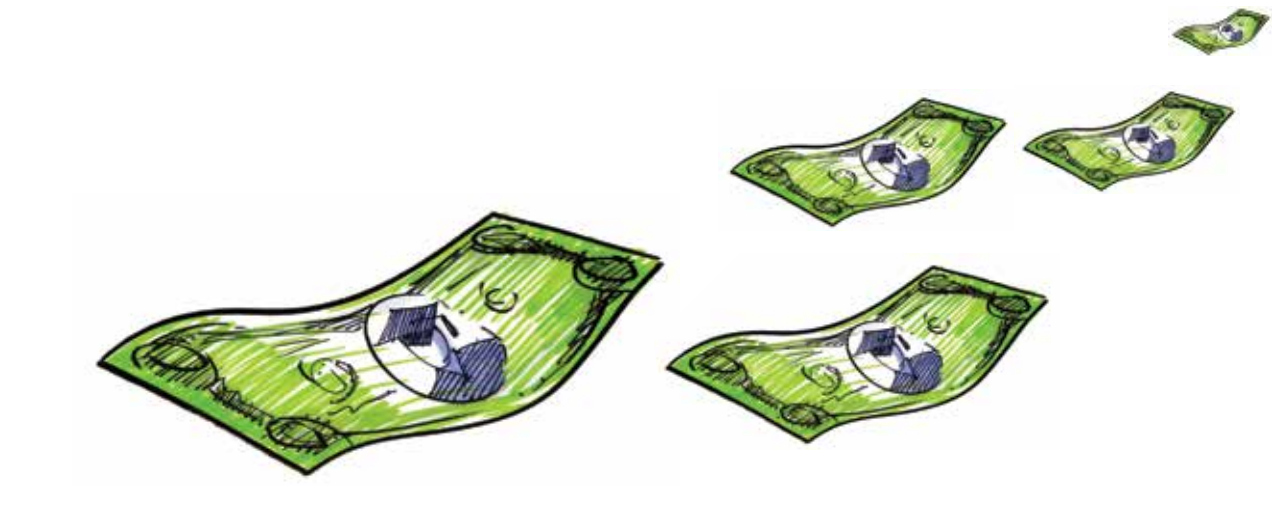
by Michael J. Smith and Akiko Ota

Matching International Enthusiasm With Diversity Commitment



Introduction of the Problem

It will come as no surprise to most admission professionals that enrollment pressures related to the economic downturn of the last five years have placed American postsecondary education in the middle of a spinning plate, slipping and sliding as it tries to accommodate more students with fewer financial resources from federal and state governments, as well as the challenge of dwindling investment (endowment) income. Federal and state funding revenue gaps have increased for most sectors within the constellation of public and private non-profit four-year colleges and universities.*





To close these gaps a number of strategies have been pursued, most involving aggressively courting the private sector (charitable foundations, wealthy citizens, interested corporate benefactors), with the default strategy represented in the form of increasing tuition paid by students and their families. For example, in public research institutions tuition represented 25 percent of total revenue in 1998–1999; 10 years later tuition income accounted for 34 percent of all revenue (College Board, 2012).

Within another constellation, that of student revenue sources, public higher education seeks out–of-state students (who are assessed higher tuition) and for both public and private four-year colleges, international students (assessed higher tuition than in state students and required proof of substantial financial assets). At the same time, recruitment of domestic African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islander (API) students have retreated from the center stage of the admission theater they occupied as late as the mid-1990s. As the national campus discourse about internationalization and globalization reaches a crescendo, the recruitment of those traditionally underrepresented in higher education has faded like music overheard from a car speeding down the road.

*For example, in 2004–2005 federal grants and contracts represented roughly 29 billion dollars of revenue throughout our entire system of non-profit four-year colleges and universities; by 2009–2010 that number fell 6.9 percent to 27 billion dollars (NCES, 2010). State grants and contracts fared no better accounting for 5.9 billion dollars in revenue in 2004–2005 then dropping to 5.4 billion in 2009–2010 or eight percent throughout all non-profit four year colleges and universities (NCES, 2010). While endowment income represented 10.5 billion dollars of revenue for the entire non-profit postsecondary system in 2004–2005 five years later (2009–2010), this amount plummeted to 9.8 billion for a decrease of seven percent (NCES, 2010). To place these figures in context, federal grants and contracts fell from 13.1 percent of the total revenue for our four-year colleges and universities in 2004-2005 to 10.6 percent in 2009–2010 (NCES, 2010). State grants and contracts fell from 2.6 percent of total revenue (2004–2005) to 2.1 percent in 2009–2010 (NCES, 2011). Furthermore, endowment income fell from 4.7 percent to 3.9 percent as a percentage of total four-year college from 2004–2005 to 2009–2010 (NCES, 2010). Finally, in the budget area of state/local appropriations public institutions have experienced significant fall offs based on Carnegie Classification type. For example, public research institutions could boast of 49 percent of their revenue coming from state/local appropriations in 1998–1999, but in 2008–2009 that number shrunk precipitously to 34 percent (College Board, 2012).

While this article acknowledges the obvious revenue benefit of international student recruitment, the writers take to heart the warning issued by Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson (1999) against approaching international students as

In the name of efficiency and cost reduction, many states schools have formed cooperatives to bring down the cost of international recruiting while others are using or contracting third party, private sector recruiting partners (international agents)…

"cash cows" (p. 69) while strongly supporting the idea that both forms of recruitment can be embraced as part of the academy's commitment to the "public good." Before exploring this proposal, we acknowledge the recent success of international recruitment strategies throughout American higher education.

International Student Recruitment as a Strategy

Over the last several years, countless periodical articles have monitored the progress of international student recruitment as a strategy and the lengths to which many colleges go to increase their international student presence (Fischer, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Fischer, 2011, Zhai, 2004). In the name of efficiency and cost reduction, many states schools have formed cooperatives to bring down the cost of international recruiting while others are using or contracting third party, private sector recruiting partners (international agents), much to the chagrin of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and those concerned with the increasing privatization of American higher education (Zhang and Hagedorn, 2011; Fischer, 2010a). Some schools have extended conditional admission and relaxed entrance criteria to make the process easier and more amenable to international student recruitment (Fischer, 2010b). Others note how their upper-level administrators apply a bottom line approach that outlines possible returns on investment for international recruitment programs (Fischer, 2010c). No matter what approach is used or what philosophy is employed, the momentum towards further internationalization cannot be denied nor ignored, for reasons beyond the rapidly increasing numbers of international undergraduates in the US.

In fact, the US has been a primary destination for international students pursuing overseas studies since the post-WWII era. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) data from the academic year 2011–2012 (IIE, 2012), 764,495 international students were enrolled in US higher education institutions. This is a 5.7 percent increase from the previous year and makes up 3.7 percent of the total student population (20, 625,000) enrolled in US higher education. Of those international students, 309,342 (6.1 percent increase from the previous year) are enrolled as undergraduates, 300,430 (1.3 percent increase) as graduates, and 69,566 (17.4 percent increase) as non-degree seeking (IIE, 2012). It is worthy to note that 228,467 students are international who are enrolled in the U.S. higher education for the first time constituting 6.7 percent increase of this population (IIE, 2012), indicating the result of aggressive and strategic recruitment of this target population to the US higher education.

In addition, IIE (2012) data suggest that, as a collective group, international students and their dependents contribute $21,807,000,000 to the US economy annually a critical point since their funding comes mostly from overseas and not from US sources; personal and family resources, foreign government or university, current employer, foreign private sector, or international organizations (Zhai, 2004; NAFSA, 2012). This economic contribution to the US society is not only from tuition ($15,812,000,000), but also from the living expenses, local services and products international students and their dependents consume ($14,394,000,000) and have, in fact, helped create more jobs in the US (Zhai, 2004; NAFSA, 2012). As noted earlier, American higher education has aggressively focused on recruiting international students (both graduate and undergraduate) and attracting visiting professors or postdoctoral scholars (both supported by their home nations). In all cases, host institutions benefit significantly from the amount of money they bring to campuses and the outlining campus communities, however, in addition to their economic contributions, international students bring diverse perspectives to campuses and help bolster some disciplines (such as in the STEM fields) in which US students are declining (Zhai, 2004). As the movement towards internationalization confers financial, cultural and new approaches to academic work and the production of new knowledge, the pursuit of domestic diversity has hit an ideological and legal snag. Where the imprint of both federal and state legislative and judicial bodies was visible on efforts to address decades of structured disadvantages created by years of actual or defacto racial segregation, recent years have seen gains from the Civil Rights era questioned and reinterpreted.

Minority Recruitment Stalling or Falling

In the mid-1960s President Johnson's "Great Society" legislation ushered in the legal use of affirmative action as a way to address past discrimination in the public sector. For college admission this means devoting a good deal of energy and effort in developing policies and approaches that became the foundation for minority recruitment. By the end of the 1970s the affirmative action policies designed were blamed for creating "reverse discrimination" and were, as a result, challenged through the courts.

The *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* 438 US 265, 320 (1978) defined the parameters around the use of affirmative action in college undergraduate, graduate and professional school admission which helped NACAC member institutions pursue any number of diversity recruitment strategies. With the "legal" boundaries for the use of affirmative action in college admission clearly defined, the momentum towards minority recruitment that had begun in the 1980s continued through the early 1990s during a time when nearly every American college or university had some kind of effort to increase the diversity of their campus in terms of students, faculty and staff (Kaufman, 2007; Smith, 1997). Connected to student recruitment was a similar commitment to retention of historically underrepresented domestic minority groups encouraged by innovative theoretical approaches to retention, such as "student involvement" and blending "academic and social engagement" (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993).

Later in the decade affirmative action in college admission was deemed unconstitutional through state amendments and, in the early 2000s, through a coordinated set of legal challenges made by neoconservative and strict constitutionalist lawyers. This new movement successfully challenged and often reversed some of the greatest victories from the Civil Rights era. For example, in 1996 the Texas Fifth Circuit Court of appeals ruled in favor of four white students who claimed "reverse discrimination" that excluded them from being admitted into the University of Texas School of Law in *Hopwood v. Texas* 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996) (Chang, Altbach and Lomotey, 2005). Also in 1996, California passed Proposition 209 by a margin of 54 percent to 46 percent that struck down the use of "preferential treatment" in the University of California and California State University systems (Kaufman, 2007; Chang, Altbach and Lomotey, 2005). As a result, in 2007 the number of Latinos attending the University of California is significantly lower than in 1997 and in 2006 the smallest number of African American students were enrolled as freshman at UCLA since 1973 (Kaufmann, 2007). To this day the University of California suffers from the destruction of what in the 1990s were an incredible outreach apparatus in the form of targeted and well funded minority recruitment and retention programs, and even worse was the media fallout from Prop 209 that helped generate the public perception that the UC an unfriendly place for African American and Latino young people to attend (Birgeneau, 2005p; Laird, 2005).

The neo-conservative assault against affirmative action and minority recruitment did not end with these cases. In *Johnson v. Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia* 263 F. 3D 1234 (11TH CIR. 2001) it was determined that race-conscious college admission practices were illegal in Georgia and in 2002 two cases involving the University of Michigan provided some hope but even greater despair for underrepresented student admission (Chang, Altbach and Lomotey, 2005; Kaufmann, 2007). In *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2002) and *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) the University of Michigan was ruled to have used race conscious admission in violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act by "discriminating" against white students in undergraduate admission by using a quota-like formula (*Grutter*) while the practice of considering race in law school admission (*Gratz*) (Chang, Altbach and Lomotey, 2005; Kaufmann, 2007). As race conscious admission has become a thing of the past, recruiting traditionally under-represented students has become problematic. While the push towards "internationalization"

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continues with gusto, recruitment of underrepresented minorities seems to be an initiative currently in considerable retreat even though our country has never had a greater need for aggressive inclusion of this population. At this juncture our attitudes about international recruitment and minority recruitment have reached an important point of redirection and recommitment.

International Enthusiasm Matched by Domestic Diversity Commitment

As the American academy moves further into the mid-2010s, it is important to continue to expand our push towards educating global citizens who will inherit the leadership of the "free" world. At the same time it is just as critical that populations historically underrepresented in higher education are not left behind; American higher education should continue to be the vehicle for social mobility and a "ladder of ascent" for first-generation students of all races with a particular focus on African American, Asian Pacific Islander, Latino, and Native American students (Brint and Karabel, 1989). The question we ask is "how can the current enthusiasm for international recruitment be duplicated with another push for domestic diversity even in a climate still dominated by neo-conservative discourse?" More pointedly, in an era where resources are increasingly scarce and higher education moves toward privatization and neo-liberal outlooks and modes of operation, how can we balance the obvious financial benefit of international student recruiting with the domestic public benefits of domestic diversity recruiting?

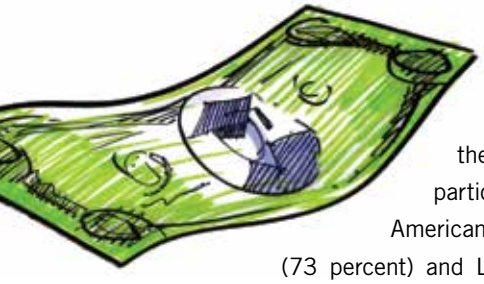
For us it is a question of reclaiming the mission of higher education as a public good in ways that honor the integrity and complexity of international and minority student recruitment. In other words, we are advocating for international and domestic diversity recruitment for the common good and, ultimately, for greater unification amongst our undergraduate populations. As such we suggest the following for contemporary admission and enrollment management practice:

1. Maintain a strong commitment to local under-represented communities by cultivating an open-door policy during the admission cycle including campus visits, invitations to lectures arts/cultural/athletic events.
2. Continue support not only international recruitment, but minority recruitment when crafting mission statements and strategic plans.
3. Reach out to student groups/clubs/organizations that lend support to underrepresented minority undergraduates or international undergraduates and include them in recruitment and retention activities.
4. Employ intercultural approaches for minority student or international student yield programs, such as bringing both groups to on campus lectures, cultural or social events, or any activities that showcase how every student is welcomed as a full and equal participant to university/college events.

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5. Strengthen international and underrepresented minority recruitment efforts by considering students on a trajectory towards academic success that fall outside of your institutional profile (think carefully about future alumni potential and influence in their community/country).

As American higher education moves towards the 2020s, the future of our country will be increasingly as tied to the fate of the global economy as it is to the full higher education participation of our increasingly diverse citizenry. International students contribute greatly to our economy and the marketplace of ideas while domestic minority populations are slowly moving into leadership positions in



education, government and commerce. President Barack Obama benefitted greatly from the support and increased political participation and votes of African Americans (93 percent), Asian Americans (73 percent) and Latinos (71 percent) during the 2012 election. It can be stated that combined weight of votes could be a metaphor for their rapidly growing influence in our country for the next 10 years (*The New York Times*, 2012). Indeed, Aud and Fox (2010) tell us that in 2000 the black, Latino (Hispanic) and Asian population in the US accounted for 30 percent of our population; by 2015 the same groups will represent close to 40 percent. Even as American postsecondary education tries to gain traction standing in the middle of a slippery, spinning plate it will be good for the college admission profession to maintain its collective enthusiasm for international recruitment, while not forgetting its role in helping their college or university fulfill the social commitment to what Brint and Karabel (1989) the "ladder of ascent" especially for first-generation, domestic, underrepresented minorities.



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