

Flying colors from page 11

orientation and address common challenges like finding housing.

Wymer said SDSU has “definitely increased services” to its international students. Two years ago it started an airport pickup service three weeks before classes started for foreign arrivals in Sioux Falls, about 40 miles away. “We have a ‘no student left behind’ policy,” joked Wymer. The university has also created a student mentor program “to help new students adjust to life both at SDSU and in the U.S.,” and significantly upgraded its online resources, all in an effort to ensure that the student experience is “second to none compared to other (universities) around the U.S.,” he said. “This will have a direct impact on attracting future students. One of the best ways to attract new students is to treat our current students well. News travels fast.”

## International benefit\$

Universities seek out foreign students for many reasons. Many of them relate to the mission of higher education in exposing students to a variety of experiences—cultural as well as academic. In a global economy, the thinking goes, a university has to bring the globe to campus.

SDSU, for example, has a largely homogenous, white student body. “Ninety percent [of SDSU students] have not stepped out of South Dakota” or neighboring states, Wymer said. “Our goal is to break down cultural barriers ... by making the halls of SDSU more culturally diverse.”

At the University of Minnesota, the influx of international undergrads has given the campus an “awakening,” Kappler said. “I think it’s wonderful to have students from around the world come here. People learn about the world from interactions with these students.”

There are other perks for universities, like the fact that these students are paying customers—well-paying customers. Most state universities and colleges charge nonresident students higher tuition on the theory that state residents support the institution with their tax dollars. International students typically pay nonresident rates, and sometimes even a little extra to cover the cost of the additional services that are provided to these students. On its website, the University of Minnesota lists current undergraduate resident tuition at \$13,600 compared with out-of-state tuition of \$19,800 and international tuition of \$21,400 per year.

At Michigan Tech, international undergraduate and graduate students pay the nonresident rate—\$14,175 per semester, which is more than double the resident rate—plus an additional \$150 fee per semester, according to Seel. Since many grants and other forms of financial aid are restricted to U.S. students, he added that “international students pay a much higher

## An international quilt of students

There is both consistency and variety in the home countries of international students.

China, far and away, is the biggest exporter of students to both U.S. and Ninth District colleges and universities, followed by South Korea and India. Canadian students have a larger presence in district institutions than in the nation as a whole, mostly because of proximity.

The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities has the largest population of foreign students in the district, at 6,400. China sends the most students to the university—more than 2,600—followed by India and South Korea with between 700 and 800 each. No other country is represented by more than 170 students.

But students from all corners of the globe make up a huge cultural quilt on district campuses. There are students from 145 different countries at the University of Minnesota. At South Dakota State University (SDSU), 600 foreign students come from 71 countries.

There are unexpected, even quirky concentrations of international students in certain states. For example, Nepal has an outsized share of foreign students at Ninth District universities. The country—poor, isolated, with a fraction of the population of many other countries—ranks in the top five in three of five district states, ranking as high as fourth in South Dakota, with 7.5 percent of students.

Among the reasons for this high share is the general affordability of Midwestern universities like SDSU, where Nepalese students make up slightly more than 10 percent of the international class. The country’s colder climate also makes for an easier winter adjustment once on campus. And that’s important when students are walking brochures for the university back home.

Song Hoffman, from the school’s international office, said that getting a foothold in most countries is “developed from scratch” through positive experiences of students, which then turns into invaluable word-of-mouth marketing. That’s been happening for years with Nepalese students. “We actually have a brand in Nepal,” Hoffman said.

—Ronald A. Wirtz

### Top five home countries for international students

(Percent of state’s international student population)

<b>Minnesota</b>	China 29.2	South Korea 9.8	India 9.2	Nepal 5.1	Saudi Arabia 4.2
<b>Montana</b>	Saudi Arabia 18.4	Canada 11.1	China 9.2	Japan 9.1	India 7.3
<b>North Dakota</b>	China 20.4	Canada 19.2	India 13.6	South Korea 4.6	Nepal 4.1
<b>South Dakota</b>	China 15.3	South Korea 13	India 12.9	Nepal 7.5	Saudi Arabia 5.8
<b>Wisconsin</b>	China 36.8	South Korea 10.9	India 7.5	Saudi Arabia 5.3	Malaysia 2.9

Source: Institute of International Education

percent of the sticker price than U.S. students.”

There are exceptions to this rule, however, because many foreign graduate students also receive assistantships, where students either teach or conduct research in exchange for free or greatly reduced tuition and a small stipend. But lower tuition revenue from these foreign students is offset by the considerable value they offer universities in terms of net human resource costs for teaching and research.

High retention rates are another benefit of increasing foreign enrollment; fewer international students drop out or transfer to another institution. Before coming to SDSU, Wymer also worked in international programs at Southwest Minnesota State University and Minnesota State University-Moorhead. He said retention rates for international students are typically about 90 percent, compared with 70 percent to 75 percent for domestic students at most universities.

“This is pretty typical because many times, international students are choosing universities based on price, major and whether they have friends or relatives at an institution for support. As a result, there isn’t much movement of international students. ... They sort of feel like, ‘I started here and I’ll finish here.’” They also tend to have high completion rates and earn those degrees faster than the rest of the student population because “there is often pressure back home to get through” due to the high relative cost of U.S. schooling.

The case for courting foreign students becomes even more attractive in light of smaller high school graduating classes. In Minnesota and Wisconsin, the total number of high school graduates fell by about 5 percent (or about 3,500 students) in both states from 2010 to 2013. That trend is tumbling into higher ed enrollments, which declined at public universities in the fall of 2012 in both Minnesota and Wisconsin, while foreign enrollment grew by close to 10 percent in both states that same year.

## Future U

In some respects, the country has a lot of room for growth in international enrollments. Despite a stellar global reputation for U.S. higher education, foreign students make up less than 4 percent of the student body; that figure is 17 percent in the United Kingdom and 24 percent in Australia.

The good news for Ninth District universities and colleges is that the international spigot of students is likely to stay open for the foreseeable future.

According to World University News, for example, an estimated 900,000 foreign students are expected to enter U.S. institutions this year, roughly 80,000 more than in 2012. A report by the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers projects that the number of foreign students leaving their home countries to study will more than double by 2025 “to well over 7 million students annually, and perhaps substantially more.” The report expects that the U.S. share of these students will fall, but adds, “The U.S. remains a highly attractive destination and the raw numbers of incoming students will likely continue to increase.”

That’s why SDSU’s Wymer is optimistically targeting growth of 100 new foreign students per year on campus, with a goal of attracting 1,000 such students by 2018. That might sound aggressive, but not to Wymer.

“There’s no secret here. We’re creating an environment where students feel cared about. The rest will take care of itself,” he said. Given a growing global population of students, “we’ll grow by default. I don’t think there’s a doubt.” 