



2016 Top Markets Report **Education** Country Case Study

China

China remains the largest single source of international students studying in the United States. In 2014/15, China sent 304,040 students to the United States, an increase of 10.8 percent from 2013/14. Chinese students make up a commanding 31 percent of all international students in the United States.¹

Overall
Rank

1

Based on 2013 data from UNESCO, China sent over 710,000 students to study abroad.¹ Some observers believe that this figure is low. It is likely, however, that at least 30-40 percent of all Chinese students studying abroad are studying in the United States. The economic impact of these students on the U.S. economy is significant, and the Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that in 2014 (the most recent data available) U.S. exports of education services (tuition, fees, and living expenses) to China reached \$9.8 billion.²

Level and Fields of Study for Chinese Students

Chinese students are fairly evenly split with 39.6 percent of Chinese students in the United States studying at the graduate level and 41 percent enrolled as undergraduates. The remaining Chinese students are enrolled either in “optional practical training” or “other.”³

As with many other countries, the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) are the largest fields of study for Chinese students. STEM fields attracted 42.4 percent of Chinese students during the 2014/15 academic year. Meanwhile, business and management attracted 26.5 percent, and the social sciences, attracted 7.8 percent.⁴

Chinese students are broadly distributed throughout the regions of the United States, including the East Coast, West Coast, South and Middle West. The 10 states welcoming the most international students account for about 62 percent all international students in the United States. These same 10 states also account for about 63 percent of all Chinese students in the United States. In nine of the top 10 states, Chinese students are the largest national student group and account for 30 percent to 40 percent of all international students. The 10 states are California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Florida, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana.⁵

Future Growth/Opportunities

A growing middle-class allows more Chinese families to send their children abroad for their tertiary education. On the other hand, future growth in the number of Chinese students studying in the United States is tempered by: the slowdown of China’s economy, a devalued currency⁶, and the shrinking number of college-age Chinese students⁷.

Factors Which Might Dampen Future Growth

It is unlikely that the exponential growth in Chinese students studying in the United States of the last decade will continue indefinitely. U.S. institutions

**Figure 1: Chinese Students in the United States
2005-2020***



Source: Historical Data - Institute of International Education. (2015), Open Doors
Forecast: International Trade Administration estimates.

are increasingly focused on diversifying their campuses and are hesitant to depend on foreign students from any individual country. In addition, the Chinese Government has significantly increased its efforts to build universities in China, which could emerge as new competitors to U.S. institutions. Chinese institutions are also under pressure from the government to offer academic programs that facilitate an easier segue way to employment. Finally, other English-speaking countries also offer education in English and at a lower cost in tuition and fees than many U.S. institutions.

Both the Commerce Department’s U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service and the State Department’s EducationUSA offer information and guidance on recruitment of Chinese students for U.S. institutions. ITA has not organized a recent education trade mission to China, as several private sector organizations offer help in recruiting students in

China. Furthermore, U.S. institutions are offering Chinese-speaking advisors and staff members to attract more Chinese students. The Internet and social media are also critical components to successful recruitment efforts. In China, and many other parts of Asia, it is important to supplement online recruitment efforts with face-to-face recruitment efforts, such as student fairs, because Chinese parents (many of whom do not possess strong English-language capability) play a large role in determining whether and where their son or daughter will attend university.

It is also important to note that Chinese families from smaller cities in China’s interior provinces have the financial resources and interest to participate in studying abroad. Second and third-tier Chinese cities are an excellent market for U.S. schools and colleges interested in recruiting Chinese students.

¹ United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Education: Outbound Internationally Mobile Students by Host Region*. Washington, D.C.: Education, 2013. Accessed February 25, 2016. But compare IIE, Project Atlas, China, “1914, Number of students from China studying abroad: approximately 459,800”

<http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=172>

² Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. International Services for 2015, Table 2.2 U.S. trade in Services, by Type of Service and by Country or Affiliation at <http://www.bea.gov/international/ai1.htm#INTERNATSERV>. Institute of International Education. Open Doors Fact Sheet: China. Washington, D.C.: Open Doors, 2015. Accessed February 25, 2016. <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/Fact-Sheets-by-Country/2015>

³ Institute of International Education. *Open Doors Academic Level and Place of Origin* at <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/By-Academic-Level-and-Place-of-Origin#.VzDqzUrKUK> Fact Sheet: China. Washington, D.C.: Open Doors, 2015. Accessed February 25, 2016. <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/Fact-Sheets-by-Country/2015>

⁴ Institute of International Education. *Open Doors Data International Students: Fields of Study by Place of Origin*. Washington, D.C.: Open Doors, 2015. Accessed February 25, 2016. <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Fields-of-Study-Place-of-Origin/2014-15>

⁵ Institute of International Education, Open Doors, Fact Sheets by U.S. State 2015

⁶ Schultz, Abby. “Surge of Chinese Students Studying Abroad Could Ebb.” *Barron’s*, February 12, 2016. Accessed February 25, 2016.

<http://www.barrons.com/articles/surge-of-chinese-students-studying-abroad-could-ebb-1455254077>

⁷ The Economist. “Georgia on their minds.” *The Economist*, February 21, 2015. Accessed February 25, 2016.

<http://www.economist.com/news/china/21644222-yearning-american-higher-education-has-driven-surge-overseas-study-georgia-their>