Educational Exchange Between the United States and China

An IIE Briefing Paper
July 2008

I. Executive Summary

Few countries have seen such rapid economic and educational change in so short a time period as China. Since 1978, when Deng Xiaoping began to send students and scholars to study abroad in large numbers as part of his broad modernization efforts, some 800,000 Chinese students and scholars have studied outside their home country. These numbers make China the overall largest supplier of international students to countries around the world over the past decade. The liberalization of the education sector, which accompanied China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001, has also permitted more students from outside China to enter the Chinese educational system. The number of Americans studying abroad in China increased by over 500% in the past ten years, making China one of the top 10 study abroad destination countries for U.S. students, and one of the top 10 host countries for all internationally mobile students.

This IIE Briefing Paper examines the current state of U.S.-China educational exchange and presents the variety of study abroad program offerings and existing funding opportunities for American students wishing to study or conduct research in China.
2. Increasing Openness in China’s Education Sector

Study abroad to China from the U.S. has grown from a virtual standstill thirty years ago to a veritable industry that today involves nearly ten thousand American participants per year. Exchange activities between China and the United States resumed in 1979 after grinding to a halt at the height of the Cold War. As China began its period of economic reform and opening up, American students were welcomed to study in China. Chinese students also quickly became a more common sight on U.S. college campuses. In 1985, President Reagan and Chinese President Li Xiannian signed an agreement “… to provide opportunities for cooperation and exchange in educational fields based on equality, reciprocity, and mutual benefit.”2 The liberalization of the education sector, which accompanied China’s entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001, has permitted more students from outside China to enter the Chinese educational system. New international academic exchange programs and joint research initiatives are growing rapidly in number and scope.3

Top Ten Countries Sending Students to China, 2006

International students from countries around the world have increasingly sought out China as a study destination in recent years. China is now ranked fifth as a destination country for international students behind the U.S., the United Kingdom, France and Germany, placing it far above any other developing country.4 Six percent of all internationally mobile students worldwide choose to study in China, and a total of 162,695 international students studied at Chinese universities in 2006. South Korea sent the greatest proportion of these students, sending 31 percent of the total, and Japan was a distant second at 11 percent. The
U.S. is ranked as the third largest sending country and the largest non-Asian sending country, sending 7 percent of all international students studying in China. Other key sending countries include Vietnam, Indonesia, India, Thailand, Russia, France, and Pakistan.5

3. Growth in U.S. Study Abroad to China

In recent years China has become increasingly popular as a destination country for American study abroad students. While the volume of students going to China is low compared to Chinese flows into the U.S., the rate at which it has increased is staggering: 1,396 Americans studied in China in 1995/96 and 8,830 did in 2005/06, a 533% increase in ten years, according to IIE’s *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*.6 China is now the seventh most popular destination for American students, attracting 4.0% of all study abroad students, compared to 1.6% in 1995/96. China’s entry into the WTO in 2001 and the parallel liberalization of its education sector, along with increasing awareness among U.S. students of China’s increasing political and economic clout, surely contributed to this astonishing growth. The dramatic drop in numbers in 2003 is the result of the impact of the SARS epidemic, when many American study abroad programs to China were temporarily suspended. Afterwards, study abroad programs quickly resumed in China, and since then their growth has rebounded with great speed.

**Number of American Students Studying in China, 1995/96-2005/06**

States Sending the Most Study Abroad Students to China, 2005/06

4. China as a Sending Country

Since 1985/86, China has been among the top places of origin sending students to the United States.

![Trends in Leading Places of Origin, 1985/86 to 2005/06]


As of 2006/07, the most recent year for which *Open Doors* data are available, 67,723 Chinese students were studying on U.S. campuses, according to *Open Doors 2007: Report on International Educational Exchange*. This represents a record-high, following a slight post-9/11 decline. Chinese students make up 11.6% of the total international student population in the U.S., and increased 8.2 percent from the previous year.
Chinese Students in the United States by Academic Level, 1989/90-2006/07


Although a complete *Open Doors* report and analysis for the 2007/08 academic year are not yet available, IIE conducted a joint snapshot survey in Fall 2007 along with seven other higher education associations, with 700 U.S. campuses responding. This survey reported further increases in enrollments from China. More institutions reported increases than declines in the number of students from China, with 53% reporting increases, 10% reporting declines, and the rest reporting level enrollments.
The number of Chinese scholars teaching and doing research at U.S. colleges and universities has followed a similar general upward trend in recent years. China is by far the largest sending country for foreign scholars (faculty members and visiting lecturers and researchers). With 20,149 Chinese scholars in the U.S. in 2006/07, China sends more than twice as many scholars to the U.S. as Korea, the second largest sending country.  

Source:
In the figure above, one can see that the growth in educational exchange between the United States and China has been remarkable in several respects. There have been increases in absolute numbers in both directions of exchange, and at the same time a dramatic change in the ratio of U.S.-bound to China-bound students. In 1995/96, there were 31 Chinese students in the U.S. for every U.S. student in China; by 2005/06, there were seven. The significant change in this ratio is all the more notable since it took place even in the context of increased numbers of Chinese students studying in the U.S., indicating an even greater increase in China-bound American students.

5. Developments in Study Abroad Program Offerings

Study abroad programs in China for American students vary greatly in length, location and field of study. They are offered by American universities and third-party providers, often with a Chinese institution serving as a host campus and handling administrative issues, but not often with an equal role in planning the curriculum. These programs take place most often in Beijing and Shanghai, but also exist in other cities throughout China. Many of these programs, although
they are managed by only one U.S. university, may accept students from any U.S.
university or even universities overseas.

IIE’s directories of study abroad programs, *IIEPassport: Short-Term Study
Abroad* and *IIEPassport: Academic Year Abroad*, have a combined total listing of
over 8,000 programs open to all U.S. students in the 2008/09 edition, of which
more than 220 are in China. These directories have been published annually since
1950 and 1971, respectively. Programs listed in the *IIEPassport* directories offer a
broad look at study abroad programs in China, including both short-term
programs conducted mostly in the summer months and long-term semester- or
academic year-length programs. The overwhelming majority of these programs
are open to all students, with no preference that students be enrolled in the
sponsoring institution.

**Growth in Number of Study Abroad Programs to China, 2001/02 – 2008/09**

![Growth in Number of Study Abroad Programs to China, 2001/02 – 2008/09](image)

*Source: IIEPassport: Academic Year Abroad and IIEPassport: Short-Term Study Abroad.*

Despite the many programs listed in *IIEPassport* and open to all students,
most students who study abroad do so through programs affiliated with their
home institutions. *Open Doors* reports that 72.3 percent of U.S. study abroad
students went abroad through programs sponsored solely by their own
institutions. This figure is likely to be lower in the case of China, since fewer
schools have established their own programs there than in European countries.
Students wishing to go to China, still considered by some a “non-traditional”
study abroad destination, are more likely to have to look beyond what their own
institutions offer for appropriate program options than are students going to
Western Europe. Therefore, the programs in *IIEPassport* provide a reasonably
clear picture of the range of programs available in China, especially from the
perspective of students whose institutions have not yet developed extensive
programs in China. The analysis that follows is based on data from the
The program listings also appear online at www.iiepassport.org.

*IIEPassport* contains more than 130 program listings for short-term programs and more than 90 program listings for long-term programs in China. Short-term study abroad programs, defined for the purposes of this paper as any program lasting less than a semester, are organized by American universities and colleges and usually involve collaboration with a Chinese host institution, to a greater or lesser extent. They are often designed at the American institution and carried out in China by American faculty, sometimes with the assistance of local Chinese faculty. Long-term study abroad programs are defined as either semester- or academic year-length study programs. Long-term programs are also often collaborative projects between Chinese and U.S. institutions and faculty.

### Program Location of Short Term and Academic Year Programs in China

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<tr>
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<th>Multi-City</th>
<th>Beijing</th>
<th>Shanghai</th>
<th>Nanjing</th>
<th>Hangzhou</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>Study Abroad</td>
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<td>Study Abroad</td>
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Data Source: O’Sullivan, *IIEPassport*.

Trends in location of programs vary considerably between short-term and long-term programs. More than half of long-term programs in *IIEPassport* are offered in Beijing or Shanghai, and a few are located in second-tier cities and inland cities such as Chengdu, Chongqing, Xi’an and Guilin. Relatively few programs are offered in multiple cities or in more than one city through the course of the academic year. In contrast, short-term study programs are offered in more diverse locales. Less than half of these programs take place in Beijing and Shanghai, more than a third of them are offered in multiple cities, and programs are available in less commonly visited areas such as Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang Province.

Study abroad programs in China cover diverse fields of study. Some programs include courses in a full range of humanities disciplines, and some are in specialized fields, most commonly Chinese language and Chinese studies and business. Very few programs focus on science and technology, and those that do usually include a language component and emphasize the social and cultural context of science rather than scientific knowledge or scientific research itself.
Long-term programs are overwhelmingly Chinese language programs or humanities programs with a Chinese studies component. Beyond these, programs with a primary emphasis on business and management or political science, often also including a language component, make up most of the rest of the programs. There are also long-term programs in other specialized fields such as musical composition and physical education.

The most popular short-term programs are in Chinese language and culture, followed by business-related subjects and then more specialized programs in fields such as visual arts, martial arts, traditional Chinese medicine, urban planning and design, archaeology and botany. Internship and volunteer opportunities are also available. Short-term business programs are much more common than long-term business programs. There are very few short-term programs in science, engineering, mathematics and technology (STEM) fields.

Some prior knowledge of Mandarin is required for many of these programs. Students without knowledge of Chinese can enroll in language intensive programs and then enter more advanced studies. Some American universities require a demonstrated fluency (academic coursework at the home institution) or waiver exams as a condition for program participation. Many American universities offer the option of direct enrollment in Chinese universities, especially elite universities such as Peking University, and these institutions often have their own (often more rigorous) language requirements for participation.
7. Funding and Scholarships for Studies in China

**Fulbright U.S. Student and Scholar Programs**

The Fulbright Program, established in 1946, supports educational exchanges that strengthen understanding and communication between the United States and over 150 countries. It is a partnership program in which the U.S. and foreign governments jointly set priorities. The Fulbright Program is sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. Partner governments, corporations, foundations and academic institutions provide additional funding. In 2007, the Fulbright U.S. Student Program granted 78 scholarships for studies in China. A strong level of Mandarin competency is required for these programs. In 2007, the Fulbright Scholar Program sent 27 American scholars to China as part of its traditional program, and an additional 14 scholars as part of the Fulbright Specialists Program, a program with shorter grant lengths designed to offer faculty greater flexibility to meet existing professional and academic commitments.

**Fulbright Awards to U.S. Students in China**

The Fulbright Critical Language Enhancement Award provides up to six months of intensive critical-need language training before the regular Fulbright grant period begins. The program is open to Americans applying for the Fulbright student program in selected countries where critical-need languages are spoken. In 2007, the program awarded approximately 145 awards and expanded to include, with the same level planned for 2008.
Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program

This program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, provides scholarships to American undergraduates of limited financial means to pursue overseas study in semester or one-year programs for college credit. The program encourages students to choose non-traditional study abroad destinations, especially those outside of Western Europe and Australia. The Gilman scholarship aims to support students who have been traditionally under-represented in study abroad, including but not limited to, students with high financial need, community college students, students in under-represented fields such as the sciences and engineering, students with diverse ethnic backgrounds, and students with disabilities. Since 2004, the program has greatly expanded the number of grants it awards for study in China, from 10 to 104, and applications for study in China have increased from 85 to 225. As of 2007 31% of Gilman scholarship recipients studied in Asia, versus 8% of the general study abroad population. Students who have already received a regular Gilman scholarship (described above) can apply to receive the Gilman Scholarship Critical Need Language Supplement award, given to selected students to support additional language study in countries where these languages are spoken.

Gilman International Scholarship Program Trends, 03/04 – 07/08

National Security Education Program (NSEP):

- David L. Boren Scholarships

The Boren Scholarships offer funds to undergraduates to study geographic areas, languages, and fields of study deemed critical to U.S. national security and currently underrepresented in study abroad. Study of a foreign language appropriate to the identified country must be an integral part of each research proposal. The
NSEP service requirement stipulates that award recipients work in the federal government in positions with national security responsibilities after completing their studies abroad. The Boren Scholarship program has funded study in China for about 30 students each year since the beginning of the program in 2005, representing slightly less than a quarter of all scholarships awarded. In 2008, 36 Boren scholarships were awarded for studies in China.

- **David L. Boren Fellowships**

  Boren Fellowships are intended to support U.S. graduate students who will pursue the study of languages and cultures deemed critical to U.S. national security, and who are highly motivated by the opportunity to work in the federal government. Boren Fellowships provide support for overseas study, domestic study, or a combination of both. Boren Fellowships do not require study abroad, although it is strongly encouraged. Study of a foreign language appropriate to the identified country or region must be an integral part of each application. In 2005, the first year of the Fellowship Program, 8 Boren fellows conducted studies in China, and this figure rose to 21 fellows by 2007. For 2008, 14 recipients of Boren fellowships studied in China.

**Trends in Boren Scholarships to China, 2005-2008**

- **The Language Flagship**

  The Language Flagship, initiated in 2002 as the National Flagship Language Program, addresses the urgent need to have professionals with advanced competency in critical languages. Flagship programs are available in Arabic, Chinese, Hindi/Urdu, Korean, Persian/Farsi, and Eurasian Languages (Russian, Central Asian). Mandarin Chinese programs are funded in partnership with Brigham Young University, Ohio State University and Ohio Public Schools, the University of Mississippi, the University of Oregon and Portland Public Schools, and Arizona State University. Several of the Central Asian languages covered under the Language Flagship (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek) are
spoken among minority groups in China. NSEP has also awarded funds to programs in other minority languages of China, including Uyghur,\textsuperscript{11} spoken by more than 7 million people living in the PRC.

\textit{The Freeman Awards for Study in Asia (Freeman-ASIA):}

The Freeman Foundation funds and IIE administers the Freeman-ASIA program, which offers funding to U.S. undergraduates with demonstrated financial need and without previous experience in the destination country. The awards cover tuition, travel and living expenses, housing and health insurance in countries of East and Southeast Asia. There are 400-500 awards distributed annually for summer, semester, or academic year programs. In the history of the program (2000-2007), 32\% of recipients have studied in China, making it the second most popular destination after Japan.\textsuperscript{12} In recent years, applications and grants for study in China have grown. Japan is still the number one grantee destination, but China receives the most applications. Summer programs are especially popular in China, making up 48\% of all grants, versus 13\% of all grants for Japan.

\textit{Other Funding Sources}

Many universities will transfer existing financial aid to study abroad programs, and some offer additional study abroad scholarships to students on a need or merit basis. Students can search for these and other funding opportunities at \url{www.studyabroadfunding.com}.

Study abroad providers also provide limited funding opportunities to students enrolled in their programs. AIFS, CIEE and IES are three study abroad providers offering such funding. AIFS awards numerous scholarships to students on its programs, including 50 summer study awards of $500 and a $500 bonus to students who apply a Gilman Scholarship to an AIFS program. CIEE’s Peter Wollitzer Scholarships for Study in Asia funds study in Asia on CIEE programs for students of CIEE Academic Consortium Board member institutions. IES awards need- and merit-based scholarships for its programs in Beijing and Shanghai. Need-based scholarships of up to $1,500 are available to participants who attend a private college or university that is a member or an associate member of the IES consortium. Merit-based scholarships of up to $3,000 per semester are awarded for achievements in a variety of disciplines.
8. Conclusion

Americans students choosing to spend time abroad in China made up only 4.0% of the 223,534 students who went abroad in 2005/06, the most recent year for which *Open Doors* data is available. The majority of students went to “traditional” destinations in Western Europe, but the weakening value of the dollar in those regions and growing career-related study interests seem to be steering more students toward China and other “non-traditional” destinations in the developing world. Among large emerging economies, sometimes referred to as the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), China has surged ahead as a destination country for American students. While study abroad to India and Brazil has grown substantially over the past decade, China now hosts four times the number of Americans as these other large, emerging countries. All indications suggest that China will continue to grow as a destination for American students, both as a percent of total study abroad and in absolute numbers.
9. IIE-Administered Study Abroad Scholarships and Resources

OPEN DOORS REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE
The Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange, supported by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, provides a long-standing, comprehensive statistical analysis of academic mobility between the United States and the nations of the world.
Website: www.opendoors.iienetwork.org.

IIE STUDY ABROAD WHITE PAPER SERIES: MEETING AMERICA’S GLOBAL EDUCATION CHALLENGE
IIE launched a new policy research initiative to address the issue of capacity abroad, in order to help pave the way for substantial study abroad growth.

Study Abroad White Paper Number 1 (May 2007): Current Trends in U.S. Study Abroad & the Impact of Strategic Diversity Initiatives
Study Abroad White Paper Number 2 (May 2008): Exploring Host Country Capacity for Increasing U.S. Study Abroad
Study Abroad White Paper Number 3 (Summer 2008, forthcoming): Expanding Education Abroad at Community Colleges
Website: www.iie.org/StudyAbroadCapacity

GLOBAL EDUCATION RESEARCH REPORTS
A new series published by the Institute of International Education (IIE) and the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation

Contact: slaughlin@iie.org

IIEPASSPORT.ORG
This free online search engine lists over 8,000 study abroad programs worldwide and provides advisers with hands-on tools to counsel students and promote study abroad.
Website: www.iiepassport.org

STUDY ABROAD FUNDING
This valuable funding resource helps U.S. students find funding for their study abroad.
Website: www.studyabroadfunding.org
FULBRIGHT STUDENT AND SCHOLAR PROGRAM  
*U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs*  
**Deadline:** October  
**Websites:** [http://us.fulbrightonline.org](http://us.fulbrightonline.org); [www.cies.org](http://www.cies.org)

BENJAMIN A. GILMAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM  
*U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs*  
**Deadline:** April and October  
**Contact:** gilman@iie.org; Tel: 713.621.6300, ext 25  
**Website:** [www.iie.org/gilman](http://www.iie.org/gilman)

BOREN SCHOLARSHIPS & FELLOWSHIPS  
*National Security Education Program*  
**Deadline:** January for graduate students, February for undergraduates  
**Contact:** nsep@iie.org; 800-618-NSEP  
**Website:** [www.iie.org/nsep](http://www.iie.org/nsep)

THE NATIONAL FLAGSHIP LANGUAGE PROGRAM  
*National Security Education Program*  
**Deadline:** January  
**Contact:** flagship@iie.org; 800-618-NSEP  
**Website:** [www.iie.org/nsep](http://www.iie.org/nsep)

FREEMAN-ASIA: AWARDS FOR STUDY IN ASIA  
*Freeman Foundation*  
**Deadline:** March, April and October  
**Contact:** Freeman-Asia@iie.org; 212-984-5542  
**Website:** [www.iie.org/programs/Freeman-Asia](http://www.iie.org/programs/Freeman-Asia)

WHITAKER INTERNATIONAL FELLOWS AND SCHOLARS PROGRAM  
*Whitaker Foundation*  
**Deadline:** February  
**Contact:** whitaker@iie.org; 212-984-5442  
**Website:** [www.whitakerawards.org](http://www.whitakerawards.org)
ENDNOTES


4 “Global Destinations for International Students at the Post-Secondary (Tertiary) Level, 2007,” Atlas of Student Mobility; available online: http://www.atlas.iienetwork.org/?p=48027. Atlas of Student Mobility data for China is collected in partnership with the China Scholarship Council and uses the OECD definition of ‘international student’: “Students are classified as foreign students if they are not citizens of the country for which the data are collected. Countries unable to provide data or estimates for non-nationals on the basis of their passports were requested to substitute data according to a related alternative criterion, e.g., the country of residence, the non-national mother tongue or non-national parentage … The number of students studying abroad is obtained from the destination countries' reports. Counts of students studying in countries not reporting to the OECD are not included within this indicator.”


7 Open Doors defines international scholars as “… non-immigrant, non-student academics … at U.S. doctoral degree-granting institutions. Scholars may also be affiliated with these institutions for activities such as conferences, colloquia, observations, or consultations.”

8 Bhandari and Chow, 69.

9 We have not restricted program examples solely to programs listed in IIEPassport, but we do use IIEPassport to discuss trends in study abroad offerings in China. We have used the print directories for this purpose: Marie O’Sullivan, ed., IIEPassport: Academic Year Abroad, 37th Edition 2008-2009 (New York: Institute of International Education and EducationDynamics, 2007); Marie O’Sullivan, ed., IIEPassport: Short-Term Study Abroad 58th Edition 2008-2009 (New York: Institute of International Education and EducationDynamics, 2007). The database is also available online at http://iiepassport.org.


11 See www.indiana.edu/~celcar.

12 Daniel Obst and others, 13.

Parts of this paper were also included in an unpublished IIE report submitted to the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, United States Department of Education: Shepherd Laughlin, Opportunities and Challenges in U.S.-China Educational Linkages: Reviewing the Past, Surveying the Present, Charting a Course for the Future, Institute of International Education.