

# *Current Situation and Experience Enlightenment of American Higher Education Internationalization*

Rui Zhao<sup>\*</sup>

*Foreign Studies College, Northeastern University, Shenyang, China*  
*ginazhaorui@163.com*  
<sup>\*</sup>*corresponding author*

**Keywords:** United States, Higher Education, Internationalization

**Abstract:** This paper first carries out the analysis of the current situation of internationalization of higher education in the United States, focusing on topics of the continuous rise in the number of international students, the growth in the number of students who study abroad, more emphasis on foreign language learning, the variety of international courses, and the strong support of internationalization policies. The development history of the internationalization of higher education in the United States provides valuable experience, including establishing a complete and scientific higher education internationalization management system and funding system, comprehensively promoting the internationalization of campuses, and focusing on the training of international college teachers.

The United States' emphasis on cultivating international talents originated during World War II. Before the war, the American education system based on English and Western culture lacked non-Western universal language courses and lacked the study of non-Western cultures. This led to a large shortage of talents in the U.S. military who had mastered the languages, customs and local cultures of other countries and regions during World War II. In order to solve this problem as soon as possible, the US government has opened foreign language and regional culture courses in some universities. The implementation of these projects in the United States marks the budding of the cultivation of international talents.

During the Cold War period when the United States and the Soviet Union were competing for hegemony, the demand in the United States for all kinds of talents who mastered regional languages and cultures surged. The Fulbright Act promulgated in 1946 played an important role in the introduction and cultivation of international talents in the United States. In the 1980s, international business education became a new factor in American international education policy in response to the growing pressure of economic competition from Western Europe and Japan. After the end of the Cold War, the "National Security Strategy in the New Century" and "Memorandum on the

Internationalization of Higher Education" have continued to consolidate the international talent training strategy. After the "911" incident, a strategic turning point occurred in the cultivation of international talents, the US government began to strengthen the cultivation of talents in international relations, and at the same time, strengthened the management of foreign students and scholars. The University Presidents International Education Summit held in 2006 marked a change in the policy of internationalization of higher education in the United States, that is, universities need to open their doors to students from other countries in the world, and the United States also needs universities to send their own students around the world.

The United States set off and actively strived to internationalize higher education in the 1980s, for the aim of safeguarding national interests and improve international competitiveness. After 40 years of development, the internationalization of American higher education has already made big achievements and accumulated rich experience.

## 1. Current Situation of Internationalization of American Higher Education

### 1.1. Continuous increase of the Number of International Students

The United States is the preferred destination for a big number of international students. Before the end of the 1990s, the enrollment rate of international students in the United States maintained a high growth rate. After 1999, the enrollment rate of international students began to stabilize. In 2002, the rate fell for the first time after 30 consecutive years of growth. In April 2013, the number of international students submitting applications increased by just 1% compared to the same period the previous year, which is the slowest growth rate in nearly eight years. [1] In general, the number of international students entering colleges and universities in the United States to study continues to increase.

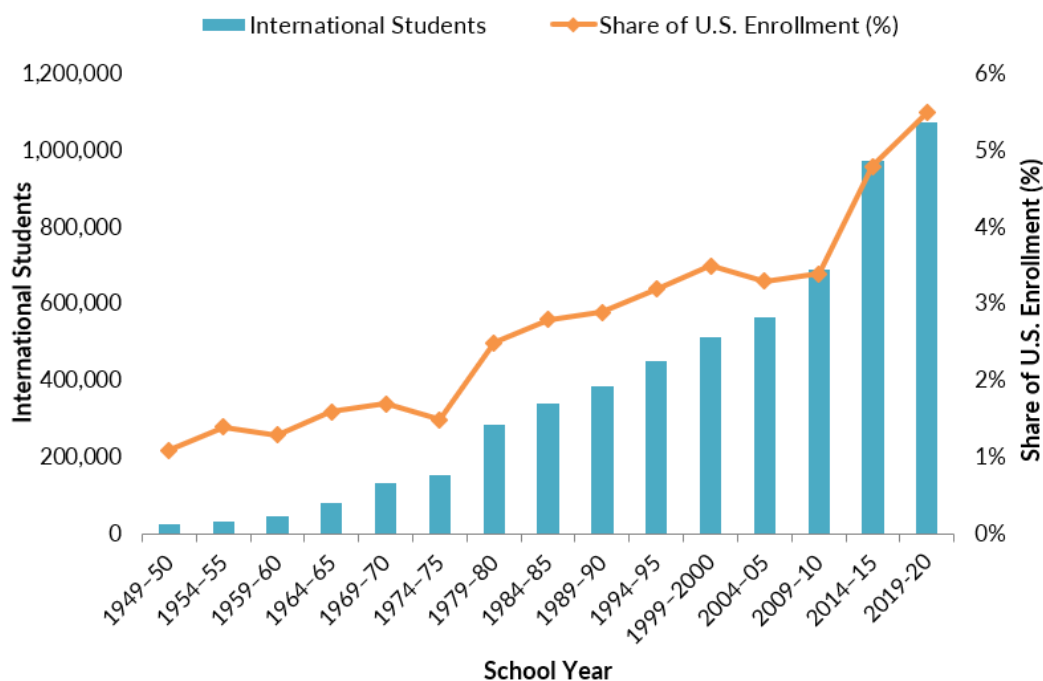


Figure 1. Number of international students and share of total enrollment (%) from academic year 1949-59 to 2019-20 [2]

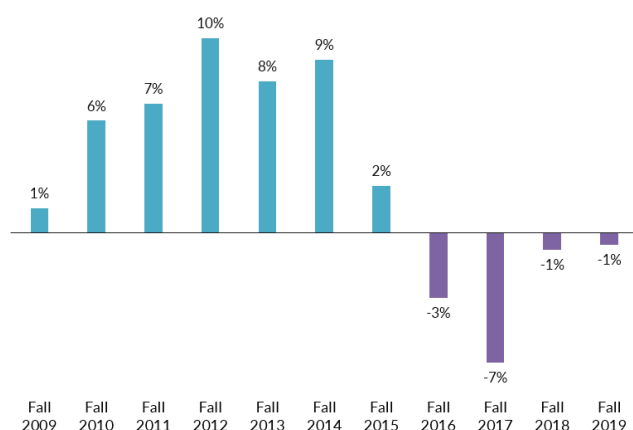


Figure 2. Annual change by rate in the enrollment of new international students (%) during fall 2009 to 2019 [3]

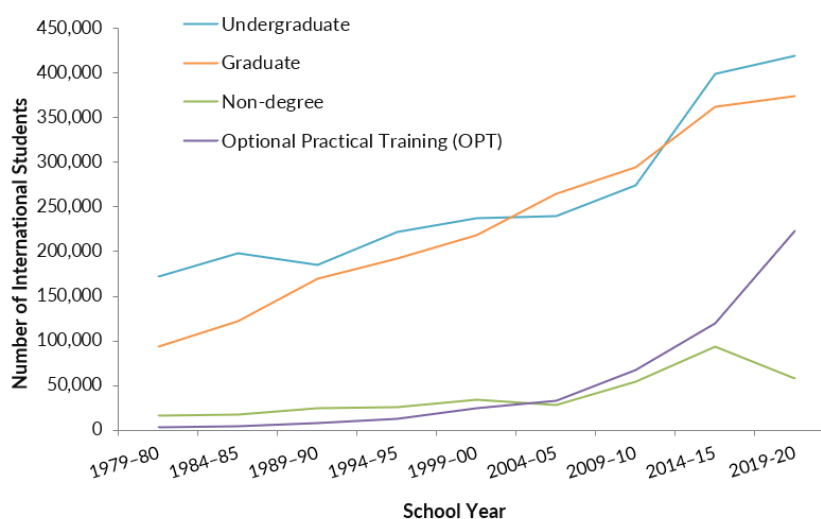


Figure 3. Number of international students in different academic levels from the academic year 1979-80 to 2019-20 [4]

## 1.2. More Attention is Paid to Foreign Language Learning

Foreign language learning is considered to be an important indicator to measure the level of the internationalization of higher education. Rice, former US Secretary of State, has pointed out that it will expand opportunities for young people to learn a foreign language, their lives could be enriched, and our respect for other cultures could be reflected. After the 911 event, the United States paid much attention to the legislation for the foreign language education, and the status of foreign language learning was truly improved through the form of legislation, and the implementation and development of foreign language education were guaranteed and promoted. At the end of July 2007, the U.S. Congress passed the “University Opportunity Act of 2007” that stipulates that the grant objects of the federal academic competition grant program will be expanded, including those who have studied key foreign languages for the third, fourth, and fifth years. The Act also strengthens the foreign language and regional studies grant program, requiring that the funds must be applied to areas that carry our researches into foreign languages and oversea culture courses. The legislation of

foreign language education demonstrates the United States' globalization purpose of using the language strategy to spread to the world the American ideology and penetrate American culture.

### 1.3. The Number of People Studying Abroad has Increased

At the beginning of the 21st century, the number of American colleges and universities' students studying abroad experienced an explosive growth. According to the 2009 "Open Doors Report" survey statistics, the number of American students studying abroad showed an increase of 8.5% in the 2007-2008 school year. It has grown by 150% in 10 years to a record of 262,416. Destinations of studying abroad have also undergone great changes, starting to shift from 25 traditional destinations (UK, Spain, Italy and France, etc.) to some other countries, such as China, India, Japan and South Korea. The State Council strongly encourages and supports students to join in programs of studying abroad through various kinds of government-funded projects. [5]

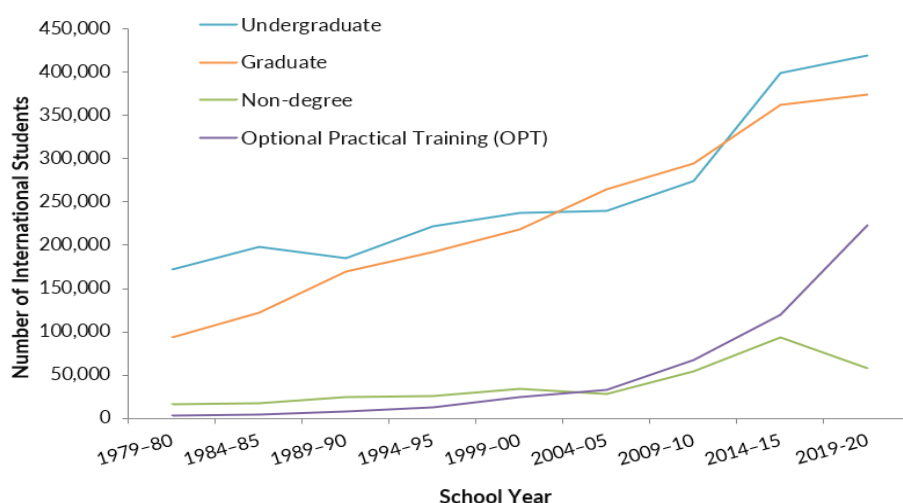


Figure 4. Numbers and percentage of full time postsecondary students who participated in the study-abroad programs from the academic year 1979-80 to 2019-20 [6]

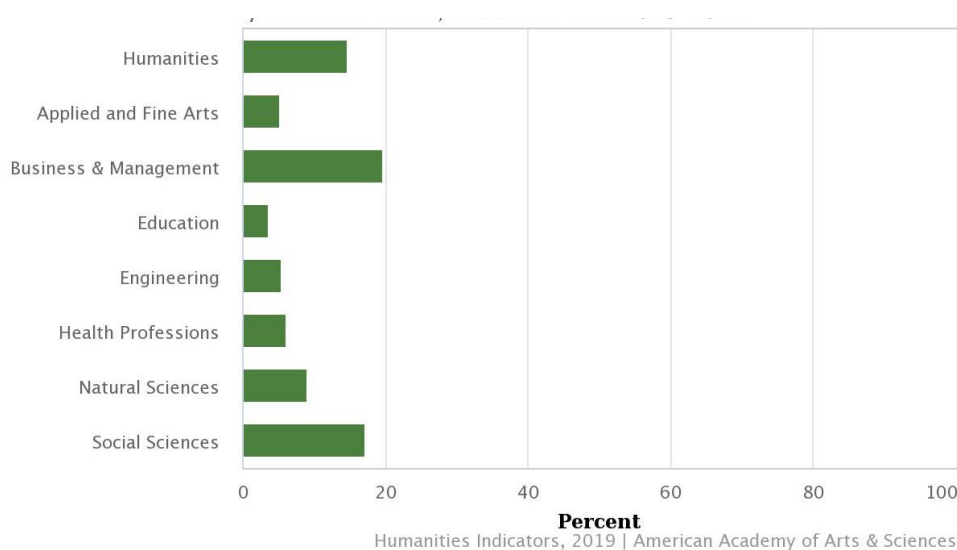


Figure 5. Percentage of U.S. postsecondary students who took part in the study-abroad programs by academic field in academic year 2019-20 [7]

#### 1.4. Forms of International Courses are Diverse

The internationalization of American higher education is featured not only as the attraction to a growing number of foreign students to be able to study in the United States of America or encouraging American students to further their study or join in programs abroad, setting up joint degree programs and open course resources have also become a hot field of internationalization.

Offering dual-degree or joint-degree programs is thought to be a very effective way for many colleges and universities in the United States. According to the arrangement of the dual-degree program, students can take courses in partner universities and obtain degrees, diplomas or certificates. According to a recent survey conducted by the Graduate Schools Council, 29% of the U.S. graduate schools surveyed have established joint-degree programs, dual-degree programs, and other cooperative programs through cooperation with foreign universities. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Yale University have established the MOOC open course websites, which drives other educational institutions to form a world knowledge network that benefits all mankind. [8]

#### 1.5. International Policies Give Strong Support

After formulating and adjusting relevant policies as well as establishing and expanding institutions during the Cold War, American higher education's internationalization process began an unprecedented development in the beginning years of 21st century. In the year 2000, Bill Clinton, former US President, signed the first memorandum about the implementation of education internationalization, assuring the significant role of higher education internationalization. Then in the year 2001, the senators unanimously approved the initiative of vigorously strengthening the internationalization process of education sectors. Then since the 9.11 incident, the introduction and promulgation of a set of restrictive measures, as well as the abolition and the merger of institutions, have driven the process of internationalization of American higher education into a trough. The U.S. government and people, especially in recent years, have reconfirmed and re-examined that the U.S. has an urgent need of policies related to international education to realize those global goals. Once again the internationalization of U.S. higher education has got out of the trough and announced a fresh new opportunity for development.[9] In January, 2006, Rice, Secretary of State, and Spellings, Secretary of Education, co-chaired the American University Presidents Conference on International Education in order to have a discussion on measures of attracting foreign scholars and students to learn and do researches in the United States, and of encouraging more American young students to go on with their study in other areas and countries, thereby fostering partnerships and enhancing the field of international education. In 2006, the U.S. State Department initiated and sponsored the U.S. National Security Language Youth Program, providing scholarships to young students with relevant language skills every year. [10] On June 5, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the "Senator Paul Simon's Study Abroad Foundation Act" to establish a special foundation for sending 1,000,000 American students to go abroad for study every year within 10 years.

In addition, the internationalization of higher education in the United States has made huge progresses in terms of cultivating youths' international awareness, the funding of short-term travel, the regular development of transnational cooperative learning and research activities, cultural exchanging activities for youths, the implementation of the internationalization training plan for college teachers, and the normalized operation of cultural exchange between colleges and universities.

## **2. The Experience of Internationalization of American higher Education**

As the trend of globalization continues to accelerate, the American higher education system reflects the characteristics of being richer and more diverse, and the interest of young students in learning non-Western languages continues to grow, and they gradually have a significant global awareness and a strong interest in international diversity. More and more American colleges and universities welcome more foreign students to enroll, and at the same time, through cooperation with international institutions to offer courses to study abroad, the internationalization of college campuses and higher education is becoming more and more obvious.

### **2.1. Complete and Scientific Higher Education International Management System**

A management system that is complete and scientific lays a foundation that is solid enough to ensure the effective implementation of the internationalization strategy of higher education. It plays an indispensable and vital role. The three-in-one system designed by the federal government departments, a lot of non-governmental agencies and many kinds of support programs play an indispensable and crucial role in dealing with matters related to the internationalization of higher education.

The United States has successively introduced and strengthened a series of programs to promote the internationalization of higher education, including the Kennedy Lugar International Youth Exchange Program, the Young Leaders Program, the Global Connections and Exchange Program, the Future Leaders Exchange Program, and the Benjamin Frank Transatlantic Youth Summer Institute, and many other projects. The federal government plays a premise and leading role in the management system of higher education internationalization. It points out the direction of development for the internationalization of higher education in the United States, regulates the process and development strategy, and at the same time, it also plays a leading role in the development of higher education in non-governmental organizations and institutions. The international management of education plays an exemplary role. A large number of non-government institutions play a fundamental role in the international management system of higher education, which is conducive to transforming and standardizing government behavior, reducing management costs, weakening administrative power, strengthening academic power and restoring academic autonomy. A wide variety of support projects are the foothold for the implementation of higher education internationalization strategies. Through funding and project support from organizations of different natures, the social channels and international perspectives for the development process of higher education internationalization will be broadened, and the government and private sector will be able to make decisions on American higher education decisions. Establishing a dialogue, committed to establishing the future direction of development of the internationalization of higher education in the United States, is conducive to developing the internationalization of higher education from a diversified and multi-level perspective, and effectively exerting the social service function of higher education.

### **2.2. The Funding System for the Internationalization of Higher Education**

To promote the process of internationalization of higher education, policy support is very important, and it is more effective and practical to directly offer finance by setting up scholarships or project funds under the guidance of policies. The US government departments, as well as private enterprises and institutions, have all offered various kinds of funding of different levels for the internationalization of higher education, and built a reliable guarantee system for the internationalization of higher education. On the one hand, studying-abroad programs and



scholarships have been set up. The Institute of International Education currently manages more than 250 funded projects, and helps more than 20,000 domestic students each year carry out international academic and professional exchange activities. [11] On the other hand, programs and scholarships supporting students from other countries to study in the United States have been set up. Thomas Farrell, State Department official, said that the United States hoped to provide more opportunities for foreign students with poor economic conditions to study in American colleges and universities, and it was an American tradition to provide financial aid to bright and talented students. [12, 13]

### **2.3. Comprehensive Promotion of Campus Internationalization**

The American Council of Education strongly advocates comprehensive internationalization, that is, making the campus a “fully international” environment through a broad, deep and integrated approach. The first is to regularly hold higher education internationalization summit forums to build a network of higher education internationalization leaders. [14] The second is to summarize and publish the management experience of higher education internationalization. Each university has a unique international management mechanism with more or less successful experience and failure experience. Therefore, universities should be able to share their own experiences and lessons, so as to promote campus internationalization more effectively. The last is to build a university cooperative consortium. The member schools of the consortium can carry out normalized information exchange and share effective strategies for the internationalization of higher education.[15]

### **2.4. Close Attention to the Cultivation of Internationalized Teachers**

Teachers are the concrete practitioners of teaching concepts, and to internationalize higher education must first realize colleges and universities’ internationalization of the teaching staff, so as to realize the internationalized school-running concept. The United States has a lot of experience worth learning from in improving the internationalization of college teachers. The first is to recruit and reward teachers with an international mindset. Direct recruitment of teachers with an international concept is a very effective way to improve the internationalization level of teachers. Some local universities have added the clause of “having global talent” in their latest recruitment advertisements, asking teachers to answer what kind of foreign languages they master and how to use their experiences and interests to contribute to the internationalisation of curriculum and teaching. The second is to strengthen the professional growth of teachers in internationalization. According to relevant statistics, over 75% of teachers in colleges or universities are willing to take part in seminars of different kinds. [16] These seminars focus on teaching and learning that are conducive to enhancing teachers' professional quality and accomplishment continuously, thereby improving teachers' professional making and growth. It has become one of the effective strategies to improve the internationalization level of teachers. The last is to enrich the international experience of teachers. Increasing the chances of visiting abroad will enable teachers to broaden their knowledge and understanding of other countries' culture and knowledge, and also help to build cooperative relations with teachers of colleges and universities in other countries related to topics of common concern.

### **Funding**

This article is not supported by any foundation.

## Data Availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Conflict of Interest

The author states that this article has no conflict of interest.

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