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Latitudes: These colleges draw students locally. They want them to think globally.

1 message

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Latitudes

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Regional public colleges work to change their global profile

American students have been slow to resume [studying abroad in China](#) after the pandemic, with cooling relations between the two countries and U.S. government travel warnings putting a damper on exchanges. The U.S. embassy in Beijing has said only about 800 students studied in China in spring 2024.

But this summer, one program, supported by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, sent 80 students to China. With scholarships from the Chinese government, students from Northern Arizona University explored Chinese culture, while others from Bemidji State University, in Minnesota, focused on global health. A group from California State University at Northridge studied managerial accounting.

Regional public colleges like these are not often thought of as hubs for international education: They don't have the high profiles that typically pull in a lot of brand-name-conscious foreign students while many of their domestic students don't have the time or money to travel abroad.

International engagement takes resources. And the leaders of regional colleges may see their missions as local, not global.

Yet a number of these institutions have quietly carved out their own places in global education, ones that reflect their distinct profiles. They have emphasized strengths like lower tuition costs or strong employer connections to appeal to certain populations of overseas students. They have taken advantage of technology and tailored programs to meet their students' particular needs or constraints.

AASCU, as the state-college organization is also known, has a long history of international ties. The group's first delegation traveled to China more than four decades ago, shortly after relations with the United States were normalized and China reopened to academic exchange. Xuesong Shen, current minister counselor for education at the Chinese embassy in Washington, earned a graduate degree in political science at Ball State University, a regional public in Indiana, and spent time as an AASCU intern.

The organization supports efforts to help colleges establish overseas partnerships and build international offerings, such as short-term study-abroad and joint-degree programs, in China and around the globe. It sustained the programs even when the pandemic halted worldwide travel, said Terry Brown, vice president for academic innovation and transformation at AASCU.

Research has shown that international study can [improve academic success](#), particularly for students who are first generation, low income, or from underrepresented minority groups — precisely the students who enroll disproportionately at AASCU institutions. Brown, who previously was provost at the State University of New York at Fredonia, recalls a student who was a former foster child and struggled to find direction until she won a scholarship to take part in an immersive short-term program in China. “Like so many, she thought study abroad was out of her reach,” Brown said of her former student, who went on to major in international business. “She found the confidence that comes with navigating a foreign culture.”

Brown and I spoke after AASCU's summer meeting, where I led a plenary-panel discussion on international education. Having an international experience makes a difference not only for students but for the communities they come from and are likely to return to for work, which have become part of a worldwide economy. "Embracing stewardship of place is to understand how the local is part of the global ecosystem," Brown said.

The first international students who came to Salem State University, north of Boston, were often the nieces and nephews of residents of nearby immigrant communities. The college has since tried to become more intentional in its outreach. One way it has done this is to embrace a "siloe approach to international recruitment and retention," said Julie Whitlow, vice president for faculty and global engagement, through joint-degree programs with partner universities in China.

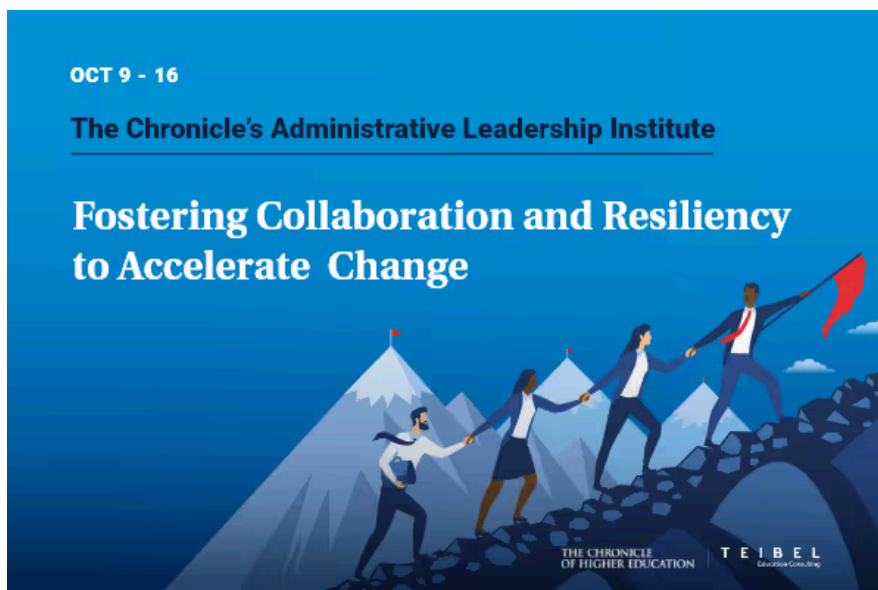
Students in the programs start at their home institutions, then come to Salem State for two years before returning to China for their final year. When in China, they get some Salem State instruction, through online coursework and a visiting professor, and they earn both Chinese and American degrees, a valuable calling card in a competitive job market.

Rather than recruiting the students individually, they come to Salem State as part of a cohort. The college currently has two groups of joint-degree students, in accounting and English, on campus, and is starting new programs in computer science, early childhood education, and international business, Whitlow said.

In Massachusetts, where the college-age population has declined, Salem State consistently has about 200 international students a year, she said.

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Leaders press for global engagement

Troy University, in Alabama, has long had a presence on American military bases overseas, educating American servicemembers. Under Jack Hawkins Jr., who has been chancellor since 1989, Troy used military education as a foothold to offer classes to civilian students, particularly in Vietnam, where Hawkins served in the Marine Corps. Many of the college's 1,000 international students begin their studies in their home country, saving on the costs of travel and living in the United States.

Although Troy "was planting a flag in other countries," Hawkins wanted to do more to give international exposure to its largely local student body, a goal of the college's strategic plan. "We weren't part of a global village," he said.

Public colleges in Alabama share in the revenue from a vanity-license-plate program, and Hawkins decided to use that pot of money to fund scholarships for study abroad. All Troy students, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, are now eligible to receive \$1,250 every year to go overseas, provided they meet certain academic requirements.

Despite Covid disruptions, Troy has doubled the number of students who study abroad since the scholarship program began in 2016, to more than 250. “If we can understand differences,” Hawkins said, “we can appreciate them.”

Like Hawkins, Daniel A. Wubah, president of Millersville University, has used his leadership to press for more global engagement. “I haven’t seen a university do it without a champion,” said Wubah, who is also chair of AASCU’s international-education committee.

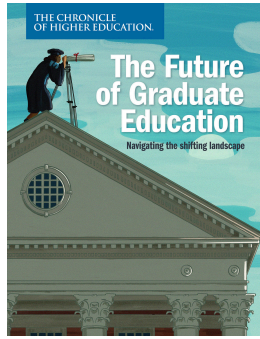
Wubah, who first came to the United States as a student from Ghana, has worked to increase Millersville’s appeal to foreign students by emphasizing the strong work-force ties of many of the college’s academic programs. He has also been successful in getting college trustees to support summertime study-abroad experiences for low-income and other marginalized students.

College leaders aren’t the only important advocates at regional public colleges. As a professor of microbiology, Wubah took students on research trips to Ghana and ran a pilot program that led the National Science Foundation to fund international-research experiences for students as part of their awards.

At Salem State, too, faculty members have been key. Each year about a dozen professors take part in a learning community to help them start virtual exchanges, Whitlow said, and a faculty fellow assists others in adding more global content to their syllabi. Salem State students can now earn a global-engagement seal on their transcripts, indicating coursework in foreign languages and world cultures as well study abroad and overseas internships.

Wubah acknowledges that not all institutions have made the kind of progress that campuses like Salem State and his own have. For regional publics, it’s particularly important to share knowledge and best practices about global engagement, he said. “That’s one way by which we can lower the barriers.”

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The Future of Graduate Education

Graduate education has enjoyed a jump in enrollment over the past five years, but it faces a host of challenges. [Order this report](#) for insights on the opportunities and pitfalls that graduate-program administrators must navigate.

Suspended international student won't lose his visa

Cornell University has reversed a decision to revoke the visa of an international student suspended for his part in pro-Palestinian protests on campus.

Momodou Taal, a doctoral student from Britain, could have been [forced to leave the country](#) in a case that underscores the complexities of engaging in political activism for students on visas.

Taal announced he was no longer under threat of removal from the country in a [post on X](#). "I will take this win and hope it serves as a reminder that you can fight back against these institutions," he wrote.

Around the globe

A federal appeals court heard arguments last week in the [latest round of legal challenges](#) to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which provides protections to young people brought to the United States as children.

Officials at Harrisburg University of Science and Technology defended its use of Day 1 curricular practical training, but critics say the approach, which allows students to work while taking few classes, amounts to a ["backdoor" work visa](#).

St. Louis University expected 1,300 new international graduate students, but only 300 enrolled. Now the college is facing [big budget cuts](#).

The Chinese government has released a plan to become a “[leading education power](#).”

Pakistani security forces have detained several [college students](#).

The British government has increased funding to [combat antisemitism](#) in schools and colleges.

Argentinian lawmakers failed to overturn a [presidential veto](#) of legislation to increase spending on higher education.

And finally ...

A college in the Palestinian West Bank has won a global prize for civic engagement.

Al-Quds Bard College won the [MacJannet Prize for Global Citizenship](#), awarded by the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities, a worldwide network of higher-education leaders focused on civic engagement. The prize recognizes the college’s efforts in community outreach and learning, such as projects to teach art in refugee campus and develop a tour of Jerusalem from a Palestinian perspective. It continued this work even after war between Israel and Hamas, in Gaza, forced classes online for much of the last academic year.

The college was formed in partnership between Al-Quds University, a Palestinian institution, and Bard College, in New York, which has sought to [expand access to liberal-arts education](#) around the globe.

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