



A growing number of Mexican students are weighing US study options, as American universities step up recruitment in the region.

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Mexico emerging as popular market for US universities

Mandy Garner 31 January 2026

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Mexico is becoming an increasingly popular market for universities in the United States seeking to diversify their international student intake at the same time as leading Mexican universities are seeking to internationalise their own offerings.

Robert Jones, president of the University of Washington, in Seattle, in the northwest of the US, told the recent IFE conference hosted by the Institute for Future Education (IFE) at *Tecnologico de Monterrey* (Tec), one of Mexico's leading universities, his institution has relied too heavily on three or four countries for its international students and needs to diversify.

Jones said the university was "aggressively" targeting countries such as Vietnam, South Africa and Mexico, as well as other parts of the world that "we have not paid enough attention to".

"We have to go out and be aggressive, engage globally through trust and mutuality," he told *University World News* on the sidelines of the 2026 IFE Conference held from 27 to 29 January.

At the moment, his university has only 52 Mexican students, a number he described as "woefully inadequate", adding that the university is looking to design research partnerships with Mexico and strengthen opportunities for Mexican undergraduates in the US.

Students want to be more interconnected

Both he and Michael Rao, president of Virginia Commonwealth University, US, defended the importance of international collaborations despite the recent dramatic decline in international students coming to the US amid bans on certain countries, visa restrictions, and concerns about deportations and other nationalist policies of the Trump administration.

Rao said: "There is always someone smarter than you, and they often aren't in your country. We can learn from others so we don't have to reinvent something that someone else has already figured out.

"Our students tell us all the time that they need to be more interconnected. They recognise how they learn from people from different backgrounds. Many of their parents came from another place. US higher education is very good, but that will not continue to be true if we isolate ourselves and think we can solve complex problems without being connected to the best minds in the world."

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Jones echoed this, saying global partnerships were “critically important to what I am as a scholar” and have become more important in the last decade to large, complex research universities. He said student mobility was core to what has made higher education in the United States what it is today.

“We place a very high value on making sure that increasing numbers of our students have some kind of global experience before they graduate,” said Jones.

“No university I know has given up on their absolute commitment to the belief that one of the reasons the US is the nation we are today is because of the students we have been able to attract from all over the world. That is under threat, and we are trying to protect it and our connections to the innovation ecosystem. If we lose that, it’s not just American universities that lose. We all lose,” he said.

Rao, who stressed that his university was “apolitical”, said internationalisation is about solving grand challenges and saving lives. “We need to communicate the value of outcomes of international research better so the public understands why we are making these investments,” he stated.

Jones also stressed the need to make the case for internationalisation. “We cannot just sit in our labs in the US and think that the world will continue to beat a path to our door,” he said.

He called for “radical partnerships” internally and internationally which aim to create ecosystems where multiple universities come together to bring their comparative strengths to the table and find impactful solutions to grand challenges.

Brain recycling

Juan Pablo Murra, rector of Tec, said he is not worried about losing students to US universities looking to diversify their intake. He said one of the biggest challenges Mexico faces is a lack of leaders with the capacity to transform the country. If more went to world-class universities outside Mexico, that would eventually help Mexico, he said. “It is more like brain recycling than brain drain.”

David Garza, president of Tec, agreed. Even if they settle abroad, he argued there will be benefits in terms of potential collaborations. “It’s the diaspora effect,” he said.

Tec has its own network of high schools which graduate 10,000 students every year. Around half of Tec’s undergraduates come from these schools. The university wants to do more to encourage them to study abroad and has launched a Road to College programme to help students prepare for the best universities through counselling, recommendation letters and more.

Just over 30,000 Mexicans are currently pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees abroad. However, only 5% of first-year undergraduates are international students, and Murra wants to double that figure. Most of Tec’s current international students are from Latin America, but there are increasingly more Mexican Americans enrolling.

In 2019 Tec, whose commitment to making the university more global is embedded in its 2030 institutional plan, launched its first bachelor degree in English – in global business. It now has eight courses in English, ranging from architecture to global management. Some graduate programmes are also taught in English.

‘Going global’ is paying off



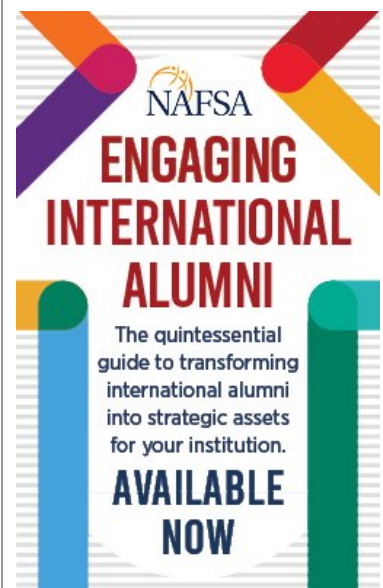
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Murra said the admissions team regularly travels around Latin America, and IFE invited high school directors from Central American countries that typically send students to Tec to encourage their students to think about studying abroad.

The university has also opened its flagship scholarship programme, *Líderes del Mañana* (Leaders of Tomorrow), to other Latin Americans, mostly from Central America and the Caribbean. Tec partners with universities in Central America and has helped design a new engineering university in El Salvador.

Tec's plans to go global seem to be paying off. In January the World Economic Forum included Tecnológico de Monterrey's educational model as an international benchmark case in its report *New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage*.

Murra senses that the current moment of geopolitical instability could bring Latin American universities closer together, prompting greater regional action. He is calling on them to work together at a time when the universities in the Global North they used to look up to are facing their own problems. "We need to act in a more integrated way," he said.

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