

## WHY INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION?

**Philip G. Altbach**

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This publication is part of an exciting new venture in international higher education. *International Higher Education*, which will be published quarterly, provides information and analysis not available elsewhere. It serves as a primary focus for communication among academic institutions and colleagues at colleges and universities in the Jesuit tradition, noting new initiatives and featuring discussion of issues of special concern. Our interest extends beyond this important group to the broader world of universities around the globe. *International Higher Education* is a forum for information, debate, and discussion about the central issues facing higher education. It brings a distinct concern, stemming from the Jesuit roots of Boston College, our sponsoring institution, for the role of universities in social and economic development, for the involvement of higher education in the global struggle for social justice, and for the integrity of the academic enterprise. We have a particular concern for universities in the Third World—institutions often left out of the international mainstream and yet of critical importance in the struggle for development. *International Higher Education* provides a perspective, a set of concerns, and a commitment not available in other publications.

*International Higher Education* will feature a rich mixture of material of interest to higher education professionals. News of initiatives and events among the colleges and universities involved in this undertaking will be included. Analysis of broader issues affecting higher education worldwide will also be featured. Editorials will permit thoughtful commentators to express opinions on contemporary themes. Readers will also be provided with book reviews and information about current publications in the world of higher education. *International Higher Education* is the first publication to approach higher education with a commitment to exploring the spiritual and moral responsibilities of academic institutions and academic communities throughout the world.

We hope that you will join us in an interactive venture—our readers will also be our writers. We welcome ideas for articles, news of current initiatives and developments, and letters. As we start this exciting enterprise, we look forward to your support, interest, and participation.

## FLOWS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: TRENDS AND ISSUES

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The total number of students from abroad who enroll in a country's colleges and universities is the queen bee of statistics describing international student mobility. While this *gross* measure of student flow is a useful starting point in analysis, it frequently is an end point as well. For policymakers at the national level it tends to induce unidimensional ideas that can limit broader thinking about the factors behind student exchange.

Over the past 40 years there has been considerable change in exchange practices. The real story in international academic cooperation is that exchange is actually a reflection of mass education, that is for the most part, foreign study is being financed by individual students who are making an investment in their own careers. Only about 1 percent of all foreign students studying in the United States receive direct support from the U.S. government while almost two-thirds of the students are supported from personal or family sources. To serve national interests, which are increasingly congruent with a global economy, higher education systems are becoming more sensitive to the international dimension of higher education. National educational systems are becoming more hospitable in terms of curricular offerings, expanded support services, and open recruitment of international students.

From the perspective of the United States, foreign students are an important segment of our third-level student population. In the 1993/94 academic year, the number of international students attending U.S. colleges and universities neared 450,000. The actual number of 449,749 represents about 37 percent of all international students worldwide. Some of the leading home places of foreign students in the United States are China, Japan, Taiwan, India, Korea, Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Germany.

Data on educational exchange between the United States and other nations is collected and disseminated by the Institute of International Education (IIE), with the sponsorship of the U.S. Information Agency. IIE annually collects and publishes institutional aggregate data in a report on international exchange titled *Open Doors*. The report is based on responses from 2,743 institutions surveyed (a 95.3 percent response). This year the *Open Doors* report presented analyses of a variety of economic, political, and social factors that have an impact on international student mobility. The *Open Doors* analysis is an attempt to stimu-

late awareness of these contexts and their relationship to student mobility. The purpose of this article is to describe two of the broader contextual factors that appear to be associated with international student mobility.

Over the past 20 years a series of studies have been conducted that attempt to describe the factors affecting international student mobility. These studies have led to the development of the “push-pull” model of student mobility. The push factors can be thought of as conditions in the sending country that create a generalized interest in overseas education but do not give specific direction to individuals. The pull factors are specific to a potential host country and serve to point students to particular destinations.

While student mobility is largely the result of individual decisions, these private choices occur within national contexts. The conditions in home countries surely set up the circumstances that “push” individuals to seek educational opportunities abroad. Two basic home country conditions that appear to be related to promoting significant student mobility are: (1) the wealth and development status of the home country and, (2) the extent to which a nation invests its resources in human development. This second factor has been quantified into a measure known as the human development index (HDI).

The level of economic development, as indicated in Figure 1, is partially related to student flow into the United States. Clearly, the wealthy nations in Western Europe as well as Canada and Japan do send many students to study in the United States. Although these wealthy nations are

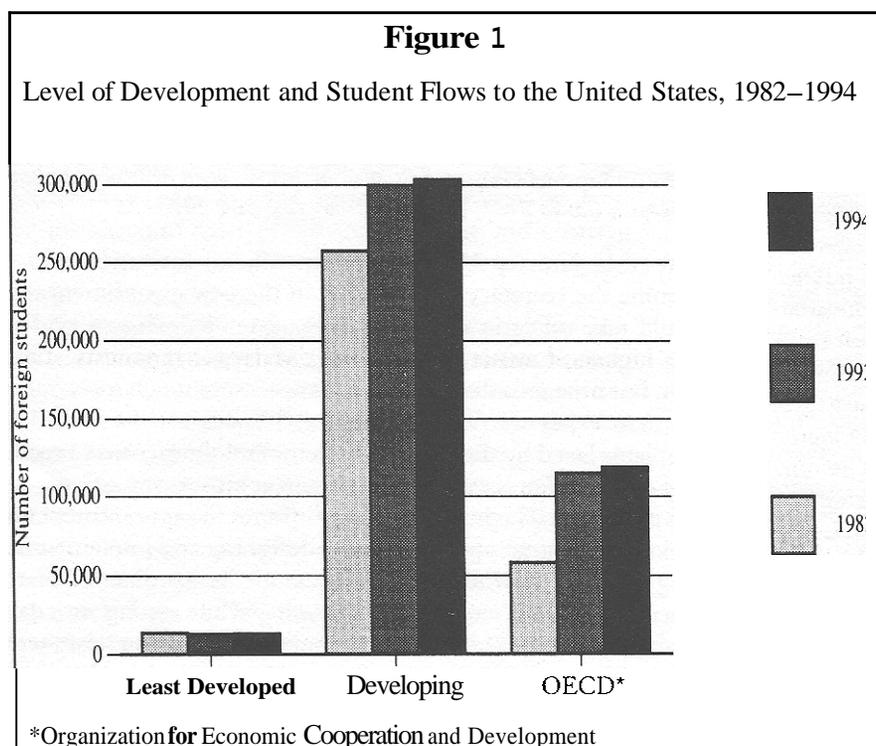
important home countries, the largest group of students has consistently come from the developing nations of the world. The least developed nations of sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and the island states of Oceania have not participated to a significant degree. If foreign study contributes to the economic development of the home country, then the implications of this trend for future economic and social development in the poorest countries of the world are potentially quite serious.

About 66 percent of the overseas students studying in the United States in 1993/94 are from developing nations. While it is not unusual for a host country to have a large majority of its foreign students from developing countries, the proportion of such students studying in the United States is less than in other major host countries. Based on UNESCO data from the early 1990s, in Japan the percent of students from developing countries was 93 percent; in France 82 percent; Canada 77 percent; Germany 71 percent and in the United Kingdom it was 68.1 percent.

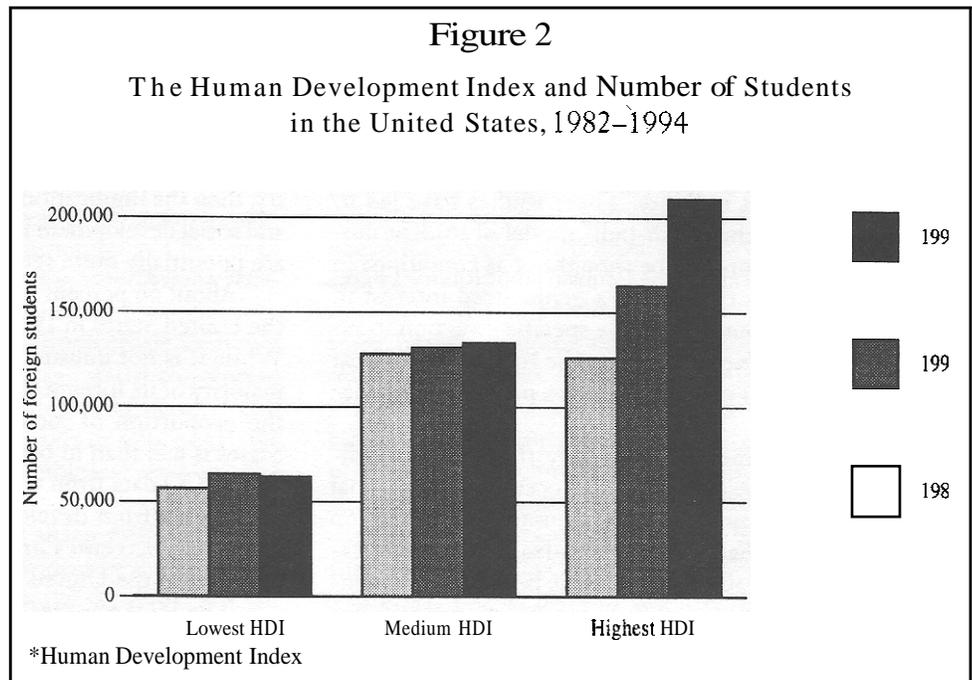
The HDI was created by the U.N. Development Program and reported in its well-respected *Human Development Report*. This is a measure that goes beyond the raw wealth of a nation to describe the manner in which a nation uses its resources. Nations with a high HDI are those that invest in social and educational infrastructure. The HDI is a composite index of three components: longevity (life expectancy), knowledge (adult literacy and mean years of schooling), and standard of living.

Generally, nations that have a high HDI are also important places of origin for international students. This includes many Western European countries, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Canada. Similarly, nations in the middle range of the HDI such as Mexico, China, Thailand, and Malaysia are major countries of origin. Some nations are exceptions—such as India, which has a relatively low HDI and yet is the place of origin for many students studying in the United States.

Two patterns are especially striking in Figure 2. First, those nations that are characterized by higher HDIs are the ones that send large numbers of students to the United States for third-level education. Second, in recent years those nations with the highest HDIs appear to be places of origin for an increasing proportion of the total number of foreign students in the United States. Clearly, nations that invest in educational infrastructure are likely to be the largest sources of internationally mobile students in the future.



In closing, it is important to remember that student mobility exists within a broader national context. With respect to student mobility and economic development, especially among the poorest nations, we have an obligation to explore the efficacy of student exchange schemes to ensure that these exchanges, which clearly benefit the developed host country, achieve their larger purposes in the poorest of nations. Are nations reintegrating these internationally educated citizens into their economic infrastructure in a meaningful way? Are these internationally educated citizens even returning home to strengthen their place of origin by using what they have gained for the benefit of their home country? Is the home country's support of education sufficiently broad based to enable large numbers of students at the primary and secondary level to receive a sound education? Answers to these questions could have important implications for economic development and cooperation between the developed and developing nations. Exchange schemes that produce benefits for both developed and developing nations are worthy goals. For it to be an obtainable goal the role of exchange must become understood as one of several policy approaches that can lead to positive social and economic conditions.



## Ministerial Reflections

It is rare that scholars are appointed to positions of political power. Recently, two colleagues who are specialists in higher education were appointed to ministerial positions in their countries. Their comment on their experiences in political office provide a unique perspective on the realities of policy-making, and perhaps on the difficulties of linking research and public policy. Each author is a distinguished educator and researcher. Both were part of the research team that is responsible for the first international study of the academic profession, the Carnegie Survey of the Academic Profession in 14 Countries. Ernesto Schiefelbein has been a senior educational researcher in Chile for several decades, and is well known for his writings on Latin American and Chilean education. Sungho Lee, who has held top administrative and teaching posts at Yonsei University in Korea, is one of Korea's most respected higher education researchers.

— Editor

## ADVENTURES OF A MINISTER OF EDUCATION: CHILE IN 1994

### Ernesto Schiefelbein

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In early January 1994—when an official invitation to become the secretary of education in the new government that would take office in mid-March was extended—it was evident that higher education was an area that required priority attention, but nine months later the advances were much more modest than expected. These modest advances can be traced to problems faced by the education sector and the fact that a secretary of education is expected to remain at most one year on average in that job. Having no partisan linkages the appointment was looked upon as an opportunity for designing and implementing long-term policy while coping with immediate problems. There was no attempt to set a short-term policy while coping with day-to-day problems. There was no importance placed on short-term success, but at the same time, it was necessary to plan what could be accomplished in less than one year.