

Chapter 17

Globalization, Cross Border Education, and Student Migration: Determining Student Institutional Choice Factors

Ryan Vance Guffey
Lindenwood University, USA

ABSTRACT

Presently, there are more than two million students studying outside their home countries and the total number is expected to grow to eight million by 2025. This trend has inspired research into the “push” and “pull” factors that drive student mobility within the global higher education environment. However, despite the growing presence of cross border student enrollments throughout the United States, which is also the number one location for cross border students to study in the world, limited efforts have been made to identify what characteristics motivate particular groups of cross border students to leave their home countries to attend particular types of higher education in the United States. This chapter addresses that gap in the literature. In response, this study sought to build upon existing global higher education literature by determining the relationship between the perceived importance of institutional characteristics and cross border students’ age, gender, and country of origin.

INTRODUCTION

Demand for a higher education has typically been driven by the implied assumption that it will improve an individual’s economic or social status (Kerr, 2002). For cross border students, the assumption is no different (Altbach, 2002a; DeWit, 2002; Agarwal & Winkler, 1985). Due

to limitations of higher education systems in home countries or the perceived opportunities of an education abroad, students are migrating in higher proportions than ever before (Institute of International Education, 2013; Baldwin & McInnis, 1999; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Presently, there are more than two million students studying outside their home countries, which is expected to

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grow to eight million by 2025 (Altbach, 2004a). This trend has inspired research into the “push” and “pull” factors that drive student mobility within the global higher education environment (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Srikatanyoo & Gnoth, 2002; Mazzarol, 1998; McMahon, 1992; Agarwal & Winkler, 1985).

A convergence of factors influence students to study outside their home countries. For example, students in African countries have traditionally had difficulty obtaining access to their own higher education systems, while other developing nations with historical or colonial connections lose students to cultural associations or to the perception of better lives or education abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Other issues that may affect a cross border student’s decision to study abroad include a commonality of language, the availability of academic programs, such as science and technology, and the geographic proximity to the home country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). A study by McMahon (1992) suggested that the flow of students was relative to the prosperity of the home country’s economy, the involvement in the global economy, the priority level placed on education by the government of the home country and the availability of higher education in the home country. Students were also influenced by the relative size of their home country’s economy compared to the host country, economic and cultural links and the home country’s level of transnational scholarship support (McMahon, 1992).

Following McMahon’s work, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) determined three distinct decision making stages students pass through prior to studying outside their home countries. First, a student must decide to study abroad rather than in the home country. Second, the student must decide which host country would best satisfy his or her educational needs. Lastly, the student must select an institution to attend. This raises the question, after a student decides to study abroad in a particular country, which factor(s) make one institution more desirable than another? According

to Mazzarol (1998), an example of “such factors include an institution’s reputation for quality, market profile, range of courses, alliances or coalitions, offshore teaching programs, staff expertise, degree of innovations, use of information technology, resources, size of the alumni base and promotional and marketing efforts” (p. 83). This study does not examine the first two stages in the decision making process. Rather, this study focused on one aspect of stage three; specifically, a cross border student’s choice of a United States (U.S.) university relative to institutional characteristics.

BACKGROUND

Rationale

The growing global interconnectiveness experienced among higher education institutions, the rapid expansion of foreign institutional agreements, the emergence of a transnational academic labor market, and the increasing numbers of cross border student enrollments have contributed to the evolution of cross border students’ migratory higher education study choice patterns (Altbach, 2004b; De Wit, 2002; James, Baldwin, & McInnis, 1999). However, despite the growing presence of cross border student enrollments throughout the United States, limited research has been conducted to identify what institutional characteristics specifically motivate particular groups of cross border students to leave their home countries to attend particular types of higher education in the U.S. (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006).

This chapter intends to address the existing gap in American higher education student choice literature by providing a systematic examination of one element of student choice: institutional characteristics. The student’s choice of an institution is affected by personal characteristics, parental influence, financial opportunities, academic characteristics, institutional facets, external influences and other factors (Moogan,

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