The "Trump Effect?" Challenges to the United States Hegemony in Higher Education Cross-Cultural Exchange: A Case Study of International Students at Old Dominion University

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THE “TRUMP EFFECT?”

CHALLENGES TO THE UNITED STATES HEGEMONY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

CROSS-CULTURAL EXCHANGE: A CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

AT OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

by

Raven Alexandra Showalter
B.A. May 2016, Mary Baldwin University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
May 2018

Approved by:

Austin Jersild (Director)
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ABSTRACT

THE “TRUMP EFFECT?”
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Raven Alexandra Showalter
Old Dominion University, 2018
Director: Dr. Austin Jersild

Scholars and politicians today fear that international student enrollment at U.S. institutions of higher education may be declining. While some attribute potential enrollment decline to domestic politics, others believe that globalization may be allowing student flows to diversify across many nations, thus limiting the U.S.’s share of students and soft-power influence. To assess the extent to which U.S. hegemony in cross-cultural higher education is being challenged, I trace the origins of educational exchange at Western colleges and universities from their earliest incarnations in the Medieval Era to the present. I also draw a parallel between the Bush administration after 9/11, when visa policies became increasingly regulated and limitations for individuals from Muslim countries were put in place, to the current administration under Trump, where similar proposals to alter existing visa legislation, as well as travel restrictions for individuals from several Middle Eastern countries have emerged.

By conducting a small-scale case study of a public research university, Old Dominion University, I find that although some individuals feel threatened and alarmed by the current political environment, the majority of international students have not been deterred from earning their degrees in the United States. However, international students are becoming increasingly aware of alternative programs and work opportunities in rival countries, like Canada, the U.K., Australia and Germany. If the political environment of the U.S. does not soon improve, I
conclude that greater numbers of international students will choose to study, work and live elsewhere. U.S. preponderance in cross-cultural higher education is being challenged by both internal and external factors, and without serious attention to either, detrimental decline over the next few years is a distinct possibility.
This thesis is dedicated to those international students
whose friendships have enriched my life beyond measure.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the course of my graduate student journey, I have received assistance from many within and beyond the GPIS program. I would like to extend special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Jersild for helping me to transform my ideas for this project into a tangible reality. I would also like to thank Dr. Schulman and Dr. Huizar for serving on my thesis committee and offering very helpful suggestions throughout this long writing process. Additionally, I thank Dr. Gainey for guiding me through the technicalities of IRB human research review. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Regina Karp, for granting me admission into the international studies program at Old Dominion University and overseeing my progress as a graduate student.

In addition, I would also like to extend my gratitude to the other Master’s and Doctoral students in the GPIS program, who have worked alongside and encouraged me in all of my coursework, and have made my time as a graduate student equally rewarding. I sincerely thank the student organizations, anonymous survey participants and confidential interviewees who gave their time to provide me with the necessary information for my case study and analysis of Old Dominion University.

Finally, I thank my family, close friends and former academic mentors. Without you, this creation and completion of this thesis project would not have been possible.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE QUESTION OF US HEGEMONY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

“The hegemony of ideas is often a greater and more lasting source of power than brute force.”¹
- Fareed Zakaria

The question of the hegemony of the United States in world affairs is one that continues to be debated by scholars and politicians alike. Whether one interprets the international system as one that is dominated by a single power, or upheld by the contributions of many, the U.S. has an irreducible role to play in the liberal democratic order system as well as in the spreading of knowledge. With the largest economy in the world in terms of nominal GDP, the most advanced and skilled military which can be found at all corners of the globe, and some of the greatest institutions of higher education in the world, the United States leads global affairs as a ‘hegemon.’

A hegemon is a state “so powerful economically and militarily that it has the dominant influence on the foreign policies of other states” and relies on ‘power,’ or “the capacity to do things” to get the “outcomes [they] want.”² A hegemon does not have to be a threat to the interests of other countries, however. In fact, the United States is often characterized as a ‘benevolent hegemon,’ seeking to guide the world to follow certain rules or political ideologies through soft power, like the attractiveness of its culture and education institutions, rather than hard power, or economic sanctions and military might.³

Up to the present moment, the United States remains the most prominent country for higher education in the world, consistently topping global university rankings for its quality of programs across a variety of fields. As a key aspect of the ‘global knowledge economy,’ students seek out U.S. higher education from across the globe. The ‘global knowledge economy,’ supported by the U.S. hegemony in higher education, effectively describes how the world’s “economic and social life centers on the exchange of information or intellectual property rather than goods.” The global knowledge economy today calls for an increased demand of “technical, specialized, postsecondary education,” that prompts students to “go abroad in search of educational opportunities.”

As of May 2017 there were a reported total of 1,184,735 active international students enrolled in both graduate and undergraduate degree programs in the U.S. alone. As most academic journals and think tanks are located in the U.S., and the dominant language for publications is English, it is no surprise that many students are attracted to American colleges and universities. International students believe that these institutions and their degree programs will provide them with the opportunity to learn coveted skills and acquire the necessary knowledge to be competitive in their chosen career field after graduation.

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6 Ibid.

Beyond its supportive role in the global knowledge economy, higher education cross-cultural exchange is an important form of soft power, or “the ability to obtain desired outcomes through attraction or persuasion rather than coercion or payment,” and serves as a tool for the U.S. to spread its ideals to foreign countries through. The U.S. soft power of higher education allows individual students from different countries to foster bonds that could one day, mean the difference between diplomacy and war. Countries with high degrees of soft power, like the United States, Great Britain, and Canada, for example, are more likely to attract tourists and students alike from the most distant countries than nations who lack soft power projection, like North Korea. Currently, the United States may be experiencing a decrease of preponderance in important soft power areas like the attraction of international students to its higher education programs, and such a decrease could very well have a negative impact on the U.S.’s position as a hegemon in world affairs.

Although the attraction of international students to U.S. campuses is seen by many to be an irreplaceable soft power asset, the presence of foreign students has become an increasingly controversial topic in just the last few years. As Hazen and Alberts note, “despite our heritage as a liberal democracy” the United States “struggle[s] with conceptions of inclusion and fairness in many social domains.” Notably, after the 9/11 terror attacks, President Bush Jr. altered international student and visitor visa policies. His administration also established the Student Exchange Visitor Information (SEVIS) system, which was used to track the movements and academic intentions of international students. Although these changes were made with the hope of preventing terrorists from entering or remaining long term in the United States, they have

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grown increasingly hostile towards international students, and are potentially weakening the overall U.S. hegemony in global affairs.

Since the early 2000s, intellectuals like Fareed Zakaria have posited that the U.S. hegemony and soft power is on the decline for three major reasons. The first, he notes, is that the United States has effectively become “less attractive in the eyes of the world” due to the mixed opinion presented towards foreigners living in the country. The second reason, closely attributed to post 9/11 policies, is that the U.S. government has made it more difficult for foreigners to enter the country. Finally, greater competition and more alternatives in education outside of the U.S., which are vying for the attendance of the most talented international students, prevents the U.S. from maintaining as large a ‘share’ of the global pool of international students as it has previously.

As of 2017, the dream of a world where an American-led cross-cultural educational exchange may one day lead to greater cooperation and understanding between the nations of the world is being critically challenged by both U.S. policymakers and disgruntled citizens. Despite globalization and the increased competitiveness of universities outside of the U.S., the greatest threat to America’s leading role in higher education cross-cultural exchange may in fact come from within.

In response to increasing fear of terroristic activity and anti-Muslim sentiment, President Trump enacted a controversial travel ban in January of 2017 for ninety days to restrict the movements of foreigners from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan and Libya. Although it expired after a short period of time, the travel ban led to great unrest among international

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
students and educators, who vocalized their concern for not only safety, but also for their ability to return home or reenter the U.S. to continue their education after vacation breaks. If successfully implemented in any shape or form in the future, a travel ban is likely to have a significant impact on higher education institutions nationwide.

In the wake of the travel ban and its subsequent ramifications, many journalists and scholars predicted a domino-like “Trump Effect” to take place for the 2017-2018 school term, and beyond. They believe that the “Trump Effect” will lead to a significant decrease in both continuing and new international student enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities nationwide for the duration of his presidency, but especially for the 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 school terms. Until the fall, discussion of a possible “Trump Effect” was entirely speculative. However, by November of 2017, data analysts at the Institute of International Education had recorded a 7% drop in new international student enrollment, and 2% drop in returning international student enrollment nationwide. The preliminary results were finally in.

After the data was published, the Institute of International Education (IIE) reported that institutions of higher education were taking the drop in international students seriously and “respond[ed] to current landscapes through outreach, recruitment & advocacy” to ensure that negative trends in new international student enrollment would not continue long into the future. While they were neither the intended target of the travel ban nor the direct focus of the politically charged ‘America First’ rhetoric, many international students across the country have been filled

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15 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
with a sense of uncertainty and fear that, at the present moment, has yet to be comprehensively addressed.\(^\text{18}\)

So, why should the concerns of international students attending U.S. institutions of higher education matter, when there are ‘greater threats’ of nuclear warfare or terrorism on the horizon? Author Robin Shields believes that international student flows “reflect larger global relationships of knowledge productions, transfer, and circulation” and are “closely related to world trade and increasingly, international governmental organizations.”\(^\text{19}\) Essentially, cross-cultural educational exchange is a key component of not only the U.S.’s higher education system, but also its economy and foreign policy relations.

The exchange of international students between other countries and the United States is also useful in fostering peaceful relationships. The IIE notes that “international students contribute to globalizing U.S. campuses, classrooms, and communities” which allow the students to build relationships and network with domestic American students.\(^\text{20}\) American students, in turn, benefit from having the opportunity to study alongside foreign students or go abroad to visit their home countries through cross-cultural educational exchange. Exchange programs like Fulbright, in particular, provide international and domestic students the chance to live and study in over 140 countries globally.\(^\text{21}\) In this way, international higher education exchange and interaction between students has become an important “component in our foreign policy toolbox” as ordinary citizens are able to “engage in ‘citizen diplomacy’ to promote understanding and

\(^{18}\) Sentiment expressed by multiple ODU students during the timeframe and again at the present moment. Recorded through interview and survey responses presented and discussed in later sections.

\(^{19}\) Robin Shields, “Globalization and International Student Mobility: A Network Analysis,” *Comparative Education Review*, 609.


peace.”

In fact, the U.S. State Department considers American universities and colleges “essential part[s] of our nation’s diplomatic outreach” as well as a “critical” factors in “building the cross-cultural relationships necessary to solve the world’s most pressing problems.”

In addition, international students dominate STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields as well as graduate programs across the nation. Scholar Adam Segal comments that “the number of Americans pursuing advanced degrees in the science and engineering is declining” even though “university science and engineering programs [have grown] more dependent on foreign-born talent.” He believes that ultimately, such “dependence on foreign talent” may turn into a “critical weakness for the United States, especially as foreign applications to U.S. science and engineering graduate programs decline.” His concerns are well-founded. Presently, students from Middle Eastern and South Asian countries like Iran and India provide the “highest number [of students] in [the] sciences and engineering [programs] in the U.S.,” and inadequate enrollment of these international students in STEM programs would certainly lead to a shortage of qualified employees to fill necessary jobs.

Beyond the dependency America has on international students and workers in the STEM fields, without the cross-cultural exchange higher educational opportunities in the U.S. that are offered to both international and domestic students, both the future effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy and global higher education is uncertain. If the United States leaves the concerns of

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25 Ibid.

international students unchecked and neglects its interest in promoting cross-cultural educational exchange among its domestic students, the U.S. may critically weaken its preponderant role in international higher education, and lose one of the best tools it has for fostering cooperation and understanding among citizens of the world. As Press Herald journalist Tim Honey cautions, “at a time when our country appears to be turning more toward nationalism and isolationism, we need to remind ourselves of the richness that occurs when we are sharing our lives with people from outside the United States.”

Thus, it is the goal of this thesis to address the speculation surrounding the uncertain future of cross-cultural educational exchange of international students in the United States higher education. Unless the United States improves its political environment, scholastic as well as job opportunities, international students can, and will, go to other countries. U.S. hegemony is being challenged not only by globalization and the improved capabilities of other countries to offer quality higher education and employment opportunities to international students, but by the current administration’s domestic policies and unwelcoming rhetoric.

To assess the extent to which U.S. hegemony in higher education may be in decline, I analyze the predicted decrease in international students at American colleges and universities for the 2017-2018 school term and tie these findings to the current state of the U.S.’s higher educational soft power projection in world affairs. Beyond this, I contend that the enrollment of international students in America’s institutions of higher education remains an irreplaceable asset that should be encouraged and embraced, rather than shunned or feared. Aside from the economic prosperity their tuition fees bring to the economy each year, an estimated thirty-five billion dollars, hosting international students also provides an opportunity through which the U.S.

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To address my research questions, I first explore a selected Western history of cross-cultural educational exchange from the earliest known students to ever ‘study abroad’ in both Europe and in the United States. I then describe the development of major international organizations that have made it their mission to promote educational exchange before and after World Wars I and II. Next, I focus in on the intellectual and cultural competition between the United States and the Soviets that emerged during the Cold War, including the development of the Fulbright program and the USIA, and how the competition between them affected and further developed cross-cultural educational exchange. I then take a closer look at a more recent time, the early 2000s George Bush Era, to note how an international threat altered domestic policy related to foreign students. Using this information, I attempt to draw a parallel between the changes in policy during Bush’s presidency to current challenges under Trump. I delve further into this idea in chapter four, where I explore the specifics of the Trump administration’s approach to visa reform and the travel ban. I then relate how these policies have affected international students coming to the U.S. for college, and ultimately, how these changes may impact the U.S.’s hegemony in higher education.

To illustrate my conclusions, in chapter five, I draw from a small-scale, self-conducted case study of Old Dominion University. I assess the opinions of International Students regarding their study and life experiences at both ODU, and beyond, to life in the United States. After comparing national trends highlighted in the SEVIS 2016-2017 report with data compiled by ODU, I present my questionnaire and interview findings. I then attempt to draw preliminary
conclusions from thirty-five confidential survey questionnaires and three personal interviews to see if the “Trump Effect” has impacted ODU’s international student’s lives. Next, I relate this information to the greater question of possible decline of the U.S. hegemony in higher education, and discuss the extent to which such an assessment is possible. Finally, I conclude the paper with my suggestions for future scholarly research on this topic.
CHAPTER II
WESTERN HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN US HIGHER EDUCATION

EARLY ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT UNTIL WWI

The United States has not always held the leading position in global higher education. Yet, the idea that cross-cultural educational exchange is beneficial for economic, social and political reasons has been around for centuries. Before the first colleges were even established in the U.S., European colleges and universities had worked along states to aid in the “developing [of a] national culture and identity as well as educating a qualified work force” so attract students from distant lands to study.¹ During the Early and High Middle Ages (400-1300), higher education evolved as a necessary tool for both “administration in the church, secular states, and municipalities, as well as for the traditional ‘professions.’”²

The university, in its medieval Western tradition, was “perceived as a highly international institution compared to other major institutions of society.”³ Institutions of higher education of this era focused on “teaching, research and service” and instructed students primarily in Latin.⁴ Historian of higher education, John C. Scott notes, “kings emphasized the acquisition of advanced, secular knowledge and technical skills by students—future public servants—in order

to build up efficient state bureaucracies.” Yet, despite the influence of “state control and guidance,” the university faculties of the Middle Ages “did not necessarily lose their authority over teaching appointments, nor did academic quality always suffer.”

Beyond national development, higher educational institutions were created for the very purpose of “gather[ing] information from all over the world and generat[ing] innovation on a world scale.” Although cross-cultural educational study essentially began when the first travelers set out to explore unfamiliar countries, it was not until the Renaissance (1300-1700) that formalized institutions of higher learning hosted students from other regions. It was also during the Renaissance era that “modern academic specialization and the intersection between teaching and research missions”, as well as the idea of a “well-rounded development of the student” through a liberal education emerged, a legacy that is reflected through the liberal arts curriculum at U.S. and European colleges and universities today.

In 1190 we see the first-recorded student to formally study abroad, Emo of Friesland, making a journey from his home in Holland to attend Oxford University in England. During his studies, Emo was educated to become a teacher, and later an abbot after his return to his home village, where he used the knowledge he gained from his education abroad to establish a

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6 Ibid.
“thriving religious community.” Students like Emo, seeking greater knowledge of Christianity, would enroll at higher education institutions across Western Europe “for the next 800 years.”

During a more secular era in the wake of the French Revolution, under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte (1804-1814), France embraced the Swiss concept of “exchang[ing] professors among various nations.” Swiss diplomat Emmerich de Vattel believed cross-cultural educational exchange to be vital as the “peace and security of each nation was dependent upon the peace and security of all.” By comprising classrooms of students from different societies, Emmerich de Vattel hoped that there would be a better “exchange of ideas” between peers. By the end of the 17th century, “intra-European student mobility” reached nearly ten percent, a very high number for the time period.

Across the Atlantic, after the emergence of the United States in 1776, the founding fathers sought to instill into the nation’s youth the “republican values of liberty and self-government” through education. Greatly influenced by the enlightenment, they wanted to ensure that an “educated and self-governing citizenry” would emerge. Thus, “the formative U.S. colleges of the 19th century advanced the democratization of higher learning.” Before the Revolution, very few colleges had been founded. Afterwards, however, greater numbers of colleges and

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid, 6.
universities developed in the Southeast, many named after the nation’s founders, such as James Madison University.\textsuperscript{20}

Unlike the European countries of Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland and England, which had been attracting and grooming the best and brightest students from across the region to universities like Oxford and the Sorbonne for centuries, the United States only began to dabble in educational exchange during the early 1830s, when students like John Diomatari from Greece attended and graduated from the University of Georgia.\textsuperscript{21} It would take another 40 years before cross-cultural educational exchange would become a formalized practice in the U.S., with Indiana University beginning to host “summer tramp” programs to send students and professors to Switzerland, Germany, England and France for further research and study.\textsuperscript{22} It was also the University of Indiana that founded a separate department, the School of Education, to conduct research on international education, encourage “education for world friendship” and foster in its students “a state of mind” able to “transcend national boundaries.”\textsuperscript{23} Similarly, well-renowned Princeton University established the first fellowship program between the U.S. and Tianjin, China.\textsuperscript{24} Aside from these important but sparse examples, U.S. institutions of higher learning remained comparably absent from the international exchange scene.

During the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, student mobility between institutions of higher education was limited.\textsuperscript{25} However, the rise of the World Fairs, which began in 1851 in London, effectively jumpstarted the desire for an increased exchange of ideas, culture and students

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item The Complete History of Study Abroad,” \textit{Go Overseas.com}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
between countries. Leaders primarily from the United States, France, England and Germany met at these expositions in part to discuss the importance of viewing education “beyond the nation state” and its use as a tool for “removing national prejudices” and improving overall cooperation and understanding. At the International Conference on Education in Philadelphia in 1876, the Commissioner of Education for the United States, John Eaton, presented his “plan” to create an organization that would successfully manage international education conferences.

It is no surprise, then, that internationalizing higher education became the subject of much discussion. One important critique of European higher education was that it created “a limited set of national elites.” Many scholars noted that higher education and exchange programs were used to reinforce the hegemony of the influential elites, and “perpetuate dominance of their status-group culture.” The Global North spread what it felt was important information to its most influential citizens, and beyond to those select few in the Global South. In essence, “the positioning of higher education on a global scale work[ed] to introduce new power relations and divisions between countries, institutions and people” ensuring that the Western hegemony of ideas would remain.

WORLD WARS I AND II

In the wake of the tragedies of World War I, many began to question the extent to which greater cooperation, understanding and peace could be fostered through educational exchange.

27 Ibid.
30 Ibid, 900.
Shortly thereafter, the World Federation of Education Associations (WFEA) emerged with the goal of uniting the “educational forces of the world” into “one great world organization.”32 Their ultimate plan was to develop a “curriculum framework in international education” that would focus less on domestic issues, and instead present an “international point of view.”33 The WFEA supported the teaching of international relations, foreign languages and cultures, and promoted study abroad and peace education, among other subjects.34 The World Conference of New Education Fellowship, supported by the National Education Association (NEWA/USA), began in 1923, and would sponsor two international conferences each year for European countries and the United States until 1936.35 Leading educational publications and magazines like *Education for a New Era: An International Quarterly Journal for the Promotion of Reconstruction in Education* were also founded in the years that followed.36

The efforts of these early international education pioneers led to the foundation of International Schools across Europe and the United States, with Germany hosting the first experimental Odenwald School. Switzerland followed suit and opened L’École Internationale de Genève and L’École d’Humanité by 1935.37 Geneva also became home to the International Bureau of Education, a member of UNESCO whose mission, then and now, remains the “promotion of] shared global understanding.”38 The IBE also founded the trademark

33 Ibid.  
36 Ibid, 16.  
37 Ibid, 19-22.  
International Conference on Education in 1934, which continues to meet to and impact worldwide education practices to this day.\(^\text{39}\)

More so after the atrocities of World War II, Europe became a fertile ground for international schools and cross-cultural educational exchange. During this time, political rationale came to the forefront, and “internationalisation as a means to promote national security and identity as well as peace and mutual understanding” was emphasized.\(^\text{40}\) Importantly, it was also during this period that “the United States [was] recognized as the world leader in higher education.”\(^\text{41}\)

Historian John Scott notes that throughout the 20\(^{th}\) century, “the modern American university elevated the mission of public service” and was the “world’s leading democratic, economic and military power.”\(^\text{42}\) Unlike Europe, the United States did not nationalize its higher educational institutions. Laurence Veysey, author of The Emergence of the American University (1965) found that U.S. institutions effectively combined “the ideals of teaching, research and public service.”\(^\text{43}\) From the late 1940s on, the U.S. would work exceptionally hard to attract and educate students from across the globe to its domestic colleges and universities in order to spread what it believed were the right values beyond its geographic borders.

COLD WAR ERA HIGHER EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

In the aftermath of World War II, “universities became more directly involved in the work of government and industry,” researching “energy development, space program[s] and even

\(^\text{39}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{43}\) Ibid, 24.
“economic growth.” It was during this time that the federal government also became the “dominant patron of major research universities,” both public and private. Partnerships between universities and particular industries, like technology, also emerged, leading many scholars of the era to question the extent to which higher education had become an “industry subservient to blind market forces.”

As the federal government began to have an even greater impact on the inner-workings of colleges and universities nationwide, it is no surprise that international students were increasingly viewed as strategic tools of foreign policy. Educational exchange during the Cold War and post Cold War era (1947–1991) initially began as a means of cultural and political diplomacy between the United States and Soviet Union. Educational author Heike Alberts explains, “after the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik into outer space,” a feat that effectively demonstrated their scientific and engineering expertise to the world, “the United States began to actively recruit scientists from overseas, especially from Europe.” Due to their fear of falling behind the Soviets, the United States became “strongly committed to attracting foreign talent, including international students” and by 1960, there were over 50,000 international students studying in the United States.

The architect of containment, George F. Kennan suggested that the U.S., “by all means have the maximum cultural exchange” with other nations to ensure that U.S. political, social and economic culture could spread beyond the homeland, and eventually defeat the rival system of

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46 Ibid.
the Soviet Union. Scholar Robin Shields relates that “international student enrollment played an important role in U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War” as offering education to “students from nonaligned countries asserted and maintained American supremacy as a producer of knowledge, created a generation of educated elites with favorable ties to the United States, and produced a skilled labor force that contributed to growth in strategically important areas.” The Soviets, in turn, responded in a similar manner by sending students, scholars and artists abroad to promote its culture, political ideology and economic form as the superior alternative to all others.

For the most part, Cold-War educational exchange sought to pull students from strategic locations across the world. In fact, Russia “only exchanged students almost exclusively with other socialist or communist countries.” It was only after 1989 that Russia “began to attract students from all over the world as a result of changing its policy to actively encourage the inward flow of foreign students.” The fear of a communist threat drove U.S. institutions to target potentially susceptible areas over more ‘secure’ ones. Aside from soliciting students in strategic fields like the sciences, the United States pooled students from Western Europe and even East Asia to further promote its liberal democratic values abroad and ensure that communism and Soviet influence would not prevail globally.

Essentially, higher education cross-cultural exchange was a tool for both sides during this propaganda war. While arguably not as direct as a tool as political rhetoric, ‘educational exchange’ was a critical tool through which the U.S. was able to establish greater soft power, and

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54 Ibid, 445.
project “favorable images [of] American products, technology” and, most importantly, its “way of life.” Along the lines of promoting propaganda abroad, President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved the establishment of the United States Information Agency (USIA) to “streamline the U.S. government’s overseas information programs, and make them more effective,” spending an estimated 2 billion dollars a year to promote American views. From 1953 until its shutdown in 1999, the USIA worked to improve public diplomacy “in support of U.S. foreign policy” by “communicating directly with foreign publics through a wide range of international information, educational and cultural exchange activities.”

As author Nigel M. Healey relates, “the United States, Soviet Union (USSR) and the United Kingdom used scholarships and funding regimes to encourage foreign students onto their universities’ campuses to further geo-political ends.” Thus, during the Cold War “public and private sectors worked together to build American cultural power in the world,” a power that would be effective enough to counter Soviet propaganda and ultimately, establish a form of American global hegemony.

Domestically too, the university was utilized by the United States government “as an agent of state power and as a tool of political ideology.” By providing funding to public universities, the government earned greater influence over course offerings, overall university development, and even convinced professors and students to submit to aptitude and ideological

57 Ibid.
60 Margaret O’Mara, “The Uses of the Foreign Student,” Social Science History 36, no. 4 (2012), 583.
assessment tests.\textsuperscript{61} During the McCarthy Era, heightened fear of the possible spread of Communism drove the University of Illinois to establish an on-campus ‘Security Office’ whose main purpose was to “[keep] all students and staff under constant surveillance for any sign of ‘subversiveness.’”\textsuperscript{62} Using training from the police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the domestic intelligence and security agency of the U.S. government, security officers were able to “root out any ‘subversies’ haunting the campus” in addition to their habitual work of “administering the photo ID program” and conducting investigations of rule infractions.\textsuperscript{63} The close relationship between the government and public research universities also allowed security officers to politically “scrutiniz[e] students and conduct “intelligence work.”\textsuperscript{64}

In conjunction with the USIA, it was also during the Cold War Era that the Fulbright program began. In the year 1945, the U.S. senator J. William Fulbright introduced a bill that would “call on the promotion of international good will through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science.”\textsuperscript{65} By 1946, under the Presidency of Truman, the bill became law, and the “flagship international educational exchange program,” Fulbright, was born.\textsuperscript{66} Rather than rely on domestic surveillance procedures and international propaganda alone, Fulbright allowed the U.S. to work directly alongside other countries to “set joint priorities and shape the program to meet shared needs” thus allowing them to ultimately promote peaceful cross-cultural educational exchange.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 320.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, 325-326.
\textsuperscript{64} Nicholas Wiseman, “Falsely Accused: Cold War Liberalism Reassessed,” \textit{The Historian}, 326.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
The Fulbright program, although founded and funded by the United States, is guided by the desires of all participating countries and their students, researchers and educators.68 Only the highest-achieving and most motivated students from participating countries are selected each year to receive funding towards their tuition, living costs and travel expenses.69 Students who earn the prestigious reputation of ‘Fulbright scholar’ are expected to return to their home country after completing their degree to share what they learn with their community. Upon their return, these students bring with them exposure to alternative ways of thinking and liberal values. The opportunities for prestigious academic research the program is able to offer its students are what have arguably made the Fulbright program the largest and most successful cross-cultural educational exchange program worldwide.70

Over the last 72 years the Fulbright program has continued to grow and expand. The Fulbright program is so renowned that many universities make a point to boast about and report the number of and diversity of Fulbright students in attendance each year.71 Today, it claims to have sent more than 360,000 students from the U.S. and other countries to participate in exchange programs, as well as teaching and research initiatives and now supports students from over 140 countries, colored on the map below.72

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68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
72 “History,” Fulbright U.S. Student Program.
While the total number of Fulbright students in attendance at U.S. colleges and universities is often viewed as an indicator of academic quality and prestige, it is not the only notion through which the supremacy of university’s academic program can be inferred. Other examples include generally high levels of international student enrollment, the quality of research conducted by university students and faculty, as well as the worldwide ranking system, of which multiple U.S. universities consistently rank in the top 10, top 20, and top 50.\textsuperscript{73}

Despite these alternatives, the Fulbright program remains the hallmark program for international student exchange. It is interesting to think that without the cultural, political and economic competition between the United States and the USSR, such a program may have not

come into existence till perhaps many more years later. Because of the political climate, however, the Fulbright program was readily supported by students and educators from around the world and has aided the U.S. in strengthening its soft power initiatives and establishing its ‘benevolent’ hegemonic status in world affairs. Cross-cultural educational exchange, like the Fulbright program, has greatly benefited both the U.S.’s system of higher education and the participant’s home country because it ensures that students come to learn in the U.S., but ultimately return to their home country to share their gained knowledge and experience. By the time the United States emerged as a super power at the end of the Cold War Era, it would attract an “international student populations in the millions.”

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CHAPTER III
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT REFORM IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11

“In recent years, much debate has surrounded the international student program of the United States. International students have been depicted as threats to national security (even as potential ‘terrorists’), ambassadors of international understanding, contributors to U.S. economic and scientific development, and excessive financial burdens on the economy.”

– Katalin Szelényi and Robert Rhoads

As cross-cultural educational exchange led in part by the Fulbright program continued to flourish, by early 2001, the number of international students studying in the United States reached 549,000. However, after 9/11, international student enrollment numbers greatly declined. And while it is unlikely that a “single political event [can] fully explain the changed patterns of international student enrollment,” after 9/11, America’s view of foreigners, and foreign student exchange underwent a dramatic change. One of the reasons the enrollment numbers declined was that the visa processing procedure became increasingly challenging for students of certain ethnicities. As one of the hijackers was found to have gotten into the country by using a student visa, lawmakers stepped into action to prevent this from ever happening again. In the words of Joseph Nye Jr., acquiring a U.S. visa “bec[ame] a nightmare of red tape.”

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place after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 created new barriers for foreign students trying to enter the United States.”

Policy makers argued that changes in student visa application and issuance protocol could help to prevent future suicide bombers from entering and staying in the country unchecked. Unfortunately, these changes harmed many aspiring to become a part of U.S. educational exchange programs.

By 2002, students from alleged state “sponsors of terrorism” like Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Syria, North Korea and Cuba were more frequently denied visas. Beyond those with origins from a perceived ‘threatening’ home country, students in technology, nuclear, biomedical, robotics, or energy-related fields were also increasingly denied entry. Although one of the terrorist hijackers gained entry into the U.S. on a F-1 student visa, the other eighteen used business or tourist visas. As it was also believed that other terrorists had taken courses in the U.S. that taught them the skills necessary to fly planes, make bombs or cause other forms of disruption to society, many citizens and policy makers rallied for greater limitations of hazardous fields of study for students with certain racial backgrounds.

Unsuspecting international students from the Middle East transformed seemingly overnight from average students into high security threats to the U.S. government. In his publication for Harvard University’s National Review, George Borjas describes how the United States government began to “rethink” its acceptance of foreign students seeking to earn degrees only after the idea that “foreign students might be a physical threat to Americans” went

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10 Ibid.
mainstream. He notes that while the U.S. had bans on limitations that would prevent threatening knowledge from being taught to foreign students, and ultimately used by other countries after the student’s return. The fear that the acceptance and education of foreign students at U.S. colleges and universities could be detrimental to U.S. interests was embraced by many citizens across the country, and this fear inevitably offered the necessary support for major policy changes surrounding the issuance of visas to international visitors.

Perhaps influenced by Borjas, who posited that it may be better for “foreign students belonging to particular national-origin groups to be barred from entering particular types of educational programs,” limitations for Muslim men quickly went into effect. Inspired by the combined sentiments of frightened and enraged citizens, and politically charged intellectuals, the Bush Administration enacted a new visa policy that sought to delay and prevent the entry or individuals from the Middle East and beyond, from Pakistan, Malaysia and even Indonesia. Face-to-face interviews at consulates that were previously conducted for only the students applying from “risky” nations were now required of all international applicants. After this change, “the visa application process bec[a]me too daunting” for many researchers, teachers and business travelers, furthering the decline in international visitors coming to the U.S.

In addition, the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) also aided the Bush Administration in ‘cracking-down’ on possible foreign threats. Scholars found that the

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
PATRIOT Act, in particular, “sent a message that the U.S. was not as welcoming a place for foreign academics as in the past.”\textsuperscript{18} Because of this, other countries like Australia, New Zealand, the UK and France made it easier for students and academics to get jobs after graduation.\textsuperscript{19} They also “created more relevant curricula and degree programs for a world market and provided financial aid to foreign students, particularly at the graduate level.”\textsuperscript{20} Competition from rival countries for international student enrollment at institutions of higher education was on the rise.

Despite skepticism surrounding a possible decrease in the number of international students as a result of changing policies, in their study of international graduate students in the United States, Szelényi and Rhoads discovered a decline to be under way. In fact, many of the students they interviewed attributed personal concern and fear about “the difficulties of obtaining a visa and passing through immigration when entering the United States” to the “especially problematic post 9/11 climate.”\textsuperscript{21} A Chinese graduate student they interviewed commented, “I don’t know why the U.S. government is so excluding to foreigners. It just hurts its image and I’m pretty disgusted with this policy.”\textsuperscript{22} Another student from Brazil complained, “I am constantly reminded that I’m not a citizen, that I don’t belong. You know, I’m a foreigner; things are made harder for me. I don’t have access to a lot of things.”\textsuperscript{23}

Meanwhile, rather than focus on what it could do to ensure that higher education remained competitive and inviting, the Department of Homeland Security created SEVIS, or the Student Exchange Visitor Information System, to keep track of international students entering and exiting the country on F-1 and M-1 visas, as well as J-1 exchange visitor program.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 36.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
participants. Beyond this, academic institutions were required to supply SEVIS with the student’s personal information, including their name, citizenship, age, course of study, proof of funding, dependents, address, as well as their expected arrival and graduation dates.” SEVIS was viewed as “a critical tool in [the United States’] mission to protect national security while supporting the legal entry of more than one million F, M and J nonimmigrants for education and cultural exchange” and continues to be used to track incoming and outgoing international students to this day.

After Bush’s visa reform and the creation of the SEVIS system, the opportunities that international visitors had become increasingly dependent on the type of visa that they were first issued. F-1 visas were intended for full-time students at academic institutions or enrolled in language training programs while M-1 visas were issued to international students attending vocational or nonacademic institutions. Both F-1 and M-1 visas allowed international students to attend programs below the higher education level as long as they were SEVP or “Student and Exchange Visitor Program” certified. There were also special student visas, the F-3 and M-3 visas, issued specifically to Canadian and Mexican students who commuted to the United States for full or part time academic or vocational training. Finally, J-1 visas were issued to those international students who came to the U.S. for “exchange programs, graduate-level training, summer work-travel” as well as to visiting scholars and professors.

26 “SEVIS By The Numbers: Biannual Report On International Student Trends.”
27 Jie Zong and Jeanna Batalova, “International Students in the United States,” The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute, migrationpolicy.org, last modified May 12, 2016, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/international-students-united-states
28 “SEVIS By The Numbers: Biannual Report On International Student Trends.”
30 Ibid.
Once international students successfully graduate from their academic institution they must obtain an alternative visa to continue to live and work in “specialty occupations” in the U.S.\(^3\) Of all the visas issued for working internationals, the H1-B visa is the most coveted, because it allows those with advanced degrees to hold jobs “unfilled by American workers” for up to six years.\(^3\) Yet, H1-B visas are capped, and as a result, the application and selection process can be very competitive. If denied, students must make difficult career and life adjustments.

Along this vein, in their 2006 publication scholars Hazen and Alberts noted that “international student numbers in the U.S. steadily declined” due to “real and perceived difficulties in obtaining student visas”, background checks, tracking inside the U.S. and “more stringent regulations regarding travel.”\(^3\) Yet, despite the efforts of those in Washington to “expedite student visas” multiple, often unaddressed, problems continued to persist.\(^3\) Other scholars noted then that if the “feelings of being unwanted and excluded” were left unchecked, international students were likely to experience alienation and miss out on key opportunities to make valuable connections with other students, thereby downplaying the potential for “greater intercultural encounters and understanding of transnational connections in politics and the economy” which the United States worked so hard to achieve during the Cold War era.\(^3\)

Many in the U.S. government were unhappy with the Bush Administration’s decisions regarding changing visa policies and heightened security measures directed towards international

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\(^3\) Jie Zong and Jeanna Batalova, “International Students in the United States,” The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute.


\(^3\) Ibid.
visitors. Writer Raymond Bonner quoted a senior American diplomat in the Middle East as being supportive of not fewer, but “more exchange programs” between the U.S. and Middle Eastern countries because he viewed them as “the very people we want to engage, want to influence.” If the U.S. were to cut off cross-cultural educational exchange with countries associated with terrorism, he feared that any chance of a positive influence through exposure to liberal democratic values or an open and challenging educational environment, would be lost, critically weakening U.S. foreign relation potential. Regardless of where they hail from, international students who study in the U.S. and learn about American freedoms and culture “often return home with a positive attitude” towards the United States. “That alone,” associate director at the National Association of International Educators, Victor Johnson believes, is a “huge foreign-policy asset” not to be discounted. Concerns that increased security measures would lead U.S. institutions of higher education to “reject the next Bill Gates” were also widespread.

Beyond the deliberations of politicians and academics, news articles from as early as November 2001 focused in on the dilemma of international students in the wake of 9/11. Reported struggles of international students unable to re-enter the country on issued visas, or being prevented from receiving a new visa, filled the papers. An article from the Economist deliberately called attention to the vital role international students play in the U.S. higher

38 Ibid.
educational system, and hypothesized that a significant drop in their enrollment due to changes in visa policy would severely impact the U.S. economy.\textsuperscript{40}

Staff writer for \textit{The Christian Science Monitor}, Mark Clayton, too, found that without international students to attend, “the quality of research would suffer” at U.S. institutions of higher education.\textsuperscript{41} Even though the majority of targeted Muslims were “certainly not terrorist material at all” they continued to be singled-out and prevented from obtaining their visas in a timely manner.\textsuperscript{42} This targeting, in turn, had a negative impact on the enrollment of international international students at U.S. colleges and universities; especially in science and engineering programs.\textsuperscript{43} Heike Alberts noted in his 2007 article for \textit{GeoJournal} that “some students are now fearful of travelling home at all, even for family emergencies, because they do not want to risk getting delayed.”\textsuperscript{44} In addition, this fear of being unable to re-enter also makes it difficult for “students to attend conferences outside the United States or carry out research projects in other countries.”\textsuperscript{45}

Racial targeting was not limited to students with Middle Eastern origins, however, as 400 Indonesian students were prevented from entering the U.S. to continue their degree programs, followed by several hundred more in Singapore and Malaysia.\textsuperscript{46} In addition, some reports found that students from China, a state not affiliated with Islam nor known to sponsor terrorism, were “among the most affected by post 9/11 backlash.”\textsuperscript{47} A PhD student at the University of California at Berkeley, having experienced the inconsistency of visa processing, expressed his

\textsuperscript{41}Mark Clayton, “Open Doors,” \textit{The Christian Science Monitor.com}.
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44}Heike C. Alberts, “Beyond the headlines: changing patterns in international student enrollment in the Untied States, \textit{GeoJournal} 68, 144.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid.
desire for American citizens to “realize [that] not everybody foreign is a terrorist, just a handful” and to adjust policy accordingly. With these wide-spread visa reforms, however, the Bush administration promoted a unwelcoming message of international intolerance that made it difficult for the U.S. to “educate the next generation of world leaders” to be supportive of the liberal democratic order.

IMPACT OF BUSH REFORM QUANTITATIVELY MEASURED: THE OPEN DOORS REPORT

Beyond the speculated trends of decline during the Bush Era, we can also look at data collected by one of the best international student data collection agencies—the IIE. The IIE has been publishing a yearly ‘Open Doors Report’ since 1949 with the help of the USIA, to chart the enrollment pattern of international students and scholars in U.S. higher education.

For the 2001-2002 school term, the U.S. hosted international students grew from 547,867 to 582,996. By 2002-2003 school term, however, international student growth decreased dramatically by 5.8%. While the overall population increased, it only increased by .6%, to reach a total of 586,323. Notably, by the 2003-2004 school year, a time by which visa changes and SEVIS would have taken effect, international student enrollment experienced a significant 2.4% decline.

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49 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
The Open Doors Report from 2006-2007 year and associated chart above illustrates that projected decline reports, which emerged immediately after the Bush administration’s visa policy changes, turned out to be fairly accurate. Despite claims that 9/11 did “not appear to have had a negative impact on the desire of international students to come here,” the slowed growth in international students for the 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 school year, followed by the sharp decline from 2003-2004 lead credence to journalists and scholars who, at the time, posited that changes in visa policy under the Bush administration after 9/11 would alter the overall
enrollment of international students across the United States in a negative way.55 Prior to 9/11, no clear decline was underway. Yet, following reports noting the “cumbersome visa process,” limitations on the amount of time international students could work in the U.S. after graduation, as well as “higher university fees” and “greater competition” from institutions of higher education in Europe and Australia, the U.S. experienced a severe drop in international student enrollment that led to a 10% decrease in America’s foreign student share.56

Critics of this analysis would suggest that external factors like “increasing competition from other host countries” as well as “changing economic and educational conditions in sending countries” occurring at the time certainly played a major part in determining how many foreign students applied to and enrolled at U.S. campuses.57 Beyond these external factors, however, the internal factors of visa reform and associated political rhetoric significantly sped up what may have been an already declining trend. It also made recovery from this decline a lengthier process, as evidenced through the slow climb at the end of the Bush presidency. By 2006, decline was likely “leveling off” due to the efforts of the U.S. educational institutions and government to “reverse this trend” by improving visa processes and by sending the message that “foreign students [were] welcome to study in the United States.”58

While it would be difficult to attribute the decline in international students in its entirety to Bush administration policy and reforms, it seems fair to suggest that clear changes in enrollment patterns are visible before and after 9/11 and the associated Bush administration. This idea, of relating declining international student enrollment to a political leader and his policy, is

56 “Chillier on campus?,” The Economist.com.
once again gaining ground as scholars and reporters today hypothesize that Trump policy and rhetoric will have a severely negative effect on the number of international students coming to the U.S. to study, work, and live.
CHAPTER IV

THE “TRUMP EFFECT” AND CHANGING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT U.S. INSTITUTIONS

“Today more than ever, an exclusive focus on national differences blinds us to the sources and benefits of internal diversity. People worldwide contribute different values and different skills— their diversity produces a rich harmony.”

-Noel F. Mc Ginn

Like the Bush Era after 9/11, many perceive that the negative political climate of the U.S. under Trump and proposed visa changes are deterring international students from enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities. Speculation of decline attributed to the travel ban has resulted in multiple reports of “bureaucratic hassles and political hostilities” that have made many international students feel that “studying, teaching or doing research in the U.S.” is more trouble than it is worth. While the overall number of international students continuing their study in the U.S. is reportedly up 2% from the previous year, new enrollment of international students declined by 3%, with certain states reporting an average decline of 7%. Altogether, the headlines, SEVIS and Open Doors Report data paint a concerning picture of international student enrollment trends.

Here, I examine how internal factors, like unwelcoming messages towards foreigners, the fear for safety, and even the difficulties in obtaining visas and employment after graduation, as

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well as how improved education abroad contribute to international student enrollment changes and a weakening of U.S. hegemony.

THE CURRENT CLIMATE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

With the overall yield rate of returning international students across the U.S. predicted to experience a 2% decrease, from 26% to 24% by the fall semester of 2017, the exploration into the relationship between changing international student yield and U.S. policies has never been more timely. But what relationship, if any, can be determined from the existing literature and speculative articles surrounding international student yield for U.S. colleges and universities for the 2017-2018 term, or beyond, in future years? The SEVIS report published in June of 2017, presents several findings of key interest.

The United States, as a hegemon of higher education, currently hosts students from more than 231 countries and territories worldwide. In May of 2017, the U.S. reached a total of 1,184,735 international students. A sizable majority, roughly 77% or 915,612 of these international students come from Asia alone. Although East and South Asia are both represented, China and India, in particular, dominate in this cross-cultural educational exchange, reaching a total of 362,368 and 206,698 students respectively for the 2017 term. While the total number of international students in the U.S. found in the 2016-2017 Open Door Report (1,078,822) is lower than the number presented in the 2016-2017 SEVIS report (1,184,735), their findings both support that an upwards trend of international students occurred nationally for the

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5 “SEVIS By The Numbers: Biannual Report On International Student Trends.”
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
2016-2017 school year. Beyond the increase in international students in 2016-2017, the U.S. has also experienced an overall trend of growth in international student enrollment for the past seven years.

Even though the U.S. successfully hosts a multitude of students from around the globe, most of them pursue degrees in two particular fields, and no, English is not one of them! Although English practice is an undeniable component of each student’s education in the United States, the majority of international students hope to earn degrees in business and the STEM related fields of Engineering (39%), Computer and Information Science (28%) and Biomedicine (8%). As the U.S. is believed to offer “some of the best STEM programs in the world” international students flock to the colleges and universities that can provide them with the necessary courses and skills to become successful in these fields. In fact, in the STEM programs alone, American colleges and universities saw an 8% increase in international student enrollment from 2016 to 2017. Despite the fact that the U.S. is experiencing continual growth, it appears that the amount by which international student enrollment rises each year in the U.S. is dropping.

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8 Ibid.  
9 Ibid.  
10 Ibid.
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<th>Year</th>
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Table 2: Percent Annual Change of International Students 2010-2017 created from data taken from the 2016-2017 Open Doors Reports.

In the table above, we can see that annual percent change (in bold) for the 2016-2017 school term decreased by almost half—from 7.1% to 3.4%. From 2014-2015 to 2015-2016, the annual percent change also decreased substantially, from 10.0 to 7.1%. From these numbers, it is clear that the percentage of growth is slowing down, and has decreased by a significant amount from 2015 to 2017 alone. As the data in table one shows, a similar decline in annual percent change occurred between the 2001-2002 to 2002-2003 terms. As discussed previously, many scholars and journalists attributed the slowing growth and eventual decline to Bush visa policy changes and unwelcoming rhetoric directed towards Muslims.

Another important trend noted by *Inside Higher Ed*, is that decreases and increases in international student yield are not occurring evenly across all colleges and universities.\(^{11}\)

Location matters. Any decrease in international student enrollment is predicted to have devastating effects on middle and small-sized universities in the South and Mid-West, especially at the graduate level.\(^{12}\) These mid-tier institutions do not have a great advantage in attracting

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\(^{12}\) Ibid.
international students to enroll as international students typically wish to attend universities that are “large, urban and prestigious” or that specialize in STEM degree programs.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, elite American colleges and universities like Harvard or Yale are unlikely to experience any significant decline in international student applications or enrollment because their reputations are so well established. However many “second and third-tier colleges and universities may well suffer” from any significant enrollment decrease.\textsuperscript{15} Geographically, Northeastern universities are predicted to experience the least amount of decline compared to


\textsuperscript{14} “SEVIS By The Numbers: Biannual Report On International Student Trends.”

Southern universities, where enrollment and attendance numbers may heavily diminish.\textsuperscript{16} Aside from enriching the lives of their student-body, second and third tier institutions rely on international students to fill programs and pay higher tuition. As such, any decrease in international student enrollment would cripple these institutions.

In fact, one institution in particular, the Lamar College of Engineering has commented that it has already experienced a significant drop in international students for the 2017-2018 school year.\textsuperscript{17} They attribute this drop almost entirely to “American political rhetoric.”\textsuperscript{18} Article author Teitz argues that beyond Lamar College, the state of Texas itself is facing a crisis after experiencing a \textit{two-thirds} decrease in applications from international students to its public colleges.\textsuperscript{19} There seems to be a consensus that the pattern of international student applications and enrollments in U.S. universities is undergoing a non-uniform change that may result in significant consequences for many domestic academic institutions.

Many of these colleges and universities worry that the enrollment of whole nationalities and religious groups initially targeted by the travel ban, namely Muslims, may plummet in the 2018-2019 school year and for many years to follow.\textsuperscript{20} While the ban itself has ended, 33\% of a 200,000 August student survey expressed their greater disinterest in studying in the U.S. after Trump came to power.\textsuperscript{21} The opinions of such students are expected “to have an impact” on enrollment patterns “this year and next year.”\textsuperscript{22} In article published by the \textit{Springfield Kellie Bancalari, “The Trump era hasn’t badly hurt international student enrollment after all,”} \textit{USA TODAY College.}\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ibid.
  \item Ibid.
  \item Bancalari, Kellie, “The Trump era hasn’t badly hurt international student enrollment after all,” \textit{USA TODAY College}.\textsuperscript{18}
  \item Ibid.
  \item Ibid.\textsuperscript{19}
  \item “More Evidence of Trump Impact on International Admissions,” \textit{Inside Higher Ed.}\textsuperscript{21}
  \item Ibid.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{itemize}
Newsl
[527x744]eader, Missouri State University reported that it experienced its “first drop in international students” of roughly 20 percent, and attributes this drop indirectly to the travel ban. Although MSU had recently enrolled “fewer than 10 students” from the countries directly affected by the travel ban, they feared that the ban has painted the U.S. and its centers for higher learning as unwelcoming and potentially dangerous places to enroll in. Director of international programs Brad Bodenhausen hopes to assure the public that MSU remains a “welcoming community” for international students” where they can have a “healthy, happy and academically successful experience” despite negative political rhetoric.

But what can we really tell from a slowing positive annual change percentage, and the differences in enrollment for universities across the country? Regardless of what factor or combination of factors has contributed the most to changing enrollment patterns of international students at U.S. colleges and universities, we cannot dismiss the fact that some notable trends have begun to emerge. However, the extent to which these trends are impacted by internal (domestic) factors compared to external (international) factors is debatable. If international cross-cultural educational exchange is reaching its peak, and is leading to continually slowing growth in every participating country, external factors are likely to be the cause. However, if the number of international students worldwide is still rising, but fewer international students are ultimately choosing to enroll in U.S. colleges and universities, it is likely that both internal and external factors are driving this change. Therefore, in the next section, I will explore how domestic factors like changes in visa policy and incidents of violence as well as external factors

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
like globalization may be used to explain current changes in international student enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities.

DOMESTIC FACTORS AFFECTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Since his inauguration on January 20, 2017, the President and his political views and commentaries have dominated the media. Although there was speculative journalism and academic discussion positing how his presidency would affect and change foreign diplomacy, it was not until the President’s executive order 13769, informally known as the ‘Muslim travel ban,’ that concern for future enrollment of international students in American higher education became a major topic of consideration for those outside of higher education. Swarms of news articles like “The Sky Is Falling…or Is it?,” “Optimism about US International students numbers is misplaced” and “Despite Liberal Outcry, Trump Didn’t cause international enrollment to drop at U.S. colleges” dotted the headlines, each offering alternative perspectives and facts on the question of international student decline at American colleges and universities.26

Although the travel ban has expired, and international students nationwide have been able to continue their semesters of study, the ban served as important wake-up call for students and educators across the United States. Kent Hopkins, vice president of enrollment services at Arizona State University, spoke out in support of a ruling on the travel ban that he hoped would ultimately allow “students enrolled at public and private universities throughout the United

States [to] still have the ability to complete their education."\textsuperscript{27} Uncertainty about what the future might look like for international students and higher education in the U.S. looms, as scholars and reporters alike question: what needs to be done before things get worse—before international students forsake the opportunities available for higher education in the United States and enroll elsewhere?

Although the enrollment of international students continued to rise from 2016 to 2017, the percent increase dropped, and the overall yield of international students declined from 26\% to 24\%— the largest recorded drop in six years.\textsuperscript{28} Beyond general yield, international students in Master’s programs have also fallen from 26\% to 19\% for the fall 2017 school term.\textsuperscript{29} But why why is this so?

Authors alike have posited that a potential decline in international students attending U.S. colleges and universities is likely affected by several internal factors, each tied to the political climate of the United States.\textsuperscript{30} I will bring attention to the two internal factors that seem to emerge most frequently. The first of these internal factors is the increasing difficulties for international students to secure a visa for study and work, even the opportunity to earn scholarships to study with in the U.S. The second factor is international student’s growing concern for the security environment due to the appearance of increasing acts of violence directed against other foreign students.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Kellie Bancalari, “The Trump era hasn’t badly hurt international student enrollment after all,” USA TODAY College.
\end{flushleft}
VISA POLICIES AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES

One important consequence of the Trump presidency affecting international student enrollment is the difficulty of getting student and work visas. International students ideally “want to get a job, and get their money back” and countries like the U.S., which are experiencing less-favorable economic change, are becoming less attractive to international students.31 In recent months president Trump has expressed his intention to “curtail the OPT (optional practical training) extension period,” a critical window that allows graduate students, in particular, to remain in the United States for up to three years after graduating.32 With discussion about ensuring greater job opportunities for Americans, and the increasing difficulty of obtaining the highly competitive H-1B work visa, international students today are more likely to attend higher education institutions in countries where they have a greater chance of securing work after graduating.33 Should international students choose to earn their degrees in other countries, the U.S. would lose a “primed international workforce” that has been particularly beneficial in fields like computer science and technology.34 Despite the fact that there remains no “cap” on the number of H1-B work visas for those working in “research and academic institutes,” many international students have experienced great “anxiety and fear,” that today, makes many of them feel that trying to work or study in the U.S. is not worthwhile.35

34 Ibid.
VIOLENCE

The greater visibility of violence against foreign students or immigrants in the U.S. is also a contributing factor in the decline of new international students enrollment. The perception of a less-welcoming environment for foreign students, as acts of violence and hate-crimes paint the United States in a violent light, is rising.36 One of the most frequently asked questions of international families when they meet with college councilors is, “does everyone in America have a gun?” Before the shooting of a Japanese student in Baton Rouge during the 1980s, Japan was the “top sender of students to the U.S,”yet, after the event, Japanese student enrollment numbers began to decline.37 Today, Japanese students make up only 2 percent of the international student body. Similarly, in 2015 alone, three Muslim UNC Chapel Hill students were shot by a fellow classmate. Unfortunately, this incident spurred great political discussion in Muslim countries surrounding whether or not study in the U.S. would be safe for their students.38 Just last year in Kansas, an Indian engineer was killed by gunfire in a bar.39 Labeled as a possible hate crime, outraged Indian news sources linked the crime to “America First” rhetoric.40 With such striking instances of violence, it is no surprise that safety concerns may be influencing international students when they decide which colleges and universities to enroll in.41

40 Ibid.
41 Kellie Bancalari, “The Trump era hasn’t badly hurt international student enrollment after all.”
COMPETING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS FROM ABROAD

Beyond the incessant internal speculation, especially regarding international student safety and visa difficulties, a major external threat to U.S. hegemony in higher education remains: increased competition from universities outside of the U.S. in attracting international students. After all, the U.S. is just one of many countries participating in the global knowledge economy, seeking to project its soft power to other countries by attracting and educating foreign students. Scholars now argue that “new patterns” of international student travel, featuring “a two-way flow” have emerged, as less-competitive developing countries are better able to attract talent from developed countries.42 They attribute this change to developing countries “improved economic conditions, standardized legislations,” the “narrowing gap with developed countries,” and increased “growth opportunities.”43 Increased “integration and comparability across education systems” is further increasing the number of international students in higher education, as they are able to “become more mobile in their educational endeavors.”44

We see China, in particular, increasingly embracing transformative soft power policies aided by technology and interconnectivity in order to make their government and culture seem more attractive to foreigners. In 2006, China was the 6th most popular education destination, with a total of 141,000 international students.45 By comparison, in more recent years China’s Beijing University has recruited more international students and scholars to their academic

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43 Ibid, 106.
programs. This action is, in some ways, a ‘challenge’ to the U.S.’s preponderance in higher education. Because China recognizes the superiority of higher education outside of its borders, it is seeking to improve domestic programs at least in part, by pooling talent from abroad. Around 40% of the faculty employed at Beijing University, China’s most prestigious university, have been trained at foreign institutions, especially in the United States. China also seems determined to “improve the quality and research culture of its own universities” to “retain and educate more students domestically.”

If any country becomes able to successfully attract a large number of international students or retain a major portion of their domestic students at home universities, the United States would experience a significant decrease in international student enrollment that would be detrimental to U.S. soft power initiatives and economic interests. In fact, many scholars and researchers argue that despite the fact that “graduate education remains America’s strong suit, particularly in engineering, the sciences, and business management, the U.S.’s overall “world market share of international students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels is eroding.” If left unchecked, it is likely that the “US’s international ranking in education attainment levels will erode further over the next decade without a major effort at the state and federal level and by colleges and universities.” America needs to “think more strategically about how each piece of the international and global education puzzle fits together as an integrated whole,” and one way they can do this is by supporting “more internationally focused

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47 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid, 43.
universit[ies].” As Bernan asserts, “it is evident that international interconnectedness—globalization—has increased and will be increasing in higher education in the future,” thus, “national systems of higher education can no longer be regarded as closed systems.”

IIT-Kanpur deputy director Manindra Agrawal echoes these findings in his comments, “students are getting better opportunities back home. Also with the growing uncertainty on getting work visas for US, many students are discouraged.” Countries that can offer international students a welcoming environment, with ample educational and work opportunities, are likely to be very successful in attracting further enrollment. Their success would inevitably weaken the U.S.’s preponderance in global higher education, and may also have an effect on the nation’s ability to spread its liberal values and democratic ideals abroad. In addition, too much ethnonationalism may lead America to greater “ethnic conflict and war.”

International students hoping to avoid arduous visa processes, restrictions on work after graduation or threats to safety can easily look to other countries for higher education opportunities—and many of them are. An article from *The Opinion* relates how the travel ban, which allegedly led to an “increase in the number of visa refusals” has made the U.S. more susceptible to globalization trends in higher education today. Countries like Canada, that presently promote a “big unifying theme of equity” are “reaping the benefits of the Trump effect, with record levels of applications from overseas students seeing Canada as a North American

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51 Ibid, 44.
alternative to the United States.”\textsuperscript{57} The Opinion author Philip Altbach calls the optimism about international student enrollment in U.S. universities and colleges “misplaced” because of a trend towards “more plurality in global student flows.”\textsuperscript{58}

Yet, not all believe that changing enrollment trends can be attributed to the Trump administration. Maguerite Dennis’s article, “Dwindling US international student numbers? Don’t blame Trump!” suggests that long before Trump was elected President, international students were already increasing their enrollment at universities in other countries. Australia, for example, experienced international students enrollment growth of 12% in 2016.\textsuperscript{59} Similarly, China has recently surpassed the U.S. as “the leading host country for international branch campuses, enrolling an estimated 180,000 students worldwide.”\textsuperscript{60} These institutions are also offering cheaper, attractive alternatives to American colleges and universities, as “affordability” is a major concern for international students “when considering whether or not to attend college in the United States.”\textsuperscript{61}

Competition between countries to attract international students is growing for economic reasons as well, as they remain a “significant profit source” for most universities.\textsuperscript{62} While the U.S. currently hosts over 1 million international students, the market share of international


\textsuperscript{58} Philip G. Altbach, “Optimism about US international student numbers is misplaced,” \textit{Times Higher Ed}.

\textsuperscript{59} Marguerite Dennis, “Dwindling US international student numbers? Don’t blame Trump!,” \textit{Times Higher Education}.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{62} Claudette Riley, “MSU braces for its first drop in international students, \textit{Springfield Newsleader}.”
students is decreasing due to increased competition from foreign countries like China, Australia and Canada.  

For these many social, political and economic reasons, students have become more open to attending college in countries beyond the United States. Changes in enrollment patterns are most likely due to both American political rhetoric and the improved opportunities for higher education beyond the United States. As the perceived gap between American and foreign universities continues to shrink, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and even China are likely to host even more international students at their college and university campuses in subsequent years. As Douglass and Edelstein relate, “there are already signs that the world market for student talent is shifting to the benefit of the U.S.’s competitors, and in bad economic times we may find that shift accelerating.” To demonstrate how both the American political environment environment and globalization have driven the recent changes in international student enrollment, over the next few pages I provide a brief analysis of a ‘rival’ country in higher education, Canada.

CANADA: A CLOSER LOOK AT A HIGHER EDUCATION RIVAL

One important ‘rival’ to the U.S. in higher education today is Canada. In a publication titled, “Attracting International Talent,” from May of 2017 from the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), Laura Cooper analyzes the rise of international student enrollment in Canada. Like America, a significant majority of the international students studying in Canada come from

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China and India. In the graph below extracted from her report, we can see the sharp growth in enrollment of international students at Canadian colleges in universities over a period of less than 10 years.

When compared to American higher education, Canadian education ranks 7th globally and charges an average of $11,000 less than the U.S. in tuition and fees. Universities in Canada are also more inclined to offer international students financial assistance, something “incredibly rare for international students in the United States,” especially at the undergraduate level.

Cooper also finds that the “rise of a global middle class,” highlighted in the graph below, combined with Canadian academic prestige and affordable tuition rates positively correlate with

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67 Ibid.
68 Abigail Hess, “Why students are choosing to go to college in Canada instead of the United States,” CNBC MAKE IT.
higher international student enrollment trends.\textsuperscript{69} Beyond this, Canadian colleges and universities are attempting to “capitalize on the shifting sentiment in the U.S.” by specially encouraging the enrollment of groups targeted by the immigration ban. In 2017, Canada successfully reported experiencing a “Trump Bump” in international student applications and enrollment in higher education, particularly if they are able to increasingly monopolize the enrollment of certain ethnicities.\textsuperscript{70}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{The_Growing_Global_Middle_Class.png}
\caption{The Growing Global Middle Class}
taken from Cooper “Attracting International Talent,” \textit{Royal Bank of Canada}.
\end{figure}

In the previous section I mentioned that we would need to consider global international student enrollment trends to determine whether or not the U.S. ‘share’ is effectively declining or not. As Cooper’s publication shows, with the emergence of a global middle class in countries worldwide, international student enrollment in other countries is expected to continue to rise, not decline. Each year, \textit{more} international students seek educational opportunities abroad. However,

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
it appears that the countries they select to study in are becoming more varied. From this, we can see that although cross-cultural educational exchange may not be on the decline, the U.S. hegemony in higher education may well be.

In short, competing institutions of higher education in other countries are successfully attracting greater numbers of foreign students to their programs than in previous years because they are aware of international students’ concerns in specific areas and are able to appeal to their sensibilities surrounding these issues better than American institutions currently can. With other countries increasing their yield of international students through their “solid economies and welcoming policies,” the United States will need to step up, rather than step down, its academic game to ensure that it may once again earn a reputation as a welcoming and safe country for international students to study in.71

Thus, in order for the United States to remain competitive, and ensure that international students continue to come to it for higher education and work, the U.S. must work quickly to address international student’s concerns for safety, for racial and cultural prejudice, for affordable education, for smoother visa processing, and for greater work possibilities. Without effective change, negative changes in enrollment are likely to grow and cause both educational and economic disruptions.

71 Altbach, Philip G., “Optimism about US international student numbers is misplaced,” *Times Higher Ed.*
CHAPTER V

CASE STUDY OF OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

EXPLANATION OF CHOICE OF CASE STUDY

Nationwide data collected during 2017 has limited predictive power. Authors Brajkovic and Helms attempted an analysis of international student trends using existing data from the IIE, and determined that it is too soon to tell if any possible effects of presidential political policy and rhetoric are affecting international student numbers at the national level.

With the limited amount of data available from leading sources SEVIS and the Open Door Reports on international students for the 2017-2018 school term, and the difficulty researchers have had in assessing the current trend in international student enrollment, I felt that it would be best to gather my own data by conducting a case study of international students at my home institution, Old Dominion University (ODU). Through this study, I hoped to see if I could draw any concrete conclusions surrounding both the predicted decrease in new international student enrollment and the unrest of those returning to studies to the U.S. political climate under president Trump.

This case study of international students at Old Dominion University has allowed me to assess the potential disconnect between major national trend discussion of ‘decline’ and the “local realities.” While a 2% decline nationally in new international student enrollment, or a 1.3% increase in total international student populations may both be small changes, these

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3 Ibid.
percentages are not distributed evenly across all colleges and universities. Nationally, nearly forty percent of colleges have experienced a decline in applications from international students due to concern for securing visas, for safety, and the growing perception of the United States as unwelcoming to foreigners.\(^4\) Therefore, a case study of a regional state university, like Old Dominion University, which has a substantial international student population and is predicted to see greater decreases in international students in future years, is especially beneficial for research of this topic.

To complete my case study, I first look at changes in enrollment information for the university during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school terms and compare these findings with nationwide trends recorded in SEVIS. Using enrollment numbers from fall 2016 to the spring 2018 school term, I draw limited conclusions about the possibility of a noticeable ‘decline’ at ODU during the Trump era.

From this point, I use my confidential survey questionnaires and interviews to focus my attention towards the students that remain at the university during this time, and assess how the changes in policy have impacted (or not impacted) their time as students, their everyday lives, and ultimately, their future career plans. I also provide an inside look at how international students perceive and rate the quality of education and social experiences they have had while studying at the university and living in the United States. While it is important to trace the pattern of enrollment, I find it equally necessary to consider how persisting students feel about their experience, as their positive or negative impressions are likely to have a direct effect on the future state of international student enrollment at the University. Finally, I conclude the study

with a look at research limitations and offer suggestions to researchers who may choose to continue this project in future years.

SNAPSHOT OF ODU AND ITS INTERNATIONAL STUDENT BODY

Like the early European medieval institutions of higher education, Old Dominion University has grown and changed over many years. Located in the Eastern part of the United States, Old Dominion University was founded in 1930 in Norfolk, Virginia, as an extension of the College of William and Mary to educate both “teachers and engineers.” By 1962, however, ODU became an independent college, and with this change, began to offer master’s degrees (1964) and Ph.D’s (1971). Over the years, ODU has built up a reputation as a quality research university and has become a “powerhouse for higher education,” offering students degrees across six colleges: Arts and Letters, Business and Public Administration, Education, Engineering and Technology, Health Sciences, and the Sciences. Described as “Virginia's forward-focused, public doctoral research university for students from around the world who want a rigorous academic experience in a profoundly multicultural community,” Old Dominion University has consistently celebrated its role as a supporter of cross-cultural educational exchange.

Yet, a key component of being a successful public research university stems on ODU’s ability to welcome students and faculty members from across the globe. In 2018, Old Dominion University ranks 229th out of 1,293 alternative institutions for the “Overall Most Popular U.S. Colleges and Universities for International Students,” and 548th out of 1,174 for providing

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5 “History and Archives,” Old Dominion University.edu, accessed February 2nd, 2018, https://www.odu.edu/about/historyandarchives.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
“quality educational experiences” to international students.\textsuperscript{8} Beyond academics, ODU offers services tailored to international students, as well as a variety of cultural clubs, groups and associations that encourage cross-cultural interaction not only between international students and the domestic students body, but among international students as well.\textsuperscript{9}

So, just how many international students call ODU their home today? Recent statistics show that out of the 24,375 graduate and undergraduate student body, 4.15\% of the population, or 726 students are international.\textsuperscript{10} Data for international students who are on non-immigration visa statuses total 715 for the spring 2018 semester alone.\textsuperscript{11} While impressive for the Virginia area, this number is relatively small compared to the enrollment numbers of international students at universities like New York University (15,386) or the University of Southern California (13,365).\textsuperscript{12} In fact, Old Dominion University hosts only .08\% of all international students in the entire U.S. for the 2017-2018 school year.\textsuperscript{13} Yet, despite this, Old Dominion University attracts international students from a total of 108 countries and across all 6 major continents.\textsuperscript{14} Notably, the top ten senders of international students to ODU in order from first to tenth are: India, China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Japan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, the United Kingdom and South Korea.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10}“University Facts & Figures,” \textit{Old Dominion University.edu}, accessed February 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2018, https://www.odu.edu/about/historyandarchives.
\item \textsuperscript{11}Data received from Delgerjargal S. Betcher, ODU International Student and Visa & Immigration Service Advisor, Advisor, email correspondence February 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2018.
\item \textsuperscript{12}“SEVIS By The Numbers: Biannual Report On International Student Trends.”
\item \textsuperscript{13}Ibid; “University Facts & Figures,” \textit{Old Dominion University}.
\item \textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
COMPARING TRENDS: ODU AND SEVIS

Every year, SEVIS (Student Exchange Visitor Information System) compiles data on the active international student population in the United States. The data it collects is used, among other things, to predict the nationwide trends in international student enrollment we’ve discussed throughout. When comparing ODU data to trends reported in the most recent, June 2017 SEVIS report, I found that the university clearly supports many of SEVIS’s nationwide findings.

For example, the 2016-2017 SEVIS report finds that 77% of the 1.18 million currently international students in the U.S. come from Asian countries.15 Excluding Middle Eastern countries, six of ODU’s top ten home countries for international students are in Asia. If the Middle East were to be included in this analysis, all but one of the top ten international student source countries would be ‘Asian.’

Another trend that holds for both ODU and the nation at large is regarding international student enrollment. In both the 2015-2016 and most recently published 2016-2017 SEVIS reports, international student enrollment across the country as a whole has increased. From 2015 to 2016, the U.S. experienced a 2.5% increase, and from 2016 to 2017, a 1.3% increase.16 These predictions fit relatively well with trends at ODU if numbers beyond the last two years are included in the analysis. As we can see in the table below, international student enrollment fell by 2.8%, from 2015 to 2016. However, from 2016 to 2017, international student enrollment decreased sharply, by a total of 9.9%. However, since 2011, the university has experienced an overall trend of growth in the international student body.17

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15 “SEVIS By The Numbers: Biannual Report On International Student Trends.”
16 Ibid.
17 “University Facts & Figures,” Old Dominion University.edu.
By examining enrollment data semester to semester during the Trump presidency, yet another trend begins to emerge. I include enrollment numbers of international students from the fall of 2016 up to the present semester, spring 2018, below. These enrollment numbers differ from those included in the previous table, which only include international students on non-immigration visa status. This means that these numbers exclude students without any visas, those with asylum status, Dreamers, those in OPT as well as students of the campus’s English Language Center so a direct comparison between the two tables is not possible.18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
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<td></td>
<td>522</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>784</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>726</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Enrollment of ODU International Students 2011-2017
data taken from ODU and college factual.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of International Students</th>
<th>Fall 2016</th>
<th>Spring 2017</th>
<th>Fall 2017</th>
<th>Spring 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>729</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Non-immigration Visa Status International Student Enrollment from 2016- 2018
data provided by Delgerjargal S. Betcher, ODU Visa & Immigration Service Advisor.

Looking at these enrollment numbers, we can see that from fall 2016 to fall 2017, the non-immigration visa international student population fell by 2.06%. If taken semester to semester, the biggest drop in enrollment, 3.7%, occurred between the fall of 2016 and the spring of 2017, directly after the 2016 presidential election.

18 Data received from Delgerjargal S. Betcher, ODU International Student and Visa & Immigration Service Advisor, email correspondence February 6th, 2018.
Another important area of comparison between SEVIS and ODU is in the increase and decrease enrollment trends of international students by country. In its 2016-2017 report, SEVIS reported that students from Nepal rose by 18%, students from India increased by 7%, and students from Vietnam increased by 6%.\(^9\) We can see from the table below that, at first glance, ODU’s enrollment of Vietnamese and Indian students seems to be consistent with SEVIS’s findings, as India ranks 1\(^{st}\) and Vietnam, 8\(^{th}\) as the most populous source countries for international students. However, if we compare the number of students enrolled from both Vietnam and India during the 2015-2016 school term with the 2016-2017 school term, we can see that ODU actually experienced a decrease in enrollment from both of these countries. While the Indian student population declined by only 4.7%, the Vietnamese student population fell by a total of 14.8%. These drops are significant in value, and also highlight an instance of possible disconnect between nationwide trends and the actual numbers of a specific university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>SEVIS Percent Increase By 2017</th>
<th>ODU Percent Increase or Decrease By 2017</th>
<th>ODU Enrollment 2016-2017</th>
<th>ODU Enrollment 2015-2016</th>
<th>Current ODU Ranking By Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>+18%</td>
<td>+13.3%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11(^{th})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>+7%</td>
<td>-4.7%</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1(^{st})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>+6%</td>
<td>-14.8%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8(^{th})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Nepalese, Indian and Vietnamese Student Enrollment Changes 2015-2017
Data compiled from Old Dominion University and SEVIS.

The SEVIS report also notes the top three countries that have experienced the greatest decline in international students. In 2016-2017, these countries were Saudi Arabia with a 19% drop, South Korea with 7%, and Japan with a 1% decrease in international students. Currently,

\(^9\) “SEVIS By The Numbers: Biannual Report On International Student Trends.”
ODU hosts 105 students from Saudi Arabia, 31 from Japan, and 18 from South Korea. Initially, these numbers and overall ranking of each country, 3rd, 6th, and 10th, seem to contradict SEVIS’s findings. However, if we look back one or two additional years, we can see that the number of Saudi, Japanese and South Korean students has in fact decreased by a notable percentage. In 2015-2016, there were 145 Saudi students, 34 Japanese students, and 24 South Korean Students, respectively. Yet by the 2017-2018 school term, ODU experienced a 27.6% drop in Saudi students, an 8.8% decrease in Japanese students, and a 25% decrease in South Korean students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SEVIS Percent Decrease By 2017</th>
<th>ODU Percent Decrease By 2017</th>
<th>ODU enrollment 2016-2017</th>
<th>ODU Enrollment 2015-2016</th>
<th>Current ODU Ranking By Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>-19%</td>
<td>-27%</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>-25%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>-8.8%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Saudi, South Korean and Japanese Student Enrollment Changes 2015-2017
Data compiled from Old Dominion University and SEVIS.

One of the reasons that it is important to consider the enrollment trends of international students at any university is that it allows both administrators and educators to plan their course offerings accordingly. As SEVIS notes, 43% of international students come to the U.S. to earn degrees in STEM fields. Another 18% earn degrees in business, marketing, and management-related fields. If a significant portion of the international students who typically study in these areas decreases, it will affect the entire structure of the university. One article recently published by the New York Times, relates how Wright States University in Ohio, Kansas State, and even
the University of Central Missouri are making “new rounds of cuts” due to a “loss of international students.”\textsuperscript{20}

As the SEVIS report notes, both Saudi Arabian and South Korean students rank third (25,125) and fourth (16,474) as the most students enrolled in STEM fields in the United States.\textsuperscript{21}

If ODU continues to lose Saudi and South Korean student enrollment, it may be difficult for the university to maintain its current research and study opportunities in these fields. However, without more concrete evidence relating the decrease of a particular group of international students to a specific program, present speculations and comparisons are limited. As I move into my survey questionnaire and interview, I will keep the question of decreasing new international student enrollment in mind.

CASE STUDY LITERATURE

Before I present my survey and interview findings, I would like to take a moment to briefly relate how both my research design and questionnaire were inspired by the works of other scholars completing similar studies of international students at colleges and universities across America.

One article in particular, “Visitors or Immigrants? International Students in the United States,” by Helen D. Hazen and Heike C. Alberts was helpful during my research design process. In this article, the authors conduct a study of University of Minnesota students to investigate the intentions of international students after they complete their degree and see if their decisions change as time passes. Inspired by the claim that “these large numbers [of foreign students


\textsuperscript{21}“SEVIS By The Numbers: Biannual Report On International Student Trends.”
attending US institutions of higher education] have not only had far-reaching implications for the American education system, but also for immigration, since many international students choose to remain in the US after completing their degrees,” I attempted to discover how many international students were interested in remaining in the U.S. on a permanent basis after graduation.22

Similarly, in their survey of thirty international graduate students at a large research university, Katalin Szelényi and Robert Rhoads focus on the student’s experiences of living in the United States.23 They also consider how international students contribute “to more globalized notions of citizenship.”24 In my research design, I have drawn upon their work in order to discover what experiences international students have had in the United States, and beyond, what their plans are for work after graduation. I also borrowed from this study when I posited the question how might a student’s time at ODU have impacted them as individuals.

I also drew upon Ketevan Mamiseishvili’s analysis of the persistence of international students in U.S. postsecondary institutions. By reaching out to graduate students at an anonymous American university, Mamiseishvili discovers that international students who frequently meet with their advisor, attend study sessions and prioritize their academic work are more likely to persist than others.25 Those that do not have enjoyable academic or social experiences, she finds, are less likely to persist at American colleges or universities beyond the first semester or first year.26 Among all the discussion of decreasing enrollment of international

24 Ibid, 29.
26 Ibid, 1.
students for the 2017-2018 school term, I found this article especially useful. As my survey pool was entirely made up of so-called ‘persisting’ international students, I was inspired to draft questions surrounding both the international student’s academic and social experiences at ODU. Like Mamiseishvili, I hoped to draw connections between persisting international students at the university with satisfactory academic and social experiences.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design for this case study includes my collection and analysis of data from both a widespread confidential survey questionnaire and confidential interview process. In October of 2017, I drafted a survey questionnaire to help me ascertain how international students were feeling and thinking about their educational and social experience at Old Dominion University and in America at large during the Trump presidency. As major news outlets have been consistently drawing attention to the possibility of a decline in international student enrollment, as well as an increase in fear and uncertainty among remaining students due to controversial policy decisions under the current administration, I was curious to find out to what extent these policies may have affected the returning ODU international student body. Although I will describe the survey below, a full version is included in Appendix A at the end of the paper for reference.

While I was originally interested in surveying and interviewing members of the ODU faculty and staff, as they both educate and work alongside international students, time constraints prevented me from completing this component of my study. I would expect them, however, to have expressed their support for international student participation in U.S. higher education, and
their desire to see positive, rather than negative changes in U.S. policy and rhetoric in future months.

The survey questionnaire begins with five demographic and program-of-study related questions. From there, questions six to eleven shift gears and focus in on each individual student’s motivations for study and their after graduation intentions. Questions twelve through seventeen then explore each student’s opinion of the U.S. political climate through a combination of provided multiple choice answers and short answer sections. The final set, eighteen to twenty-four, follow this same format and specifically target the student’s opinion of the university as a whole, relating to me a more comprehensive perspective of their entire educational and social experience.

After gaining approval for the distribution of the survey questionnaire from the university’s IRB board, I sent the questionnaire out to international student organizations, clubs and specific international students during the weeks of January 21st and January 28th. Although few groups were responsive to my efforts, I was able to compile a total of 35 survey responses by my cut-off date, February 4th. Students had the option to fill out the survey in word document form, or complete it online as a Google form. To protect the confidentiality of respondents, I prevented the Google form from recording their email address. For those students who I received emails from directly, their responses did not include any names, and were downloaded and saved to my computer confidentially.

I was also invited to bring printed copies of the survey to an on-campus Muslim Student Association prayer service and to a Global Student Friendship event on January 26th. At these events, I announced my survey and approached interested students who voluntarily took a few minutes to fill out the surveys. I treated these surveys the same as those I received via email or
Google form to retain confidentiality, by not including their names or contact information. Finally, on January 30th, I gained permission through the university’s Office of Intercultural Relations to post my survey link to the official ODU International Student Facebook page. On February 4th, I closed out the survey and began my analysis.

Beyond the survey, I also took some time to interview particularly interested international students during the last two weeks of January. All together, I completed three personal thirty minute-to-an-hour long interviews. Although I used the same questionnaire, I was able to record more detailed responses and inquire why the students responded in certain ways. The students that chose to participate in interviews were very eager to share their experiences and opinions with me, and I feel that their responses add a much greater depth to this paper than any widespread survey could alone. These interviews are included throughout the next section of the paper in a confidential manner. No real names are used, and the student’s country of origin is only referred to if alternative survey responses were received from students from that same country to further protect their identity.

SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

After reviewing the thirty-five survey questionnaires, I compiled the following data figures and developed an analysis. The purpose of these figures, when applicable, is to highlight any significant trends found among the responses received. By relating my findings here, I aim to compare the climate of Old Dominion University international students with that of the United States at large.

By the end of my survey period, six undergraduate and twenty-nine graduate students had responded, altogether representing twenty-two unique countries. This sample, while not entirely
representative of the data set, does provide me with enough variety to draw some conclusions, especially regarding the graduate student-body population. Two respondents did not list their home country, and one of them, a graduate student, explained that they chose not to specify home country due to concern that listing it would expose their identity. As you will see in figure six below, I was able to gather responses from six out of the top ten international student home countries. I also received the most responses from Sri Lanka, followed by Bangladesh, India and Iran.

Figure 6: Number of Survey Participants by Country of Origin and Degree Sought

surveyed international student population by country and degree program.

I also compiled data on the majors of all respondents. For graduate students, the most popular field of study was international studies. However, because I am a graduate student in international studies, I reached out to students I know to participate in this survey. Therefore, a significant portion of international studies responses is likely not wholly representative of the ODU international graduate student population. I did not have the same problem with
undergraduate respondents. Although my data sample was limited to six, the most popular major was clearly mechanical engineering. Interestingly, mechanical engineering was the second most common major of graduate students.

Figure 7: Number of International Students per Major and Degree.

With mechanical engineering as both the most popular undergraduate major and second most common major of my graduate respondents, I became curious how my results might change if I adjusted the way I measured majors. I hypothesized that, if all engineering fields (electrical, computer, and mechanical engineering) were combined into one single major, ‘engineering,’ I would see an even higher percentage of both graduate and undergraduates selecting this field of study. The adjusted majors are shown in figure 8.
This discovery—that more than double the number of students majoring in international students were pursuing degrees in engineering fields, led me to make an additional comparison between those earning STEM degrees and those not. After all, one of the major trends found in colleges and universities nationwide, is that international students disproportionately pursue degrees in science, technology, computer and mathematics-related fields.

Figure 8: Simplified International Student Majors.

Figure 9: Comparison of STEM and Non-Stem International Student Majors.
From the population of students I surveyed, twenty out of the thirty-five, or roughly 59%, are pursuing STEM degrees. Five out of six, or 80% of undergraduate international students in my sample, selected a STEM major. At the graduate level, this difference is less severe, as only two more graduate students—a total of 15, are enrolled in STEM programs. Despite this small difference, my findings are supportive of larger international student degree trends highlighted in both SEVIS and the Open Doors Report that international students primarily enroll in STEM-related degree programs.

When asked whether or not the program of study was offered in the student’s home country, only two responded ‘no’ and one, ‘unsure.’ These responses are significant because they suggest that, although the majority of students (90.9%) could earn their degree domestically, they have instead chosen to earn them in the United States, and specifically, at Old Dominion University. I initially speculated that this decision may stem from the idea that the United States is a global hegemon in higher education, and that the degree students can earn here may mean more than a comparable degree from the student’s home country. I also considered that these international students may have chosen the U.S. not out of necessity but rather, out of volition, as their chosen major fields are offered by universities worldwide.

In order to definitively ascertain why students have chosen to come to the U.S. despite having the opportunity to earn a similar degree in their home country or in another country beyond the U.S., I asked students to specify their motivation for study. To this, many responded that they came to the U.S. because it offered “higher quality education,” had “greater opportunities for research” and “career opportunities” when compared with their home country. Similar findings were presented in Hazen and Alberts’, as well as Szelényi and Rhoads’ studies
of international graduate students.\textsuperscript{27} One ODU student even went so far to write that the U.S. is the “holy grail for higher education” with a “diverse culture” that ensures students “always learn a lot.” Beyond the perceived high quality of education offered by U.S. institutions, several students also listed “better life quality,” “family” as well as “new experiences” and “exploration” as their top motivators.

When pressed about their decision to attend ODU, the proximity of the university to family members, previous attendance of a family member, the opportunity for research, specific degree program offerings, connections with NATO and labs, as well as scholarship/assistantship opportunities were listed as their top reasons to attend.

As reports surrounding the “Trump Effect” suggest that international students are becoming more likely to choose other countries for their graduate and undergraduate degrees, my next question asked students to consider what alternative country they would have liked to study in. As students had no limit as to how many countries they could select, I received quite a variety of responses.

From figure 10 above, we can see that Canada, the U.K., Australia and Germany rank very highly in 1st (22%) and 2nd (16%) place respectively. These results once again support predicted trends that Western countries like Canada, Australia and the U.K. are becoming more attractive alternative locations for higher education and may, sooner or later, experience greater enrollment of international students.28

When asked to explain why they have selected their alternative country for study, students listed reasons such as better quality education, advanced research facilities, lower priced education, as well as increased openness to other cultures. As I noted earlier, Canada, especially, has emerged as a rival to the U.S. in higher education because it offers comparable quality education for cheaper tuition rates, and often gives scholarships to both undergraduate and graduate international students. Canada, like the U.K. and Australia, is also an English-speaking

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country, so international students are still able to develop their English language skills by attending their institutions of higher education. The remaining eight alternative countries, each of which only received one vote, were selected primarily due to student’s interest in the country’s culture, language learning opportunities as well as the country’s role in international politics.

Moving beyond education, I next inquired each student’s intentions after they successfully earn their degrees. After graduating, respondents either expressed their desire to work or continue their education further. For those wanting to get a job, eight selected work specifically within the education field. Several others chose government-related or industrial jobs, especially those in political science or STEM major fields.

I also inquired as to whether or not the student had the intention to work in the U.S. after graduating, as there is great political discussion and concern that foreigners who earn degrees in the U.S. ultimately seek to stay and take jobs away from Americans. Yet, as the following figure shows, only 50% of respondents are certain that they want to live and work in the U.S. after graduating. In their survey of international students, Szelényi and Rhoads find that “international graduate education was seen as a site where students acquired knowledge, skills, and resources to take back to their home countries.” Through their similar case study, Hazen and Alberts reported that “only a small minority of students came to the US with the intention of using student status as a springboard to a more permanent stay,” and of these students, “over a

third subsequently change their minds (most deciding to leave immediately).”31 My research distinctively supports both groups’ findings, as a large portion of respondents, 34%, expressed their desire and intention to return to their home country to work after graduation. Thus, the notion that “international students com[e] to the US with the intent[ion] to adjust their status and immigrate permanently” is not guaranteed.32

![Intention to Live and Work in U.S. After Graduating](image)

Figure 11: Intention to Live and Work in U.S. After Graduating.

Continuing on the same idea, my next question asked students to specify where they would like to live and work beyond the United States. This location could include home country or be an entirely different location.

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32 Ibid.
Figure 12: Alternative Work Location Selected by International Students.

Following the most popular choice, home country, with thirteen votes, Australia, and Germany rank second, selected by two students each. As Germany and Australia jointly share the position of second most popular alternative country to study in the previous question, I was not surprised to see them rank highly as alternative locations for work. Once again, these responses are also supportive of trends that suggest Australia is becoming a more attractive location for international students.\(^{33}\) Canada and England were also selected, although not nearly as frequently as they were as education destinations. I believe that this may be due to the fact that the students who previously selected Canada or the U.K. may have, this time, selected their home country instead. An alternative explanation could also be that the students are simply not as interested in living and working in the U.K. or Canada for an extended period of time beyond studies, perhaps due to the colder climate or distance from the respondent’s home countries, which are primarily in Asia or the Middle East.

Having addressed where international students would like to live and study outside of the U.S., I next turned inward to inquire about the international student’s satisfaction with their lives in the U.S. as well as their opinion of the country, both before and after living here for a period of time. I was curious to discover whether or not their opinion had changed significantly after experiencing American life during the Trump presidency, or if their opinion had stayed much the same.

![Opinion of U.S. Prior to Studies](image)

Figure 13: Opinion of U.S. Prior to Study.
Before coming to the U.S., the percentage of “very positive” was 21% while “positive” reached 64%. However, after spending time in the U.S., respondents’ “very positive” sentiments decreased by 11% to 12% total. “Positive” and “negative” responses also decreased, by 3% and 6% respectively. The most significant change that occurred, however, was the increase in “neutral” responses. Before living in the U.S., only 6% of students felt “neutral” about U.S. life. However, after being in the U.S. for a period of time, the percentage of “neutral” responses grew by 18%! While “negative” perceptions have decreased, “very positive” perceptions have decreased as well. Extreme viewpoints have come together and boosted the “neutral” viewpoint. Yet, without a baseline of responses from students before the Trump era, it is difficult for me to assess the extent to which responses of international students have changed over time to decide whether a notable shift has occurred.
I next asked the students to rate their overall life experience in the U.S. As we can see, the majority of students (67%) described their overall life satisfaction in the U.S. “positively.” Another 18% felt “very positive” about it, while the smallest percentage—15%, chose “neutral.” At no point did any student select “negative” or “very negative,” and this left me considering that the political climate of the U.S. may not have had a terrible impact on the everyday lives of ODU international students. Before I could be certain, however, I directly asked the students to share their perspective regarding the American political environment in question 15.
In asking students how the current political environment of the U.S. made them feel, I expected to receive a large number of negative responses. However, a surprising portion of the students surveyed expressed “no opinion,” “no idea” or “no concern” regarding the current political environment of the U.S. under Trump. Responses like, “I don’t watch news” or “I don’t know anything” were common, while others replied, “I am not sure because I do not care about the political things.” I then speculated that “no opinion” or “no concern” responses may have come from students with backgrounds or academic interests unrelated to political science, who, I thought, may have less of an interest in following U.S. governmental developments.

In contrast, when I looked at the “negative” responses, I speculated that the majority of them would have come from students in political science, rather than from students in other disciplines. As the student’s responses clearly demonstrate an interest in the political environment of countries, it made sense for me to speculate that they would express a strong “negative” viewpoint. To accurately draw this comparison, I provide a graph of the votes by political science majors and non-political science majors.
Out of the eight political science students, only one of them expressed “no concern.” The other seven, or remaining 87% described strong feelings of negativity and worry. One student in particular commented, “It makes me feel unwanted, it makes me feel like I am stealing jobs that were actually nobody's jobs in the first place. It makes me feel like staying here is wrong, wanting a better life is wrong and having a life in the U.S. is not something that I am entitled to because I am from another country…” Another added, “The least I can say about it is that it makes me worried. Recently there has been an increasing anti-immigration and more isolationist narrative in the American political discourse…”

Of the twenty-seven non-political science majors, 44% described having “no opinion” or “no concern” on the matter and 33% expressed varying degrees of negative opinions. One particular student shared their view that they are not worried because, ultimately, the “political environment here is not different from any other country in the world. Politicians play their games everywhere. Just ignore them.” In their study, Hazen & Alberts also found that the majority of international students outside politics-related programs of study did not consider the
political environment to be very important, with many being entirely unaware of what was going on.

Expectedly, all “uncertain” or “positive” responses came from non-political science majors. The sole positive response, submitted by a Bangladeshi student, “it’s making me feeling more safer,” caught my attention. As there was no greater explanation, I can only surmise that the student does not feel affected by the political environment in any significant way, and when compared to the political environments of other, less-stable countries, they feel safe in America.

I would also like to draw attention to the fact that, in some of the responses I received, several of the students made a point to distinguish between the larger political environment and the American citizenry. A non-political science major wrote, “The Trump's policy makes me feel like unwanted here. The Americans however make you feel the opposite though.” A student from international studies also shared a similar opinion, “Most people are very welcome. But the government made lots of restriction for foreign student. Some people are still racist too. Makes me worried…”

I found it interesting that even though some students may feel negative or threatened by the political rhetoric, they do not harbor any ill sentiment towards the American people themselves. Without offering these international students the opportunity to live in the U.S. and study here at ODU, I am not sure that they would have made this distinction. Perhaps, due to the friendships they have made here, and the positive experiences they have had on campus and beyond, in the community, these students are able to consciously make a distinction between the U.S. government and its citizens. This expression of sentiment, I feel, is a foreign policy ‘victory’, as it supports the ideas of all those who believe that hosting of foreign students will positively improve peaceful relations between countries through citizen-to-citizen diplomacy.
To gain a better sense of how the students feel about their life in the U.S., I asked respondents to share what aspects they like the best and what they enjoy the least. When asked what they appreciate the most about life in America, students frequently responded “freedom,” “nice people,” the “dynamic culture,” “availability of better opportunities,” “political and economic stability,” as well as the “variety of people and cultures.” On the flip-side, students expressed a dislike for “racism and stereotypes,” the “disconnection in society between individuals,” the prevalence of guns and shooting-related violence, alcoholism, “taxes,” expensive health insurance policies, America’s “materialistic society”, the lack of quality public transportation, unhealthy food, and even the president, “Trump.”

Next, in questions eighteen to twenty, I asked students to rank their satisfaction with their educational, social, and community experience at ODU.

![Satisfaction with Educational Experience at ODU](image)

Figure 18: Satisfaction with Educational Experience at ODU.
Although all three graphs are visually similar, there are some slight differences. Regarding educational experience satisfaction, one student selected the lowest option, “very unsatisfied.” Another two other students expressed dissatisfaction with ODU academics. Finally, three individuals were uncertain as to the extent they were happy with their academic
life. The majority of students, 49% and 33% respectively, were “positive” and “very positive” about the scholastic environment of ODU.

Regarding social experience, no student selected “very unsatisfied” and only one student chose “unsatisfied.” The percentage of “neutral” and ‘very positive’ responses also increased, while the “satisfied” percentage decreased by 7%.

By far, community inclusion received the highest satisfaction rating, with no selection of “unsatisfied” or “very unsatisfied” among my sample respondents. “Positive” responses also increased dramatically, reaching over 50%! “Neutral” responses remained constant at 15%, and “very positive” decreased by 7% down to 33%.

When averaged together, “strongly satisfied” was chosen 35% of the time, while “positive” was selected 48% of the time. “Neutral” was selected an average of 13%, and “unsatisfied,” 3% of the time. Finally, the worst choice, “very unsatisfied” was selected by 1% of all respondents. Overall, international students seem to be satisfied with not only the education provided by ODU faculty, but also the social opportunities and community at large. Thus, despite the shortcomings of politicians in making foreigners feel welcome in the country, the students seem to believe that the University is doing a pretty good job, and that their decision to study in the U.S. has, for the most part, been a rewarding and positive experience.
For question twenty-one, I requested that students comment on any ways they think they may have changed since attending ODU. While eight students provided no greater detail beyond “no,” the other twenty-one respondents expressed varying degrees of “yes.” Some of the common explanations included personal transformation, a greater enjoyment of learning, the pleasure of getting to know others from different cultures and expanding personal mindsets, to gaining greater knowledge, becoming stronger, and finally, developing into more rational and efficient students.

The next question asked the students what they enjoy most about being at ODU. To this, students responded with the “quality of professors,” the “diversity of student body,” the “availability of cultural experiences and sporting events,” university location, “research opportunities,” “high quality facilities,” and also the “friendly environment.” One student’s answer sums up the variety of responses quite nicely: “I like very much [the] engaging campus style that we have in ODU, where you can study, socialize, learn new skills, and relax all in one place.” In similar research of foreign graduate students, scholars Szelényi and Rhoads found that
respondents “clearly linked their professional goals to their learning experiences in the United States through better access to facilities, cutting-edge research, learning opportunities, and, perhaps most important, an international environment of scholarship.”

When pressed to describe what they like least about being an ODU student, two students listed “uncertain” while four responded “nothing.” However, the remaining respondents described a variety of dislikes, ranging from the distance of the university from home, to “high tuition cost” and “limited financial aid opportunities.” Dissatisfaction from professors that are “hard to comprehend,” from “outdated teaching styles,” to “exam and grade stress,” as well as a “lack of academic diversity” and “limitations in course offerings” were also disappointing for students.

For my final question, I asked students to explain whether or not they would recommend ODU to other students. To this, I received twenty-four “yes” responses, five “no” reports, and one “uncertain” response. Those who would not recommend ODU expressed their discontent with a “lack of research project availability,” the “busyness of the city,” the “high cost of tuition and living” as well as an American “unhealthy obsession for diversity.” One student expressed their desire to “get rid of [the university] entirely” because they felt that their academic program was not at all what they hoped to be part of. Apart from this student’s strong departmental dissatisfaction, the respondents as a whole seem genuinely pleased with their experience in the U.S. and at ODU, and I feel, will likely finish their education without trouble.

Therefore, it seems that overall, the University is able to ensure that a substantial majority of international students feel academically challenged, socially included and protected from political rhetoric and potentially harmful situations. So, although many students have

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commented that the Trump travel ban and subsequent rhetoric has not made them feel particularly welcome in the United States, this feeling has not been felt strongly on campus, and further—it has not altered their decision to continue studying in the U.S.

Like scholar Ketevan Mamiseishvili, I believe international students “are very resilient and committed to their goals.” While they may “experience loneliness, acculturation stress, homesickness [and] unfair treatment, their drive to succeed helps them to persevere and overcome these challenges to achieve their goals.”

In her 2012 study of graduate students, Mamiseishvili discovered that “international students were motivated to continue with their degree and graduate because they believed in the value of education and earning a degree from a U.S. university for their future.”

Thus, where Trump’s actions are likely to have a greater impact, I predict, is in international student’s selection of work after graduating. In fact, students who expressed their awareness of the negative political climate under the Trump administration demonstrated great concern for what life would be like in the U.S. after they finish earning their degrees, rather than in the present moment of studies. Heightened worry surrounded the possibility of future work opportunities and visa processing, rather than academic limitations. As discussed earlier, if the political climate does not improve, it seems that international students will return home to work, or will seek out alternative avenues in countries like Germany, Australia, Canada and the UK. Such decisions will be detrimental to not only the economic situation of many colleges and universities nationwide, but will also limit U.S.’s foreign policy potential to strengthen diplomatic ties between individuals from different countries.

36 Ibid.
INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

The confidential interviews of international students that I conducted produced similar, if not more detailed results as the anonymous survey questionnaire responses. While I gave equal time and attention to each participating student, some respondents were more talkative than others, and so their recorded responses may differ in length and detail.

Although I intended to conduct interviews with students from a variety of academic disciplines, I was only able to interview students in the international studies graduate program. Perhaps because of their inherent interest in the political environment of the United States, their responses to question fifteen, surrounding the political climate of the U.S. today, were much stronger than many of the students who responded to the questionnaire. I predict that if I had been able to interview students from departments beyond political science, their responses to the question may have been less severe.

I was also unable to interview any undergraduate students. I suspect that this was ultimately due to the fact that my connections with undergraduate international students are rather limited. Although I did reach out to several undergraduate clubs and organizations, I received few direct responses, and this inhibited my ability to build greater connections and complete interviews with undergraduate international students.

The interviews are included in the following pages in order of discussion and questioning. Any additional comments are included in the relevant section, and I conclude with a comprehensive analysis of similarities between the survey responses and my research question of declining U.S. hegemony in higher education, at large.
INTERVIEW WITH ‘X’

On January 22, 2018 I sat down with ‘X,’ a PhD student from Indonesia, to talk about what led him to come to study in the U.S. ‘X’ commented that he began his academic career earning a B.A. in the fields of politics and a M.A. in education. For him politics “is a powerful tool to change conditions, to understand and to find solutions to complicated problems.” Now, he is pursuing his PhD in international studies to ultimately further his teaching career in Indonesia. One of the reasons that he came to the U.S. is because the U.S. is considered “one of the best for education and for international studies.” He selected ODU in part for its location in the United States, but also because it offered a great scholarship opportunity. Beyond studying in the United States, ‘X’ would consider studying somewhere in the Middle East or Turkey because of his research interest in the Islamic world.

When the topic of the United States political climate arose, ‘X’ responded that he is satisfied with his life in the United States. Before coming to the U.S., he had a positive opinion of the country. Now that he lives here, ‘X’ chose “neutral” to express his current opinion, “since coming [to the U.S.] I have experienced and learned about less positive things.” After being in the U.S. for three years, ‘X’ feels more fearful about his personal self and family. In Norfolk especially, the local news reports of crime make him feel insecure, although he himself has no personal negative experience to describe. In general, he feels good, but recounts, “I have experienced a time when people call me or other Muslims ‘ISIS’ and that upsets me. It wasn’t like that before this past year.”

As a student living in the United States, ‘X’ enjoys two specific features above all others. The first is the “intellectual environment” at ODU and the U.S., especially the “widespread” access to libraries and the fact that his family “has greater access to education.” From his
perspective, learning opportunities in America are “free and abundant.” The second feature that ‘X’ likes the most is the people. While he notes that there is a greater sense of individualism in U.S. culture compared to Indonesian society, he finds that people can still collaborate and work together efficiently. Americans are similar to collective people when they “work together to create society and achieve things together.” ‘X’ also shared to aspects of American lifestyle that he does not enjoy: cultural homogeneity and the “focus on consumerism.” With regards to cultural homogeneity, while the landscape may change, he finds that there is not much variation when it comes to restaurants or cities. The economic mindset of Americans is also difficult and makes ‘X’ “not really comfortable sometimes,” especially as he sees that those who experience health issues often lack coverage, the U.S. “is really expensive.”

‘X’ then proceeded to describe how he feels about his time as a student at ODU. He is “satisfied” with his educational experience, and “strongly satisfied” with both his social experience and sense of community inclusion. At ODU, ‘X’ feels that he “can be himself in a positive way.” Here, “people respect you as you are.” This sense of respect has led him to develop greater confidence. He noted that, in Indonesia, “to be different is to be against someone else,” to be “in conflict with others.” However, here at ODU, one can be different and critical of others, yet still be part of the group. Collective individualism is possible. ‘X’ feels that he has learned a lot simply by talking to and sharing experiences with other students and faculty members on campus. ‘X’ also enjoys the learning environment that encourages students to share their experiences and ask questions, describing it as a “healthy, supportive environment” in which one can “share ideas in.”

Although ODU has made him grow significantly as a person and in social situations, ‘X’ feels that the program lacks a competitive environment, so he is less academically challenged
than when he studied in Indonesia years earlier. Yet, because of this ‘X’ is more relaxed than stressed in his studies. Because everyone shares during the class time, he doesn’t have to worry about being number one. As a PhD student in academia, ‘X’ notes that the work involved for PhD holding professors and researchers “is very competitive” and “not really fair” so he does worry that students in the program may not be well prepared for the competitive aspects of their future work after graduating from the university.

‘X’ concluded the interview by sharing what aspects of ODU he would recommend to a prospective student. He finds that ODU is not the best fit for a student who is wholly academically motivated, as it is not a place that emphasizes “academic excellence” above all else; however, he would highly recommend it to students who enjoy supportive learning communities. At ODU, ‘X’ believes that individuals will learn more from interactions with other students. ODU provides an enriching experience beyond the classroom and is a really good place for students to develop their social skills. “We as international students feel really welcome- this is our home.” When he returns to Indonesia after earning his PhD, ‘X’ feels that he will have the ability to lead others and work well together because of his time at ODU.

INTERVIEW WITH ‘A’

I met with ‘A,’ a PhD student from Iran on January 23rd, 2018. She described her intention to come to the United States because of its reputation as the “land of opportunities” and because it has one of the “best educational systems” in the world. She came to ODU to be with her husband, who is currently earning his PhD at the university as well. She selected international studies as her field of study because she “is not a fan of limitation.” She is interested in both comparative and regional studies as well as conflict and cooperation as these
fields allows her “to combine different research methods of qualitative and quantitative as a tool to do research in both political science and international relations.”

Although ‘A’ would ideally like to work in academic or an administrative position at a U.S. University, she would also be interested in working in Australia and New Zealand because she’s “heard so many positive things about living and working there.” When asked about alternative locations for study and work, ‘A’ also selected Canada because of its health insurance policies. After she first arrived in the United States, she “did not have a great experience with health insurance.” “In my opinion, health insurance is really expensive, and other than normal diseases, it does not cover some specific areas most of the time.” Because of this, ‘A’ comments, “I always have [a scare].” The possibility of “getting sick is something [that] is bothering me.” ‘A’ is also worried about the difficult process of getting a green card of H1-B visa in the U.S. Students that are unable to change to an H1-B visa will have to leave the country after their student residency expires. With the travel ban, she fears that her husband, who is currently searching for work, will be “passed over” because he is Iranian, and thus denied the opportunity to obtain an H1-B visa.

We continued on this topic and had a brief discussion on the United States current political climate. ‘A’ shared that today, she feels uncertain about her life in the United States. Before coming here to live, she had a very positive opinion, but now her opinion has become neutral. ‘A’ comments that she does not feel welcome, “I did not feel this way at the beginning, but since the new administration started working and the travel ban, I do not feel welcome and comfortable here.” When I asked ‘A’ if she had ever had a specific negative experience because of her ethnicity, she described three particular instances. The first, she recounts, was during a class at ODU. She said that one of her professors asked their students to express their opinion on
what policy decisions they felt would be best for the U.S. to use towards Iran or North Korea. ‘A’ related that many students replied, “we have to go to war with Iran and North Korea.” This upset ‘A’ because she feels that many American students “don’t even think about the people involved” when they respond.

During a different class, ‘A’ described a time where a student expressed his dislike of foreign visitors to the United States. She said that he accused all foreigners of entering the country uninvited. ‘A’ expressed the frustration she felt when she tried to explain that she (and other students) did not come to the country uninvited. “I did not come without an invitation! I had to pass all security checks” which ‘A’ noted, involved a thorough three-month long process of background checking for both herself and her husband. Exasperated from recounting this upsetting event, ‘A’ commented, “I came as a student, what is wrong with being a student?”

‘A’ has also had negative experiences outside of the university. The day after President Trump was elected, ‘A’ went to the Post Office to mail an item. While walking towards the doorway, she saw a gentlemen standing there, reaching for the door. ‘A’ assumed that he was being polite, and would hold the door for her, when in reality, he used his arms to shut the door before she could get to it. She attributes his rude behavior to her appearance as a Middle Easterner.

Beyond these difficult experiences, when asked about what she enjoys the most about living in the United States, ‘A’ chose “rules.” “Everything here is based on rules which is totally in contrast with my country, and it’s really enjoyable for me.” By having rules, “this makes me sure that hard work would pay off and it is not possible to use short cuts [like] connections to reach something, which is exactly the case in my country. Unskilled and uneducated people are at the top positions.”
Aside from healthcare, ‘A’ does not enjoy the “loneliness” of Americans. “I can feel it as an immigrant more, but here I cannot see the strong ties between families as much as it is visible in the Middle East. People here are so lonely.” ‘A’ then described a typical social gathering in Iran, with a house full of close friends and family, casually talking and sharing a meal. She says that while she has been able to make some American friends, connections between friends and family are much weaker. “Even when people are together, here they are alone.”

‘A’ also worries about the unhealthy lifestyles of many Americans. In Iran, people care about their health, and don’t watch television for hours on end. In America, she sees that excessive use of alcohol and drugs is leading to major health problems, and that many people spend entire days absorbed in television or other electronic devices.

Regarding her time at ODU, ‘A’ is satisfied with her educational experience, but notes that she is uncertain about her social experience and community inclusion. Before coming to ODU, ‘A’ “was not a talkative person” because of her home country’s relationship with the U.S. and also because she was less confident sharing views among native students. ‘A’ was under such a great deal of stress during her first semester and first year, that acclimating became even more difficult. However, today ‘A’ feels that she has improved, and this improvement is largely due to the fact that she has made connections with co-workers and classmates. At ODU, she particularly enjoys “being active and connected with knowledgeable people.” She also notes that “having some famous scholars as my professors is a feeling that I couldn’t experience in my home country, it’s a great feeling.” Despite the fact that ‘A’ finds it difficult to live on the necessary budget, especially when political sanctions make it difficult to receive money from home, she would recommend ODU and U.S. higher education to other students. “ODU is a
decent university with perfect faculties.” We have an “open-minded president, [a] beautiful campus and [a] variety of programs.”

INTERVIEW WITH ‘B’

I met with ‘B,’ another PhD student in the international studies program on January 23rd. ‘B’ came to the U.S. from an Eastern European country when he was young, and is interested in security studies and teaching. By earning his degree in the United States, ‘B’ feels that he will gain the “biggest prospects for an international career.” ODU was a perfect choice for ‘B’ because it is close to his family and, as an Alum, ‘B’ is familiar with the institution and course offerings. However, if ‘B’ were to study in a different country, he would like to study in Bosnia because “it is [a] part of the world that I am not so knowledgeable of.” ‘B’ would like the opportunity to “build language skills and learn how the school system works there.” After earning his PhD, ‘B’ would like to teach in higher education, but would also be interested in returning to his previous job as a high school educator, and alternatively, working at a government organization or NGO “committed to peace.” Although he is happy to work and live in the U.S., if an “attractive offer from abroad came” he would be receptive to it. As a teacher especially, being able to change his environment and seek new challenges would give him “new wind” and help prevent burn out.

‘B’ comments that he is satisfied with his life in the U.S. and retains a positive opinion of U.S. today. When pressed to share his thoughts on the current political environment, ‘B’ expressed his opinion that the current administration is “a passing phenomena, not representative of the country as a whole.” He feels that the “country seems to have been hijacked by an angry, disillusioned crowd” but that ultimately, a more positive status quo will return in due time. In
fact, one of his favorite things about living in the United States is the “discourse or interaction between people.” He finds Americans to be “super nice” compared to others, “from the person at 7/11 to the professors.” For ‘B,’ America has an “infectious culture,” that seems both “giving and respectful of other.” For these reasons, ‘B’ believes that despite heightened political rhetoric and promises to change policies, everything will work out in the end.

Regarding his experience at ODU, ‘B’ finds that he is equally satisfied with his educational and social experiences. He also feels satisfied with the ODU community. ‘B’ definitely recommends the university to his former students and anyone he thinks may be interested because of its “low cost relative to others” and the “quality of education.”

INTERVIEW DISCUSSION

Each interviewed student demonstrated a strong interest in improving the lives of others through a career in international studies. After graduating with their respective PhD’s in international studies from ODU, they plan to take a position in academia or education, if possible, and promote messages of peace, cooperation and understanding. Although international studies PhD programs are available in each interviewee’s home country, they believe that by coming to the U.S., they will gain the biggest prospects or opportunities to succeed in the international studies career field. They regard the U.S. higher educational system in high esteem and are happy to have the opportunity to be part of it. If however, they had been unable to study in the U.S., ‘X,’ and ‘B’ would go to the Middle East and Bosnia, respectively, because of personal region-specific academic interest, while ‘A’ demonstrated interest in Canada for its health insurance system.
When pressed about their decision to attend Old Dominion University, my interviewees noted three major reasons. The first was that ODU offered them scholarship or assistantship opportunities that were not available at other institutions. The proximity of ODU to family members as well as prior enrollment of a family member also made ODU the best choice.

Up to this point, responses to questions had been fairly similar. Yet, when I began to explore respondent’s intentions after graduation, I received more varied responses. One of the biggest differences among the respondents was regarding their desired location to live in after graduation. While ‘X’ plans to return to Indonesia, both ‘A’ and ‘B’ intend to remain in the United States. ‘A’ notes that while she would prefer to work in the U.S., she would also be open to opportunities for work in Canada. Likewise, ‘B’ would be happy to have the chance to teach around the world, and visit many countries over his lifetime. In the immediate future, however, he plans to teach in America.

Just as my survey and interviewee respondents noted, authors Helen D. Hazen and Heike C. Alberts find that greater opportunities for education and funding, as well as the desire to improve job opportunities and be with family members motivate international students to study in the U.S. Similarly, many students noted that their reasons for staying in the U.S. after graduation would largely center around their job opportunities, the quality of living they experience in the U.S. compared to their home country as well as ties to family or friends.37

In the graphs below, I present their opinions of life in the U.S. before and after living here, as well as their overall level of satisfaction.

While both ‘A’ and ‘B’ expressed “satisfied,” Student ‘X’ responded with “neutral.” When pressed to explain why he felt this way, ‘X’ noted that his level of satisfaction with life in the U.S. was originally very high. It is only recently that his satisfaction has become more negative, and he attributes this change directly to anti-Muslim sentiments from both the government and a portion of the American citizenry.
Each student also expressed a strong “positive” or “very positive” opinion of the U.S. prior to their arrival, however, after spending time here, their opinions have decreased to “positive” and “neutral respectively.”

![Figure 24: Opinion of U.S. After Beginning Studies.](image)

These responses were closely tied to question 15, which inquired about how the current political environment had impacted each individual. Both ‘X’ and ‘A’ explained that their change in opinion had to do with some of the negative experiences they or friends have had, as students from Middle Eastern or Islamic countries in the past year. Prior to the election, both respondents felt safe, yet, under the new administration, they no longer feel secure or welcomed by the country as a whole.

In contrast, ‘B,’ who selected ‘positive’ both times had no exceptionally horrible experience to disclose, and expressed his feeling that the negative rhetoric surrounding foreigners would pass given enough time. He was confident that no matter how vocal those with
these negative sentiments were, they were “not representative of the country as a whole.” Having lived in the U.S. for over ten years, ‘B’ had a much more relaxed demeanor. While he was certainly not supportive of the Trump presidency, ‘B’ expressed confidence in the United States and its citizenry to right any wrongs and fix the situation in due time.

Hazen and Alberts found that concern for the “political situation” in both the U.S. and home country were both selected by international students as disincentives for studying in the U.S., they consistently ranked 7th or 8th out of eight or nine possible response choices, a very low ranking overall. Those who did note the political environment as a major concern, expressed their feeling that the United States is “very hostile to foreigners,” full of “xenophobia, narrow-mindedness, prejudice…”38 They also conclude that “economic and professional factors typically typically act as strong incentives to stay in the US, while personal and societal factors tend to draw students back to their home countries.”39 These findings were supported by two of my three interviewees, who expressed clear dissatisfaction and concern for the political climate.

Regarding their favorite part of living in the U.S., ‘X’ and ‘B’ responded the academic environment and the largely friendly demeanor of Americans across campus and in the extended community. ‘A’ expressed a different opinion, and selected the widespread rules and regulations that ensure that those who work hard get rewarded properly for their efforts as, in her country, “unskilled and uneducated people are at the top positions.”

Each respondent offered a unique response for their least favorite aspect about life in the U.S. ‘X’ disliked the American focus on consumerism and the lack of variety from one U.S. city to another. For ‘A,’ it was the loneliness she saw in American students, a sharp contrast to her

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39 Ibid, 201.
lifestyle of close friends and kin ties in the Middle East. Finally, ‘B’ found the lack of political knowledge and consideration of foreign affairs to be the most upsetting aspect of Americans.

For the last portion of the interview, I asked questions pertaining to the student’s experience at Old Dominion University. All three responded that they are “satisfied” with their educational experience at ODU. Yet, ‘X’ shared that although his academic experience has been enjoyable, it is not as challenging as it could be. As he is accustomed to a more competitive environment back home in Indonesia, he finds his coursework and class experiences to be enjoyable rather than stressful. ‘X’ does worry that this limitedly competitive environment may be detrimental to the students in the end because the academia, especially in higher education, is a highly competitive field that is not always fair.

There was greater variety in the responses surrounding each student’s social experience and sense of community inclusion at the university. Although ‘X’ and ‘B’ selected “satisfied” and “strongly satisfied” respectively, ‘A’ chose “uncertain” in both instances. She explained that her uncertainty was in part due to the difficulty she experienced when first acclimating to the American way of life. While she has been able to make better connections with co-workers and classmates, she feels that overall ODU and America in general are less socially inclusive than her home country and comparable institutions there.
Figure 25: Satisfaction with ODU Social Experience.

Figure 26: Sense of Inclusion in ODU Community.

Just as ‘A’ has gradually been able to build friendships with others, she believes that she has become more confident and talkative as a student because of the encouraging learning environment offered at ODU. She appreciates the opportunity to be taught by and work alongside talented faculty members. Likewise, ‘X’ feels that he has been able to freely express his thoughts both inside and outside of the classroom at ODU, without a fear of negative
consequences. He believes that people are given respect, and differences are encouraged, rather than shunned. He is especially grateful for the “healthy, supportive environment to share ideas” in. Beyond these aspects, ‘B’ is appreciative of the diversity within the ODU community and further, in the greater Norfolk area that allows him to mix with both locals and people from all over the world.

In conclusion, while the political climate of the United States may be unsettling, and may cause international students from specific backgrounds to experience negativity and feelings of being unwelcomed, they seem determined to persevere and reach their academic and career goals. Apart from the national climate, the interviewee’s time at ODU seems to be a positive one that they look forward to continuing for the duration of their degree term. Each student expresses a strong appreciation for the American lifestyle, and does not seem inclined to abandon their academic or career goals in the short or long term because of the current political climate. By analyzing the survey responses, I find that the area where Trump rhetoric is likely to have the most effect is regarding international student’s job search. Although ideally ‘A’ would like to live and work in the U.S., if the political climate does not improve, she is seriously considering moving to alternative countries, like Canada.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

As no research design can be perfect, there are multiple areas in which improvements to my design could be made.

One of the major limitations of my research design was closely related to my survey questionnaire and its distribution process. I intended to have the survey sent out to international students by the University’s Office of Intercultural Relations during the first few weeks of
classes. By having this on-campus center handle the distribution and collection of these surveys, I could ensure that they remained anonymous. Yet, it took my contact several weeks to give me access to a medium through which I could spread word of my survey—Facebook. After making my post, I only ended up receiving two additional responses. Unfortunately, this method did not turn out to be the most effective tool to use in order to gather survey data.

Going into this project, I did not have a set number of responses that I needed to obtain, but I was hopeful to obtain at least twenty survey responses. Although I was able to reach a total of thirty-three survey responses by my deadline February 5th, getting students to respond to these survey questionnaires proved to be more difficult than I anticipated. As such, the data pool from which I was able to draw my analysis is much smaller that most scholars would suggest or use. While I had initially hoped to have a relatively balanced response pool from both undergraduate and graduate students, my data results are clearly skewed in favor of the graduate international student community at ODU.

If I were to conduct a similar study again, it would be helpful for the me to be able to offer an incentive of some sort, whether it be extra credit for a course, or a chance to win a gift-card to some franchise to potential participants of the survey to boost participation, especially undergraduate participation. It would also be beneficial to get in contact with students who did not return to ODU and get their perspective on the current political environment under Trump.

Improving or extending the timeframe of the data collection process may also be beneficial for any future researchers. Although I began researching my thesis question during the summer and fall semester, I was unable to finalize approval for the survey until mid-December. My goal was to send out the surveys the first Monday of the semester, January 8th, and to conduct the survey for the entire month. Yet, inclement weather forced the university to
close for several days, and for classes to be delayed when the university did open later on. Thus, in order to maximize my analysis and writing time, I was only able to collect survey and interview data until the February 4th. To gather as much data as possible and do a thorough job, a future researcher should plan to spend more than two full weeks collecting data. With proper incentives to offer participants, one to two months would likely be very effective.

Overall, I was highly satisfied with my questionnaire and the responses I received from participating students. For the most part, respondents took the survey seriously and answered both honestly and to the best of their ability. Although the overall number of responses was lower than I had intended, the quality of responses I received were above my expectations. I am especially grateful for this.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF U.S. HEGEMONY IN CROSS-CULTURAL HIGHER EDUCATION

“America, too, will almost certainly overcome. Given past experience, there is every reason to hope that the US will recover its soft power after Trump.”

–Joseph S. Nye

The key purposes of this research was to assess the extent to which U.S. dominance in higher education is being challenged by both internal policy decisions and by the improved capabilities of other countries. Although the “share of the United States in the global international student market has decreased from 28% in 2001 to 20% in 2009,” some predict that “American colleges and universities still remain as the leading destination for thousands of students from around the world.” Conflicting evidence from scholars, journalists and databases databases together have, up to the present moment, provided few conclusive ‘answers.’ With the negative political rhetoric of the Trump administration directed towards foreigners, and the betterment of universities in competing countries, it is uncertain if the United States will be able to maintain the supremacy it has enjoyed in cross-cultural higher educational exchange long into the future. What seems apparent presently, however, as professional Nicole Tami reports, is the “general kind of blanket attitude toward immigrants and international visitors continues, be they


2 Ketevan Mamiseishvili, “International student persistence in U.S. postsecondary institutions,” Higher Education 64, 1.
students or scholars, or professionals who come to work, people who have other opportunities—and many do—will go elsewhere.”

By conducting a case-study analysis of graduate and undergraduate international students at Old Dominion University, I was able to discover that although many international students are concerned about the current political environment, they do not anticipate it impacting their decision to study in the United States. Although my data pool and findings are limited to one particular university at a single point in time, it seems apparent that international students with strong interest in the United States will continue to come here to obtain their degrees in higher education. While new enrollment numbers may have declined nationwide, overall retention of international students remains stable at ODU for the time being. The prestigious reputation the U.S. has worked to build over the years will not vanish overnight simply because of one man’s words or actions—thus, the “Trump Effect” is not likely to be fatal in this respect.

However, where the negative political environment is likely to have a significant impact, I predict, is in international student’s job search after graduation. As I found through my survey and interview responses, international students today are aware of a multitude of career and educational options outside of the U.S. Although at least half of the students surveyed expressed their intention to return to their home country after graduating, the remaining students demonstrated a desire to live and work in a country that can provide them with both a welcoming environment and great work opportunities.

Yet, why should the changing enrollment and work patterns of international students matter? Although the “Trump Effect” may very well be a limited, “passing phenomena,” the potential for a decline in the U.S. hegemony in higher education is something that has far-

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3 Elizabeth Redden, “Nearly 4 in 10 Universities Report Drops in International Student Applications,” Inside HigherEd.
reaching consequences. In an article published on February 6th, Joseph Nye, the father of soft power, discusses how U.S. soft power has declined under Trump. The U.S. now ranks third instead of first in the British *Soft Power Index*, and in recent Pew Research Center findings, has reached “near parity” with China. Along the same vein, Marlene M. Johnson from the NAFSA NAFSA Association of International Educators expresses, “the number of international students in the United States—and whether it is going up or down—maters because it is a surrogate for competitiveness.” Without competitive cross-cultural higher education programs, the U.S. could experience weakening or decline in several important spheres.

The first of these spheres is economic. International students contribute several billion dollars each year to individual states as well as the national economy. Without the million plus plus international students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities each year, economic decline and recession is possible nationwide, and is already reportedly underway in Missouri. A second area of concern is employment. By pooling students from across the globe to research institutions, the U.S. has been able to greatly further its scientific advancements and retain a highly trained workforce domestically. If the U.S. loses a substantial population of international international students, however, whole sectors—particularly STEM-related jobs will be left with many unfilled positions.

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4 Quote of ‘B’ interviewee.
6 John Aubrey Douglass and Richard Edelstein, “Whither the Global Talent Pool?,” *Change* 41, 36
7 “Open Door Briefing Presentation,” *IIE.org*.
The third, and less tangibly influential sphere affected by changes in international student enrollment numbers, is diplomacy. Higher education cross-cultural exchange is an important tool of international relations, that, if properly utilized, can aid the U.S not only in spreading its ideas to individuals beyond its borders, but also in improving its relations with citizens of countries from around the world. Similarly, Kavita Pandit relates, “[international] students, having lived and studied in the United States, often become excellent ambassadors of American culture when they return to their home countries.”\(^1\) Hosted students that return to their homeland, homeland, taking with them a rewarding experience from their time in the U.S., are likely to promote ideas or policies that are favorable to U.S. interests.

In these ways, changes in the enrollment of international students in U.S. higher education, whether due to improved capabilities of other countries, or internal weaknesses clearly have far-reaching consequences for the nation. Countries that demonstrate a willingness to embrace foreign students warmly, offer them the opportunity to work and live with relative ease, guarantee them a degree of safety from violence and hatred, and provide them with the necessary resources to learn and succeed will not have to fear a loss of international talent. On the other hand, countries that fail to address the concerns international students have mentioned, and portray themselves as unwelcoming to foreigners, will effectively forfeit the opportunity to educate and work together with the brightest international talent.

What can presently be done to head off the negative consequences that a substantial decrease in international student enrollment would bring, however, is for U.S. colleges and universities to “make sure the message [they] sen[d] is one of welcome and inclusion at all

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times.” As Nye describes, it is up to the university to decide to “reinforce or be at odds with official foreign policy goals.” Some soft-power assets are more insulated from the political actions of the government than others, and are thus likely to prevail even in the most challenging times. Even if the nation cannot address every contributing internal factor, having institutions of higher education treat their international students in a positive way, regardless of the capital’s climate, is one practice that would, at the very least, help to ensure strong yields continue. After all, international students that have a rewarding experience are likely return to the U.S. for subsequent years of study and research. Even if they do one day return home, they will take with them not only helpful skills and coveted knowledge, but a sense of global community, counteracting any negative outcomes attributed to political rhetoric and actions of the Trump presidency. In this way alone, the “Trump Effect” can and will be beaten!

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future researchers on this subject should keep a close eye on the legislation and rhetoric of the current administration as well as future administrations of the United States. Although the initial travel ban met with much contestation in congress, this is unlikely to stop the current president or future presidents from passing a similar bill at another time. Aside from these bills, charged rhetoric directed towards natives from Muslim countries that began in the Bush era and continues to this day, is not likely to die down anytime soon. This rhetoric, although it is currently not directed towards international students per se, as this survey has shown, does have

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14 Ibid.
an impact on the decisions of international students when selecting where to continue their studies as well as shape their overall educational experience in a country or at a given institution, like Old Dominion University.

Clear trends in the numbers of enrollment, which may be affected by governmental rhetoric and policies, will not be readily available or noticeable until more time has passed. Thus, continuing this research in four or even five years would be highly beneficial. Much of what I have discovered at this point is limited to a specific institution at one point in time. Yet, future scholars could build upon the ideas utilized in this research study to refine and expand upon my findings. What might the climate of international students in the United States look like in future years? I am especially eager to find out.
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APPENDIX

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Notification of Consent:
The purpose of this survey is to ascertain the climate of international students in the United States.
The decision to participate in this survey is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate, your responses will be recorded and used anonymously in graduate research.

*If you would be willing to participate in a confidential interview to share greater insight on your experience, please contact the researcher Raven Showalter at rshow001@odu.edu

Demographics:

1. Home country/nation
2. What degree are you currently seeking? (Undergraduate, Graduate)
3. What is your subject area of interest? (Major, Minor, Concentrations)
4. Why have you selected this? (Major, Minor, Concentration)
5. Is this area of study offered in your home country? (Yes/No/Unsure)

Motivations for study and afterward intentions:

6. What is your motivation for studying in the United States?
7. What made you decide to attend Old Dominion University?
8. If you could continue your education in another country aside from the United States, what country would you choose? Why?
9. What do you hope to do with your degree after you finish?
10. Do you intend to live and work in the United States after completing your degree? Yes/No – explain.
11. If you do not intend to live and work in the United States after completing your degree, where else would you like to work? Explain.

United States political climate opinions:

12. How satisfied are you with your life here in the United States?
   Strongly Satisfied    Satisfied    Uncertain    Unsatisfied    Very Unsatisfied
13. What was your opinion of the United States like before coming to study here?
   Very Positive    Positive    Neutral    Negative    Very Negative

14. What is your opinion of the United States now that you live and study here?
   Very Positive    Positive    Neutral    Negative    Very Negative

15. As an international student, how does the current political environment of the US make you feel? Explain.

16. What do you enjoy the most about living in the US? Explain.

17. What do you like the least about living in the US? Explain.

Old Dominion University, education and social climate opinions:

18. How satisfied are you with your educational experience at ODU?
   Strongly Satisfied    Satisfied    Uncertain    Unsatisfied    Very Unsatisfied

19. How satisfied are you with your social experience at ODU?
   Strongly Satisfied    Satisfied    Uncertain    Unsatisfied    Very Unsatisfied

20. How included in the community would you say you feel?
   Strongly Satisfied    Satisfied    Uncertain    Unsatisfied    Very Unsatisfied

21. Has your time as a student at ODU changed you in any way that you would like to comment on?

22. What do you enjoy the most about being a student at ODU? Explain.

23. What do you like the least about being a student at ODU? Explain.

24. Would you recommend ODU to other students? Why or why not?
VITA

Raven Alexandra Showalter

EDUCATION
Master of Arts student in International Studies, Old Dominion University, 2016 – present.

Bachelor’s of Arts (May 2016) in Asian Studies, Mary Baldwin University.

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT
Graduate Teaching Assistant to Minori Marken, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Old Dominion University, August 2016- May 2017. Responsibilities included: attending all beginning and intermediate Japanese language courses, participating in speaking exercises, grading homework, quizzes and tests, as well as weekly tutoring.

Graduate Teaching Assistant to Dr. Cathy Wu, Department of International Studies, Old Dominion University, August 2017- May 2018. Responsibilities included: assisting professor with copying and scanning reading material for undergraduate courses, overseeing the development of research projects in class, grading papers, debates and exams.

PUBLICATIONS

PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES
Old Dominion University 16th Annual Graduate Research Conference, March 2018

ACADEMIC AWARDS
Amy M. Rupe Award for Excellence, Department of Asian Studies, Mary Baldwin University, April, 2015.
Global Honors Scholar Award, Mary Baldwin University, May, 2016.
Summa Cum Laude, Mary Baldwin University, May, 2016.
Best Paper Award, Graduate Program in International Studies, Old Dominion University, March 2018.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP
Phi Beta Kappa Society