

Successfully Creating Strategic International Recruitment and Retention Plans

Case Study Discussion Summary from Roundtable Discussions

The roundtable opened with an overview on creating a Strategic International Enrollment Management (SIEM) plan, then we broke into four small groups to discuss four hypothetical institutions and their international enrollment crises. Five steps were suggested for addressing each case study's barriers. For all four case studies, some common themes and approaches emerged, and those are listed below. Case-study-specific responses are listed on the following pages.

Individual case studies with the five steps and the resources handout with an overview of the SIEM cycle can be downloaded at <http://www.greatcircleglobal.com/resources.html#IEM2015>.

Barriers

- Lack of understanding from upper admin: importance of retention as part of plan, cost (monetary along with staff time and expertise) of effective recruitment and retention, the need for intentionality, staff training needs, ESL issues
- Untrained and insufficient staff (from admissions to student services to academic services)
- Potential for resistance from faculty and staff if they are not given tools to work with increased numbers of international students and encouraged to work together to avoid unnecessary work overloads

Stakeholders

Upper administration may need to provide stronger leadership and/or to recognize importance of addressing retention along with recruitment.

Institution needs to come to consensus about priorities for recruitment, then design solutions for recruitment AND meeting student needs throughout the student life cycle.

Set up regular meetings among the stakeholders:

- Help keep them on the same page and on board with the priorities.
- Alert you early if anyone is unhappy about the direction the institution is going. The sooner you know of dissension, the easier it is to address and contain.

To improve your own office's relationship with these stakeholders:

- Listen to concerns / questions - write up what you heard and share it to check you got it
- Have them share their issues with each other to help them understand that the problem #1 isn't one they have to solve alone and #2 that they are an integral part of the solution
- Demonstrate how working together makes the job easier for everyone AND helps them achieve their goals
- If they're feeling undervalued, you'll need a different approach than if they're worried you're going to create more work for them

Mission-critical aspects

- Having students who feel unwelcome and can't navigate institutional systems will obviously reduce their inclination to stay, negating the reasons for recruiting them.
- If the institution has a diversity goal, it is affected by retention as well.
- If you have a specific discipline that is important to your institution and international students fill an essential role there, include that.

Policies and processes

- Recruitment policies will need to be updated to reflect any new agreed-upon goals.
- Institute some training for faculty and staff on working with international students, especially those with English language challenges.
- Adjust communication processes between admissions/recruitment and the ISSO to ensure resources are available to serve the needs of incoming international students, including those with English language needs.
- Revisit ESL requirements (admission or additional training) prior to matriculation for incoming international students. If institution does not have an IEP on campus or ESL instructors, may need to negotiate relationships/contracts with nearby IEPs.

Successfully Creating Strategic International Recruitment and Retention Plans

Case Study Discussion Summary from Roundtable Discussions

CASE 1: UNDERFUNDED STATE UNIVERSITY

USU has historically had fairly low numbers of international students. Recent demographic changes have made it possible and advantageous to enroll additional non-resident tuition paying international students. The university increased enrollment enough to cause challenges with the student support services offices. There currently is no plan other than to enroll larger numbers for revenue purposes.

Issues to address

- Unexpected increase in international student enrollment numbers with no retention plans in place for these students
- Sometimes putting out fires is better-rewarded than preventing fires.
- There is a general assumption that international means more complex.
- Some very logistical, practical issues like classroom space issues.
- Apparent lack of agility and forecasting, probably exacerbated by silo-ization.

Barriers (in addition to common ones listed above)

- Insufficient budget/resource allocation if need for additional admissions and student support not recognized
- Focus on crisis if the increased numbers are already taxing admissions staff and ISSO staff, among others

Stakeholders

Upper administration	Graduate school(s)
Admissions staff, especially recruiters	Service offices (housing, dining, counseling, health, etc.)
ISSO staff	Faculty
Multicultural/diversity office staff	ESL faculty (if there are any on campus)

- Getting people to the same table is a challenge. Sometimes there are people getting together under the radar and quietly solving issues.
- There will inevitably be unanticipated negative consequences for someone on campus, so need to identify and address as quickly as possible.
- Cross-organizational problem solving led by someone in authority is essential, including the Provost calling a meeting, invoking faculty champions. The call for solving the problem needs to come from an executive or faculty governance person.

Policies and processes (in addition to common ones listed above)

- An SIEM plan is needed!

CASE 2: PRIVATE UNDERENROLLED COLLEGE

PUC has recently seen a precipitous drop in total enrollment. Campus administration (at least the President and the CFO) believes it would be advantageous to enroll more international students to fill gaps. The existing SIEM plan sought only small numbers of international students for the sake of diversification and because there are not enough resources for retention of large numbers of international students.

Issues to address

- Mandate to recruit more international students to correct falling enrollment numbers

Barriers (in addition to common ones listed above)

- Potential for resistance from faculty and staff if they are not encouraged to work together to support increased numbers of international students to avoid unnecessary work overloads
- Staffing – need to create or revisit staffing plan – how does an increase in enrollment increase staffing services and budget allocation?
- Managing this change in institutional culture, including collecting and using data

Successfully Creating Strategic International Recruitment and Retention Plans

Case Study Solutions from Roundtable Discussions

Stakeholders

Upper administration	Graduate school(s)
Admissions staff, especially recruiters	Service offices (housing, dining, counseling, health, etc.)
ISSO staff	Faculty
Multicultural/diversity office staff	ESL faculty (if there are any on campus)

- Identify offices to work together in same location where they can educate each other about their roles in the recruitment-retention process. Establish a point person or facilitator to lead this cross-campus effort.
 - Have admissions staff apply to the institution as an international student.
 - Have other staff experience their offices as an international student.
- Identify international strengths – institutional and office level – to find new recruitment approaches (SWOT analysis).

Policies and processes (in addition to common ones listed above)

- Need to tie international student recruitment and retention to institutional mission, which will lead to a more long-term strategy

CASE 3: LOW ESL STATE UNIVERSITY

LESU has recently enrolled a number of international students and complaints have rippled through the faculty about ‘standards’. International students fill an important revenue need for the institution. The existing SIEM plan looked only at the revenue needs of the institution and not retention needs of the students.

Issues to address

- Tension between admitting otherwise qualified students who may not succeed and losing tuition dollars.
- Complaints from faculty and staff about low English proficiency impeding teaching and service delivery – need to ask “what constitutes English language proficiency,” and manage expectations of faculty and staff.

Barriers (in addition to common ones listed above)

- Unprepared or underprepared students
- Conflicting priorities between recruitment staff and ISSO (and other) staff
- Likely have lack of clarity from and/or understanding (and therefore support, leadership, and direction) from upper admin – focused on tuition dollars and not retention (and future recruitment)?
- Resource allocation issues – perhaps not enough funds to ESL assistance on campus?

Stakeholders

Faculty with English-challenged students in their classes	Admissions staff, especially recruiters
Service offices (housing, dining, counseling, health, etc.)	ISSO staff
ESL faculty (if there are any on campus)	Upper administration

- No matter what your language requirements, you will always have some students who are struggling.
- How best to support students? English language is not the only issue, there are other transitional topics that students may need assistance with as they adjust to the US and your campus. (And domestic students may also need transitional assistance!)

Policies and processes (in addition to common ones listed above)

- Silos get in the way of effective student support. It’s important to improve communication across campus. Supporting students is about more than offering them direct assistance, we must also address cross-cultural issues campus-wide, offer workshops for faculty and others, etc.
- While the institution may be focused on revenue, that revenue may not then be used to support these students. We have to advocate for those resources.

Successfully Creating Strategic International Recruitment and Retention Plans

Case Study Solutions from Roundtable Discussions

CASE 4: DISCONNECTED STATE UNIVERSITY

DSU has increased international enrollments with no plan for retention or academic support services. International students fill an important revenue need for the institution. A variety of offices on campus work with students on different issues, but there is no coordination of effort. The existing SIEM plan looked only at the revenue needs of the institution and not retention needs of the students.

Issues to address

- Territorial issues between staff units related to international student recruitment and retention
- Because campus is decentralized:
 - May be lack of – or confusion about – institutional policies around retention
 - Policy issues affect the ISSO's ability to implement solutions, change processes, and improve cross-unit communication
 - Acculturation of faculty to change, as well as students
- Budget-based recruitment only?

Barriers (in addition to common ones listed above)

- Resource allocation issues frequently behind territorialism - I don't have enough staff to do what I'm already doing, so I can't take on anything else!
- Likely have lack of understanding (and so support, leadership, and direction) from upper admin for SIEM
- Communication issues - territorialism is often about not understanding what others do, worrying that they'll either give you more work, take away something you like, or make you look unnecessary or redundant

Stakeholders

- Leaders of each unit feeling it's "not my job" - could be limited to admissions and the ISSO not sharing information or could be other units on campus not seeing a need to help "those" international students (advising center, library, housing, food services, multicultural center, career center, learning center, etc.)
- Regardless of other units, directors of admissions and ISSO will be essential to have as part of a team to help correct the miscommunication, mistrust, and whatever other territorial issues are present

Set up regular meetings among the stakeholders:

- It may be helpful to make the first meeting be over lunch to allow for a more get-to-know-you feeling, unless the stakeholders are very work- and goal-oriented.
- Offer workshops for faculty on working with international students or cross-cultural communication during international education week
- University of Colorado Boulder created the "International Student Success Network" where people meet informally to share issues they're facing and how they've solved them. The ISSO buys the coffee.

To improve your own office's relationship with these stakeholders:

- If possible, give them something they appreciate (sweets, food, compliments, letter to the provost about how helpful they are) to help them see you are not a threat. If they're worried about becoming redundant or obsolete, that's a different approach than if they're worried you're going to create more work for them.

Mission-critical aspects

- Revisit reason for recruiting international students: diversification of classroom? Budget?
- Needs to be an institutional commitment – including at the top – to supporting international students after recruitment, not relegated to the ISSO

Policies and processes (in addition to common ones listed above)

- Can we be more proactive (instead of always reactive) through policy changes?