

# Symposium Reflection #2

Successful International Student Recruitment and  
Admissions Strategies After COVID-19



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On October 12-13, representatives from Northwest Missouri State University, Miami Dade College, the University of Arizona, Northern Arizona University, the University of Missouri, and the University of California San Diego, shared their insights and experiences on two topics at Michigan Language Assessment's Symposium on International Mobility after COVID-19. They discussed recruitment and admissions strategies for attracting international students after COVID-19 and explored current hot markets that have emerged for international recruitment. The audience included 270 higher education professionals from colleges and universities from around the United States. Here are some of the key themes that emerged from these panels.

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## Featured Speakers



Dr. Phil Hull, Director, *International Involvement Center, Northwest Missouri State University*



Luis Castillo, Associate Director, *Marketing and Strategic Operations, Student Engagement and Career Development, University of Arizona*



Georgette Perez, Dean of Students, *Miami Dade College*



Ryan Griffin, Director, *Office of International Admissions, University of Missouri*



Raghendra Singh, Program Manager, *Center for International Education, Northern Arizona University*



Dr. Patricia Juza, Associate Dean and Executive Director of Student Affairs and International Programs, *University of California San Diego*

## Recruiting in a Virtual World

The pandemic forced colleges and universities to change their recruitment strategies for international students. A primarily physical process suddenly shifted to almost entirely virtual. Students have to navigate layers of information due to the ever-changing nature of the pandemic. In many ways, the work of an admissions officer involves a lot more enrollment counseling, answering questions and easing the concerns of prospective students. Higher education institutions have gotten creative in communicating with international students about applying to the U.S., assuring candidates that it remains a good choice despite the obstacles COVID-19 has raised. Higher education institutions adopted a model that incorporates a greater sense of collaboration. Many are developing partnerships with international high schools and recruiting agents to create regional support networks.

## Student-Focused Approach

Successful recruitment strategies are student-focused and data driven, with a greater emphasis on making the process more convenient for students. Prior to COVID, admissions had already started communicating virtually with students through platforms such as WhatsApp, WeChat, email, and text. The pandemic only accelerated those efforts. Institutions have even found ways to conduct campus tours, participate in fairs, and do group presentations through digital platforms. Many optimized their phone systems to take virtual calls.

The shift to online recruitment is readily accepted by students. Removing the physical component benefits potential applicants because communications and engagement activities fit their schedules and preferences. Admissions offices are more flexible in their application policies and procedures, accepting more English

language proficiency exam options, such as [MET Digital](#). The reality is that virtual recruitment isn't going away. Institutions should continue maximizing these digital platforms to create a global pathway.

## Expanding the Recruitment Footprint

The shift towards virtual recruitment allows higher education institutions to capitalize on regions they might not have been able to reach in the past. Some of the emerging "hot markets" have shown increased interest in exploring higher education options in the United States. In Asia, students from China, India, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh show strong interest in in-person learning and hybrid programs. Students in Africa, specifically Nigeria, Ghana, and Ethiopia, also showed increased interest in studying in the United States. The deployment of on-the-ground recruitment agents has helped institutions capitalize on these leads. In fact, collaborating with local agents helps higher education institutions to offer the majors and programs that align with the ones that the students are interested in.

Exploring new markets can bring new challenges. As admissions offices start receiving applications from new regions, they should familiarize themselves with the new educational system. It's also worth considering how some of the lasting changes from the pandemic, like test-optional policies, will impact the recruitment strategies in these markets. Panelists recommended exploring international partnership opportunities. They also recommended utilizing the resources and consulting services provided by EducationUSA and the U.S. Department of Commerce. Conducting research into the economies and education systems of these "hot market" regions is essential for higher education institutions to reach their goals for international recruitment.

The content discussed during Michigan Language Assessment's symposium was compiled into a series of reflective essays. This is the second of five articles. Check back regularly for updates or watch the full [event recording here](#).

