

COMMUNITY COLLEGE
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
RESEARCH INITIATIVE

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AT U.S. COMMUNITY COLLEGES

EVIDENCE FROM THE 2024-25
ACADEMIC YEAR

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH INITIATIVE
WILLIAM & MARY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

U.S. community colleges were created to focus on local educational needs and democratize access to higher education (Kisker et al., 2023). These higher education institutions provide an important and affordable pathway to postsecondary education for an increasingly diverse student population. They offer two-year associates degrees; technical, vocational, and occupational credentials; and, in some cases, bachelor's degrees that are especially relevant to community needs (Kisker et al., 2023).

As open-access institutions, community colleges serve a disproportionate number of first-generation, part-time, single parenting, and otherwise marginalized and disadvantaged student populations (American Association of Community Colleges, 2025). In the fall 2023 term,¹ this sector of U.S. higher education enrolled 10.5 million credit- and non-credit-seeking students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2025).

Despite its importance in educating a large number of postsecondary students in the United States, community colleges are often depicted as lagging behind in public discourse, although the extent to which this is perception rather than reality is debatable. International education is no exception.

¹ This is the most recent fall term for which data are currently available.

Although international education has been a topic of conversation at community colleges since the 1960s, this sector has traditionally been marginalized or absent from broader international education conversations, which tend to focus on the four-year university or liberal arts college contexts (Harder, 2010; Raby, 2012; Raby & Valeau, 2022).

All students, regardless of level or academic interest, live in a globalized society and will inevitably encounter situations wherein they must work across cultures and collaborate with people in other countries. Obvious examples in higher education broadly include students studying international relations who will ultimately work in global politics, or foreign language majors who go on to teach English as a second language.

However, in an internationally interconnected world, students whose interests and career goals do not include an obvious intercultural component also need tools to engage with diverse cultures, people, and ideas (Wood & Raby, 2021). For example, students studying for a healthcare profession will eventually serve patients who are immigrants, and students earning an automotive systems technology degree will service foreign cars. Raby (2007) notes that all academic areas in a community college not only can, but must, be internationalized to prepare students for their futures.

BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

International education provides numerous benefits to students and society, including improved academic performance and likelihood of credential completion (e.g., Bhatt et al., 2022; Whatley & González Canché, 2022) and important career training (Wood & Raby, 2021). Perhaps more importantly, current sociopolitical and economic forces underscore how important it will be for students to effectively and productively engage in intercultural communication and to reach greater understanding in intercultural interactions, both benefits of engaging in international education (e.g., Raby et al., 2014; Riley & Bustamante, 2016).

Given their mission to educate any individual who seeks to learn, community colleges are uniquely positioned to address the need for international learning in today's society.

THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to offer a general overview of the extent to which US community colleges engaged in international education in the 2024-25 academic year. The marginalization of community college international education in mainstream data sources that focus on international education, such as the Institute of International Education's *Open Doors* report, underscores a significant need to show the activity, creativity, and depth that community colleges have in offering opportunities for global learning.

REPORT OVERVIEW

This report is based on data collected in the 2024-25 academic year by the Community College International Education Research Initiative (CCIERI). The dataset that forms the foundation for this report includes 922 community colleges located in the 50 U.S. states and Washington, D.C. and was created based on institutional website evidence (Nyarko et al., 2025). More information about the data collection process can be found in this report's Appendix.

The international education offerings described in this report fall into two categories: student mobility and internationalization at home, referring to global activities offered at students' home community colleges. Student mobility involves students crossing country borders and includes study abroad and international student enrollment. Internationalization at home comprises international education opportunities that students can access without international travel and involves the "purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69). Classroom-integrated virtual international exchange and the availability of a certificate or diploma in global learning represent formal at-home curricular international learning opportunities. Informal opportunities include hosting of internationally focused cultural events on campus and the sponsorship of similarly focused clubs. Resources for faculty and staff that support institutional internationalization can involve both the formal and informal curriculum, depending on how faculty and staff use these resources and professional development.

For example, faculty professional development opportunities may support their integration of virtual international exchange into a specific course, which is part of the formal curriculum. On the other hand, staff support might provide resources to develop a global awareness club, which is an example of the informal curriculum. Table 1 lists and provides definitions of each of the international education offerings included in this report.

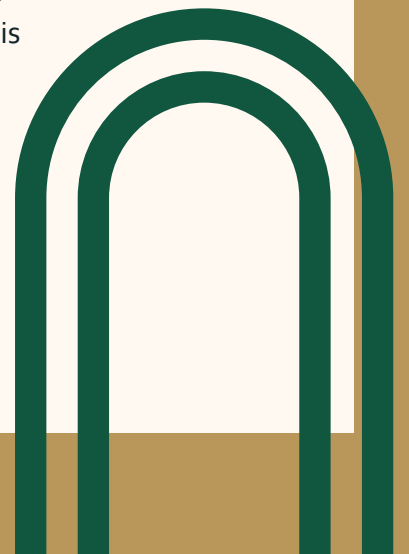


Table 1: International Education Offerings included in this Report and Definitions

Offering	Definition
Study Abroad	Study abroad is a form of off-campus study that takes place outside the country where a student's home institution is located and results in progress toward an academic degree (Forum on Education Abroad, 2025).
International Student Enrollment	International students are on a temporary, non-immigrant visa and are enrolled in coursework at a U.S. institution (IIE, 2025a). This definition does not include students in international locations taking coursework through a U.S. institution online, but it does include students enrolled in Optional Practical Training.
Virtual International Exchange	Virtual exchange programs "use technology to connect people for education and exchange" and are sometimes facilitated by prepared and responsible adults, often faculty and staff (Stevens Initiative, 2024). Virtual exchange often involves technology-facilitated collaborative projects and discussions among students and faculty from different parts of the world (SUNY COIL, 2025).
Certificate/Diploma in Global Learning	A certificate "refers to an award granted for the successful completion of a sub baccalaureate postsecondary program of study. [...] Certificates are usually awarded in a career education field and may cover the same coursework as an associate's degree, but without the general education requirements" (NCES, 2025). The U.S. Department of Education's Common Education Data Standards (2025) define a diploma as a recognition of instruction in a given area that is less than two years. In both cases, certifications are supplementary to a student's primary program of study and do not represent a full degree program. Here, certificates or diplomas had a global, international, or intercultural focus.
Faculty/Staff Support for Internationalization	Faculty and staff support for internationalization comes in a variety of forms and can be financial (e.g., grant support for program or course development) or not (e.g., professional development opportunities related to integration of global learning into teaching; membership in international education professional organizations that provide resources and support for teaching and learning).
Internationally focused Cultural Events and Clubs on Campus	Internationally focused cultural events and clubs have a definite global focus. Internationally focused cultural events include reference to at least one international location, such as a city, country, or culture. Clubs such as an international travel club, global exploration club, or international students club are examples of clubs with an international focus. However, clubs that are specific to students from a particular background (e.g., a LatinX students club) are not internationally focused, as students who identify as LatinX are not necessarily from another part of the world.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

Student mobility is often what first comes to mind when thinking about international education and involves students crossing international borders. This approach to international education can involve domestic community college students participating in study abroad or international students coming to study at community colleges. This section summarizes the CCIERI's findings regarding study abroad and international student enrollment at community colleges in 2024-25. It also compares these statistics to previously existing data sources, namely the Institute of International Education's *Open Doors* survey and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)'s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Regarding this first previously existing data source (*Open Doors*), it is important to keep in mind that the numbers reported in this section derive from the 'All Institutions' data table, which includes information for higher education institutions that report ten or more students either studying abroad or enrolled as international students.

STUDY ABROAD

Two previously existing datasets show conflicting information with reference to community college study abroad. The Institute of International Education's (IIE) latest *Open Doors Report* includes study abroad participation² data from 80 of the CCIERI dataset's community colleges³ (approximately 9%) in the 2022-23 academic year. These colleges reported a total of 3,625 study abroad participants, for an average of 45 students per institution (Institute of International Education, 2024).

The National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) does not collect data about how many students participate in study abroad. However, in its Institutional Characteristics survey, there is a question about whether an institution offers

² The Institute of International Education (2025b) defines 'study abroad' as an activity through which students receive academic credit from their home institution for study abroad.

³ Note that the Institute of International Education does not use the same definition of 'community college' as we do, and thus these numbers are not the same as those reported in *Open Doors*. The Institute of International Education refers to these institutions as "Associates Colleges" based on the 2021 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (<https://opendoorsdata.org/about/>).

study abroad. This survey's instructions indicate that respondents should select "Yes" if students have the opportunity to complete all or part of their academic program studying in another country, whether on a campus abroad or through an agreement with another higher education institution. In total, 323 of the community colleges in our dataset (approximately 35%) answered "Yes" to this question in the 2023-24 academic year, the most recent year currently available in IPEDS.

These two datasets provide very different information about the prominence of study abroad at U.S. community colleges, with IIE suggesting that 9% offer study abroad, while IPEDS indicates that 35% do so.

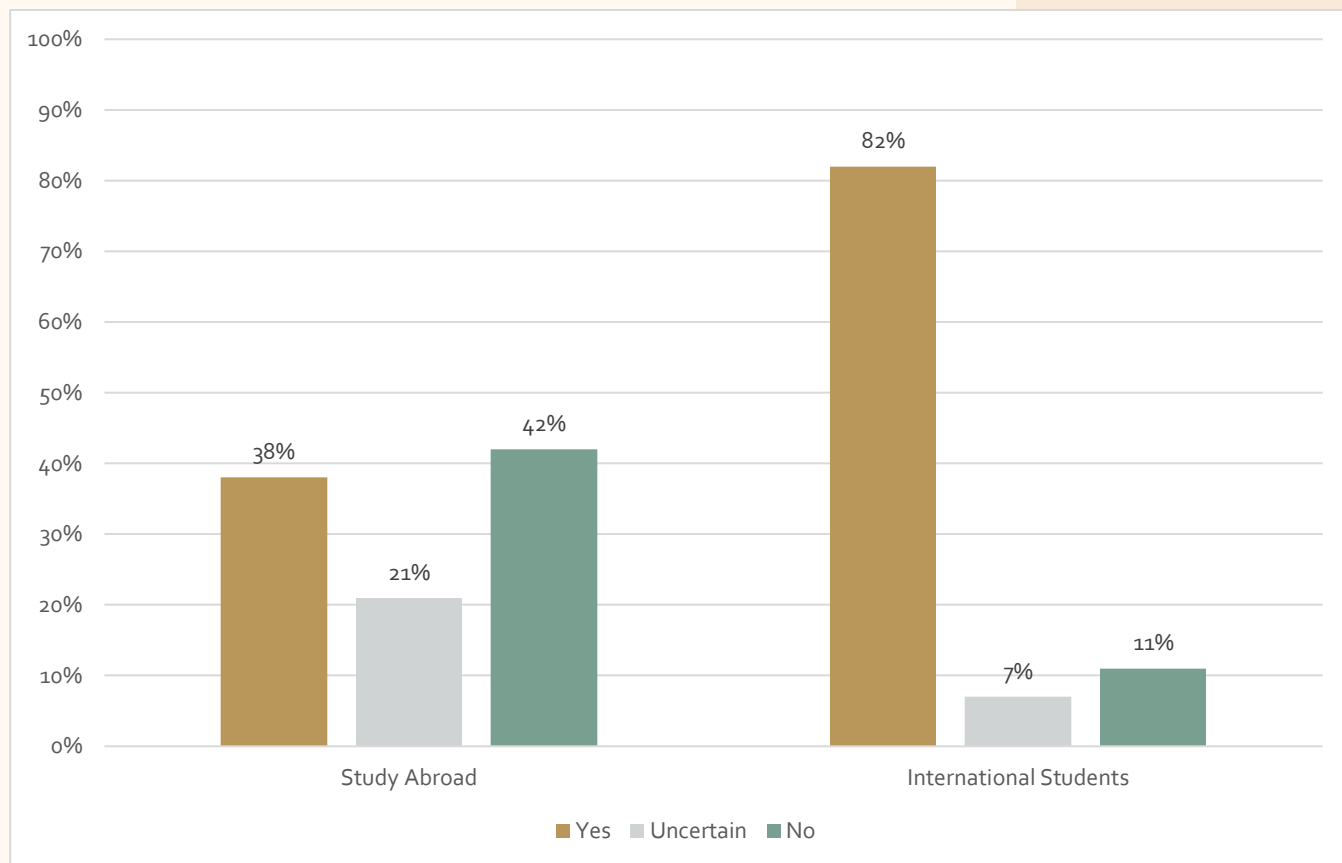
Study abroad in the CCIERI dataset is displayed in Figure 1 below. We found that 350 community colleges offered study abroad (38%), while 383 did not (42%). We were uncertain about whether study abroad was available at the remaining 189 colleges (21%) due to vague or outdated information on colleges' websites. While IPEDS approximates our dataset with regard to the percentage of community colleges that offer study abroad, IIE's dataset undercounts these offerings by 29 percentage points. This discrepancy is likely due to low participation numbers (i.e., less than 10) reported by many community colleges, which do not appear in public-facing data.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Similar to study abroad, both IIE and IPEDS provide information about international student enrollment at community colleges. According to IIE, in the 2023-24 academic year, 249 community colleges in the CCIERI dataset enrolled international students (27%). These colleges reported a total of 49,250 international students enrolled, averaging approximately 198 international students per college (IIE, 2024). In this same academic year, IPEDS indicated that 783 colleges (85%) enrolled non-US resident students¹, averaging around 156 non-US resident students per college.

In its second panel, Figure 1 displays international student enrollment in the CCIERI dataset. We found that 755 colleges enrolled international students (82%) and 102 did not (11%). We were unsure if 65 colleges (7%) enrolled international students. While IPEDS data very closely approximates our own, and differences between our data and IPEDS data may be due to definitional differences for 'international student,' IIE's dataset underrepresents international student enrollment, likely due to the aforementioned reporting of enrollments only for institutions that enroll 10 or more international students.

FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF U.S. COMMUNITY COLLEGES THAT ENGAGE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY (STUDY ABROAD AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT)



Note: This figure is based on data from the CCIERI (Nyarko et al., 2025) (percentages out of N=922 community colleges). <https://ccintled.pages.wm.edu/>

INTERNATIONALIZATION AT HOME

One contribution of the CCIERI dataset is that we collected information about community colleges' internationalization at home efforts, which are not represented in other national datasets, to our knowledge. These efforts are important for all higher education institutions, but this is especially true for community colleges, as the student populations these colleges serve are more likely not to have the financial means or freedom from other obligations, such as work or family, that allow them to participate in experiences like study abroad. At the same time, community college students are interested in international education and understand the value of these opportunities for their future careers and life trajectories (Amani & Kim, 2018).

Although nationally representative information about at-home approaches to international education is not available, the American Council on Education's (ACE)'s *Mapping Internationalization* report provides some useful reference points regarding these opportunities. This report is based on survey data collected every five years with the goal of assessing global engagement at U.S. higher education institutions. The most recent report relied on survey responses from 903 institutions (ACE, 2022). Although ACE provides summaries of survey responses by Carnegie classification, including associate institutions, it is unclear how many of the 903 total survey respondents fell into this category.

Figure 2 summarizes information about the extent to which these opportunities are offered at community colleges, as evidenced in the CCIERI dataset. In general, these at-home approaches to international education are not as frequent as those that involve international mobility.

VIRTUAL INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

The most recent *Mapping Internationalization* report indicates that using technology to facilitate course-level collaboration between faculty and/or students on the home campus and counterparts overseas was reported by around 20% of survey respondents from associate institutions in the 2020-21 academic year (ACE, 2022).

We found that 38 colleges (4%) in the CCIERI dataset offered virtual international exchange programs while 756 (82%) did not. We were uncertain about offerings at 128 additional colleges (14%).

Keeping in mind that ACE conducted the survey that is the foundation for their report during the 2020-21 academic year, which was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is perhaps not surprising that the percentage they report is greater than the one derived from the CCIERI data. It is also possible that community colleges offer virtual international exchange opportunities that do not appear on their websites, particularly when they are associated with a specific course. In this case, these opportunities could have been reported in responses to ACE's survey, but we would not have found them on institutional websites. A third explanation is selection bias in ACE's survey respondents, wherein institutions with a stronger international education focus were more likely to complete the survey.

CERTIFICATE OR DIPLOMA IN GLOBAL LEARNING

In the CCIERI data, 48 colleges (5%) offered a certificate or diploma in global learning. A total of 748 (81%) did not, and we were uncertain about 126 colleges (14%). To our knowledge, there is no other data source that reports on the prominence of this approach to global learning at community colleges.

FACULTY/STAFF SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION

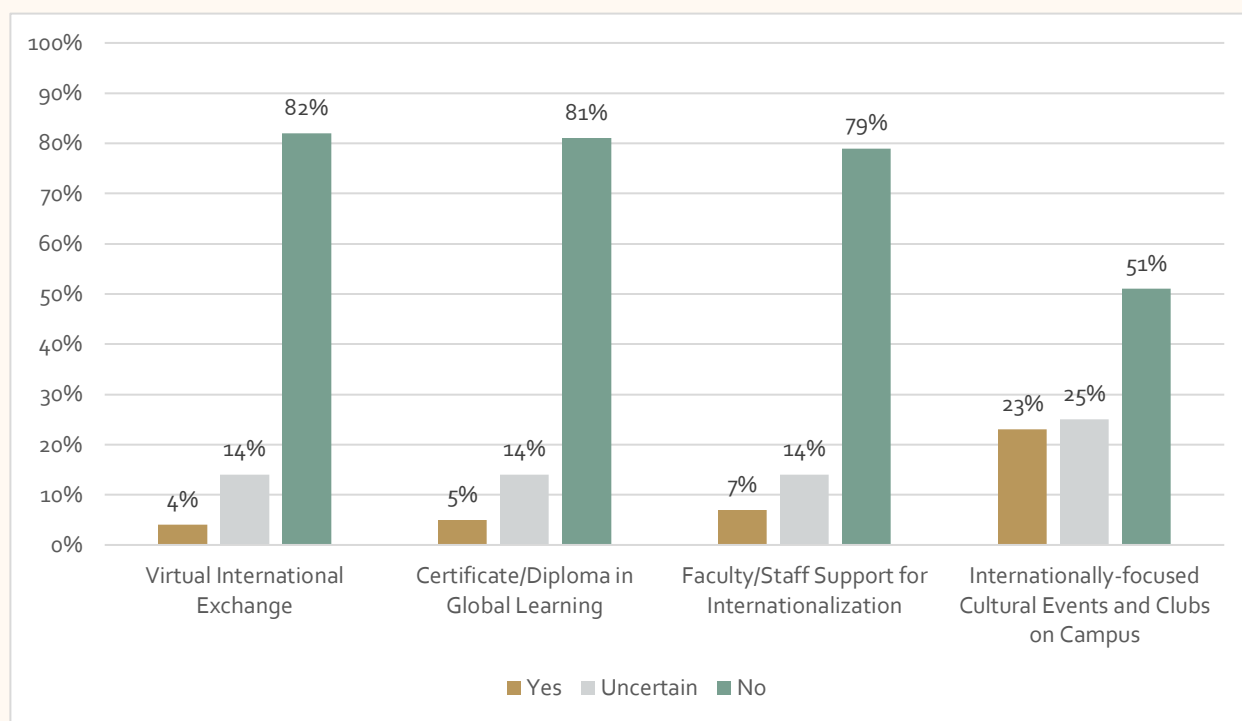
ACE's *Mapping Internationalization* report indicates that, at associate institutions represented in their survey responses, common internationalization-focused professional development opportunities for faculty include workshops on internationalizing the curriculum (approximately 30% of responding institutions), workshops that include a focus on how to use technology to enhance the international dimension of a course (approximately 20%), workshops on teaching and integrating international students (approximately 20%), workshops on global learning assessments (approximately 15%), and opportunities to improve their foreign language skills (approximately 10%) (ACE, 2022).

The CCIERI data indicated that 61 colleges (7%) offered support to faculty and staff for their internationalization work. A total of 729 (79%) did not, while we were unsure about 132 (14%). The prominence of faculty professional development for at-home internationalization, such as internationalizing the curriculum and integrating technology into courses, in the ACE report may be due in part to the proximity of their data collection to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also possible that evidence of these professional development opportunities does not appear publicly on institutional websites, which makes it less likely that they would be captured in the CCIERI data. Selection bias again offers a third potential explanation for discrepancies between our data and ACE's survey responses.

INTERNATIONALLY FOCUSED CULTURAL EVENTS AND CLUBS ON CAMPUS

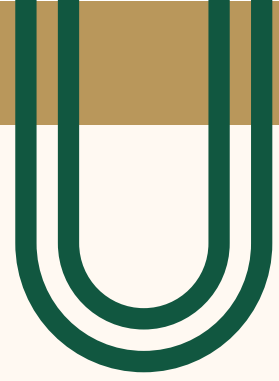
The *ACE Mapping Internationalization* report indicates that around 35% of associate institutions hosted regular and on-going international festivals or events on campus in the 2020-21 academic year (ACE, 2022). The CCIERI dataset indicates that 216 (23%) community colleges hosted internationally focused cultural events or supported internationally focused clubs on campus, while 474 (51%) did not and 232 (25%) were unclear whether these opportunities were offered. Discrepancies between our percentages and those provided by ACE may be due to information missing from college's websites about internationally focused events and clubs, which would not have been captured in our dataset, or selection bias in which colleges are represented in the ACE report.

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF U.S. COMMUNITY COLLEGES THAT ENGAGE IN INTERNATIONALIZATION AT HOME



Note: This figure is based on data from the CCIERI (Nyarko et al., 2025) (percentages out of N=922 community colleges). Percentages do not add up to 100% for 'Internationally focused Cultural Events and Clubs on Campus' due to rounding. <https://ccintled.pages.wm.edu/>

KEY TAKEAWAYS



TAKEAWAY #1

Community colleges are more active in international student mobility than mainstream data sources, particularly the Institute of International Education's *Open Doors* report, indicate.

TAKEAWAY #2

Although often marginalized, community colleges are both active and creative in offering opportunities for global learning.

TAKEAWAY #3

For international student mobility opportunities, the CCIERI data indicates that 38% of community colleges offer study abroad and 82% enroll international students.

TAKEAWAY #4

For internationalization at home opportunities, the CCIERI data indicates that 4% of community colleges offer virtual international exchange, 5% offer a certificate or diploma in global learning, 7% provide resources to faculty and staff to support international education, and 23% host internationally-focused events on campus and/or support student clubs with an international focus.

TAKEAWAY #5

While some community colleges offer opportunities for students to engage in international education at home, the primary way community colleges provide international learning opportunities to students is through mobility. Internationalization at home is an opportunity for growth in community college international education.

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APPENDIX: DATA COLLECTION

The dataset that informs this report was collected between August 2024 and March 2025 and relied on information from community college institutional websites. To create the dataset, we pulled a list of all higher education institutions in the United States in the 2023-24 academic year from the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES)'s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). We then limited the dataset to public institutions falling into the following Carnegie 2021 Basic classifications: Associate's colleges, special-focus two-year institutions, and Associate's/Baccalaureate colleges. While this latter group of institutions does award four-year baccalaureate degrees, in addition to associate's degrees, baccalaureate degrees comprise less than half of the degrees awarded. Any community college that offers a bachelor's degree program, no matter how small the program, falls into this category. We removed institutions not located in one of the 50 U.S. states or Washington, DC alongside institutions that were branch campuses of larger, four-year institutions. With these exclusions, our final dataset included 922 colleges.

As a team of three data collectors, we searched each college's website using its internal search function and dropdown menus for evidence of international education opportunities. We entered information about what we found into a Google form, which helped us compile information into a single data file. Data that we collected that informed this particular report included responses to the following questions:

- Does the institution offer study abroad? (Response options: Yes, No, Uncertain)
- Does the institution offer virtual international exchange? (Response options: Yes, No, Uncertain)
- Does the institution enroll international students? (Response options: Yes, No, Uncertain)
- Does the institution offer some sort of certificate or diploma for global learning? (Response options: Yes, No, Uncertain)
- Does the institution offer resources for faculty and/or staff to support the institution's internationalization efforts? (Response options: Yes, No, Uncertain)
- Does the institution sponsor international cultural events on campus? (Response options: Yes, No, Uncertain)

As a data collection team, we met biweekly to discuss our progress and ask questions about what we were finding on college websites. These meetings ensured that we agreed regarding what counted as a "Yes" answer for each of the above-listed questions. For example, soon after beginning data collection, we discussed that often international cultural events on campus were hosted or sponsored by a particular student club or organization, which led us to search both college's events webpages and their student clubs' webpages for information that would help us respond to the question about international cultural events. We also discussed what outdated webpage information might mean regarding offerings. For example, more than once we found that study abroad websites advertised programs from several years prior.

We published our full dataset on our website (<https://ccintled.pages.wm.edu/>) in March 2025 and announced it publicly through social media, invited presentations to various international education groups, and an email to the international education contact at each of the community colleges in the dataset. We asked college representatives to fill out a form on our website to correct their college's information if it was incorrect. We suspected that some of the information we had collected was not accurate due to outdated website information, international education offerings that were not described on websites (e.g., sometimes colleges advertised international events on social media but not on their websites), and human error. The statistics presented in this report represent the corrections we received as of August 11, 2025. On this date, we had received corrected information from 33 institutions, representing less than 4% of all institutions in the dataset. In the absence of explicit corrections, we assume that the information we initially collected for remaining institutions is as accurate as possible.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH INITIATIVE:

The Community College International Education Research Initiative (CCIERI) is a research group organized by Dr. Melissa Whatley in William & Mary's School of Education. Our work focuses on all aspects of international education in the U.S. community college context. We are especially interested in unconventional, less common, and new approaches that promote access to international learning opportunities for underserved populations and that result in outcomes that lead to a more just world.

Learn more at <https://ccintled.pages.wm.edu/>.

