

U.S. COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

AVAILABILITY AND SCOPE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 2

REPORT OVERVIEW 3

RESULTS 5

KEY TAKEAWAYS 8

REFERENCES 9

APPENDIX 10

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

The international student population enrolled in US community colleges has increased over the past two years. The most recent Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors Report indicates a total of 59,315 international students enrolled at U.S. community colleges during the 2023-24 academic year, representing a 12.7% increase from the previous academic year (IIE, 2025). International students enroll in community colleges due to their often lower tuition, easier admission, strong transfer pathways to 4-year universities, and access to vocational programs not available in their home countries (Anayah & Kuk, 2015).

Community colleges enroll international students because they provide cultural and academic benefits (Hagedorn & Lee, 2005), which can enhance domestic students' global awareness and cognitive growth, and are perceived to offer financial benefits to community colleges (Hagedorn, 2020). Even though international students contribute to community colleges' tuition revenue by paying full tuition, often at higher rates than domestic students (Hagedorn, 2020), research shows their tuition payments rarely generate large net profits for community colleges (Bae & González Canché, 2021).

Community college international students' ability to succeed once they decide to enroll in a community college depends on their access to support services. For example, Lau et al. (2019) found that academic advising services promoted students' academic achievement, persistence, and sense of belonging. To succeed, community college international students must navigate unfamiliar employment rules, financial pressures, transportation, housing, and health and wellness services. They face language barriers, limited social engagement, difficulty forming friendships, and difficulty approaching and communicating with advisors (Zhang & Hagedorn, 2018).

How community colleges approach international student services may be shaped by two main factors. First, declining public funding has increased the financial importance of international student enrollment (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). International students often pay higher tuition and fees than domestic students, which can encourage institutional leaders to view them as a potential solution to their declining funding problem (Hagedorn, 2020). This financial incentive can lead community colleges to prioritize services that attract

international students but not those that serve them once they enroll (Viggiano et al., 2018).

Second, however, international students need ongoing support services shaped by their internal and external environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ihuoma & Bista, 2025; Whatley & Fischer, 2022). Effective support services therefore should extend from pre-arrival preparation and initial adjustment through continued enrollment, graduation, and transitions to employment or further education. This comprehensive support encourages community colleges to look beyond recruitment and immigration services and provide academic, social, and other support services that help international students succeed. This report summarizes a study that engages with these alternative perspectives of international student support to examine the services provided by U.S. community colleges.

REPORT OVERVIEW

This report summarizes key findings from an exploratory sequential mixed-methods study of international student services offered at US community colleges. It uses community college website data to document:

- The services available to support international students;
- The number of colleges that focus exclusively on recruitment, admissions, and legal/immigration issues compared to other services;
- Colleges that offer services beyond recruitment, admissions, and legal/immigration; and
- Whether larger community colleges offer more services and, if yes, which ones.

The sample was drawn from Nyarko et al.'s (2025) Community College International Education Research Initiative's comprehensive data of international education at U.S. community colleges (See Appendix for information on the sample, data collection, and analysis process) and includes the 755 community colleges that enroll international students.

Table 1 on the following page lists and provides definitions of each of the international students support services in this report.

Table 1: International Student Support Services and Definitions

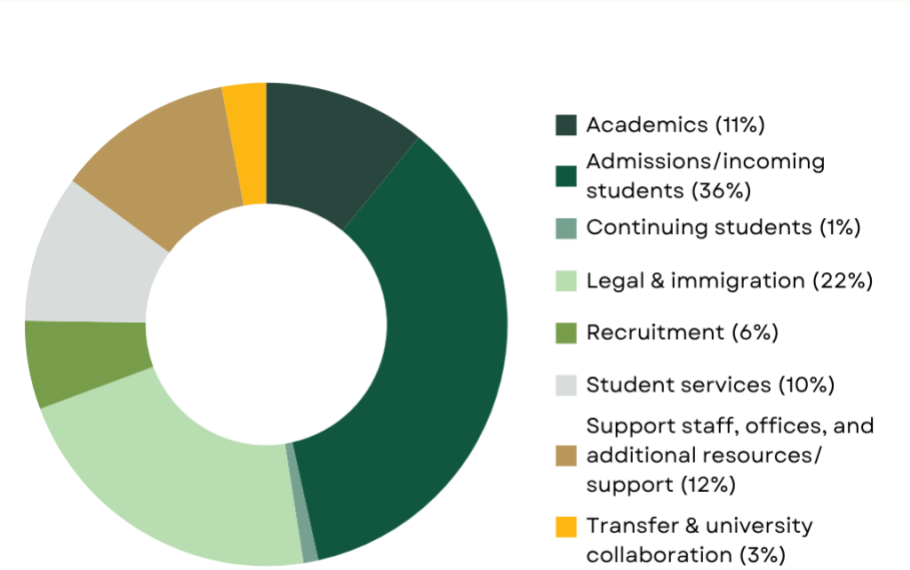
Support Service	Definition
Academics	Academics refers to services to support international students' learning and progress toward graduation through advising, tutoring, counseling, course planning, and other educational resources (e.g., English proficiency and support).
Admissions/Incoming Students	Admissions and incoming students include services to help prospective and newly admitted students navigate applications, enrollment, orientation, and the transition into the institution (e.g., admissions steps, transcript requests, TOEFL/IELTS/English proficiency test requirements, and pre arrival information/tips).
Continuing Students	Continuing students represent services to support already enrolled international students with access to resources, and persistence toward graduation (e.g., semester check-in, and requirements while in the U.S.).
Legal and Immigration	Legal and immigration services provide international students with guidance and resources on legal matters, visa requirements, immigration status, and related rights and responsibilities.
Recruitment	Recruitment includes services that attract and engage prospective international students by sharing information about the institution, its programs, and enrollment opportunities (e.g., current student testimonials, virtual campus tours, brochures, and handbooks).
Student Services	Student services are the resources, services, and experiences that support international students' basic needs, engagement, sense of belonging, and well-being throughout college (e.g., dining, housing, extracurricular events, student health, and student activities).
Support Staff, Offices, and Additional Resources/ Information	Support staff, offices, and additional resources are the institutional support networks that help international students access assistance, navigate campus and community systems, and stay informed (e.g., parking passes, contact information, frequently asked questions, local resources, and office hours).
Transfer and University Collaboration	Transfer and university collaboration services help students move between institutions through coordinated admissions, credit transfers, articulation agreements, and institutional partnerships.

RESULTS

SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE

Figure 1 provides a distribution of international student services offered at U.S communities colleges. From the figure, the most frequent service provided was Admissions/Incoming Students (36%). Services related to Legal and Immigration were the second most frequent (22%). Together, these two services, which help students with their initial enrollment, represent the majority of services provided at community colleges (58%). The third most frequent category of services was Support Staff, Offices, and Additional Resources/Information (12%). Academics and Student Services comprised 11% and 10% of services offered, respectively. These percentages suggest that around 33% of services focus on students once they arrive on campus. Finally, services related to Recruitment represented 6%, Transfer and University Collaboration represented 3%, and Continuing Students represented 1%.

Figure 1: Distribution of International Student Support Services



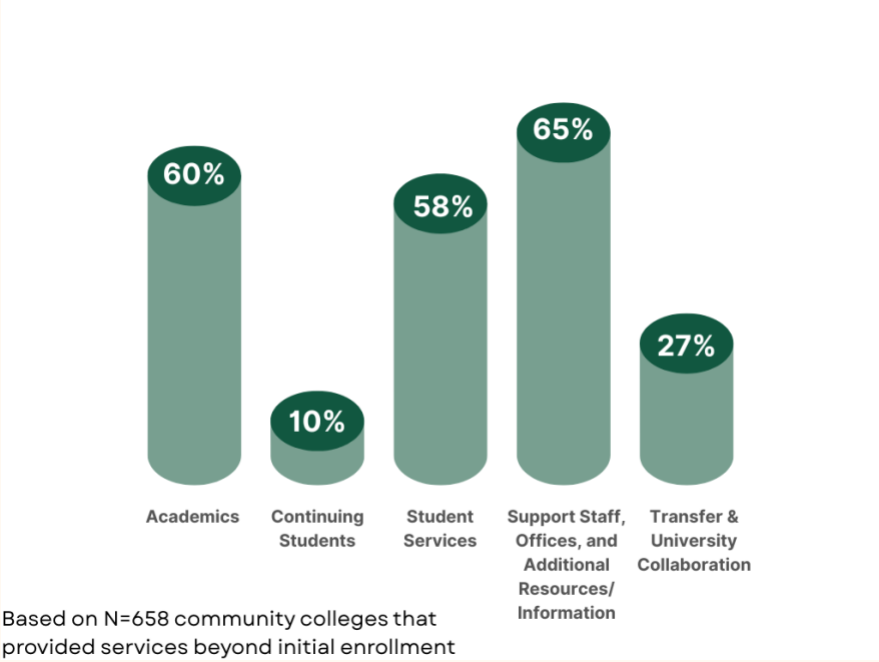
Based on N=755 community colleges that enroll international students

SERVICES BEYOND INITIAL ENROLLMENT

A large percentage of community colleges (N=658, 87.5%) provided at least some service that extended beyond recruitment, admission, or legal and immigration compliance. Although entry and regulatory services formed the most visible foundation of support, international students as continuing learners and members of a campus community were provided with additional support to enable them to thrive in their program of studies. Out of the total of 752 community colleges, very few (N= 94, 12.5%) provided only services to recruit new international students, assist in the admissions process, and support visa applications.

Figure 2 focuses on the 658 community colleges that provided international student services that extended beyond initial enrollment. 60% (N=393) provided academic services, 10% (N=64) provided continuing student services, 58% (N=381) provided student services, 65% (N=429) provided support staff, offices, and additional resources/information, and 27% (N=180) provided transfer and university collaboration services.

Figure 2: Percentages of Community Colleges Providing International Student Support Services Beyond Enrollment



Based on N=658 community colleges that provided services beyond initial enrollment

INSTITUTIONAL SIZE AND SERVICE BREADTH

The study also examined whether larger community colleges provided more international student services. Institutional size was determined using 2025 Carnegie classification. Community colleges enrolling fewer 4,000 students were classified as "Small," between 4,000 and 20,000 as "Medium," and greater than 20,000 as "Large." The findings indicate that international student support was not confined to the largest colleges or to institutions with the most extensive international education infrastructure. Admissions/Incoming Students, Legal and Immigration Services, and Transfer & University Collaboration resources were offered at colleges to similar extents regardless of size. However, larger colleges provided more support for Academics (63%), Continuing Students (25%), Recruitment (48%), and Student Services (64%) compared to their small and medium counterparts (Academics, 46% and 52% at small and medium colleges respectively; Continuing Students, 2% and 6% at small and medium colleges respectively; Recruitment, 35% and 31% at small and medium colleges respectively; and Student Services, 47% and 49% at small and medium colleges respectively). Additionally, the study's findings indicated that the Support Staff, Offices, and Additional Resources/Information services were found at 46% of small colleges, 57% of medium colleges, and 77% of large colleges, signifying that an increase in size resulted in more support in these categories.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY #1

All colleges in the dataset provided at least some international student support information on their websites, regardless of size. Community college leaders can build from this foundation while examining whether online information is coordinated and easy for students to act upon. They should continuously assess whether the information on their website is current, consistent across offices, accessible from mobile devices, and available in inclusive language so that international students who may be less familiar with college procedures can easily find, understand, and use it.

TAKEAWAY #2

Two factors guide the international student services provided by community colleges. First, the strong presence of recruitment, admissions, and legal and immigration services reflects the profit motive of community colleges and, perhaps, the potential for domestic student cultural benefits. Second, the presence of academic, social, cultural, and well-being support services recognizes that students' success depends on more than pre-arrival preparation and initial adjustment. The findings suggest that these perspectives coexist in community colleges. Colleges commonly provide enrollment-related services, while many also provide support for international students after they enroll. Community college leaders should therefore allocate institutional resources effectively across all services to ensure international students receive better services throughout their academic journey, beginning from enrollment to completion.

TAKEAWAY #3

The most visible international student support services were related to their initial enrollment. These services are essential to students at the beginning of their schooling, yet they do not encompass the academic, social, financial, and well-being conditions that shape persistence and completion. Community college leaders must make a conscious effort to provide services that focus on serving international students once they arrive on campus to support their personal and academic success. International student webpages should also help students understand what assistance exists after enrollment, when to seek it, who provides it, and how to access it.

TAKEAWAY #4

All community colleges that enroll international students, irrespective of size, are providing services for this student population. Yet larger colleges can provide more support for Academics, Continuing Students, Recruitment, and Student Services compared to their small and medium counterparts. The medium and small colleges who may face financial challenges in caring for their international students while they are in school may come together to provide these supports which are essential for international students' survival, persistence and successful completion of their program.

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APPENDIX

SAMPLE

This study's sample consisted of U.S. community colleges that enrolled international students in the 2024-2025 academic year. These colleges were found in the Community College International Education Research Initiative dataset (Nyarko et al., 2025). The dataset provides information about international education activities of U.S. community colleges in the 2024-2025 academic year. From the dataset there were 755 community colleges that enrolled international students. To ensure accuracy, this number was checked with the National Center for Education Statistics on non-resident student enrollment in the 2024-2025 academic year.

DATA COLLECTION

This data was collected by three researchers during the 2024-2025 academic year. Before data collection started, all three researchers met to discuss collection procedures using an example provided by the lead researcher. Next, each researcher went to the website of an example community college and used the key words "international education" or "global education" to locate the page dedicated to international students. Once this page was found, the researchers wrote a brief summary (4-5 sentences) of international student services offered by the community college. After this first data collection round the researchers met again to discuss the data collection process. After comparing notes, they agreed on common data collection procedures. The three researchers then divided the remaining community colleges among themselves to complete data collection. They met every two weeks to clarify any questions and ensure everyone was on the right track.

ANALYSIS

Once data collection was complete, the researchers who engaged in the study described in this report developed codes, categories, and themes directly from the researcher-written summaries. Words from the written summary were used directly as initial in-vivo codes. Any time a team member was unsure of a written summary, they went back to the community college webpage to verify the accuracy of the information provided on international student services. For the second round of coding, all researchers identified recurring codes and assigned labels to those codes. Finally, the research team met, compared their codes and gradually developed broader themes based on code similarity in collaboration. An excel sheet was used to document the entire process. The researchers then used a quantitative approach to numerically translate the themes developed using frequencies and descriptive statistics.

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.

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