

America's Biggest Source Countries - 2018-2019

Which countries do you think send the most university students to study in the US? The answers might surprise you!

Think about which 12 countries you think send the most students to the US each year. Why do you think so many students from these countries go to the US?



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According to the Institute for International Education, or IIE (<https://www.iie.org/>), the countries below were the top 12 source countries for foreign exchange students at US universities during the 2018 to 2019 school year.





#12 – Nepal

13,229 students¹



Nepal wasn't even in the top 12 in 2016-2017, but it knocked Nigeria to #13 in the 2017-2018 school year, becoming #11. Now, it's slipped to #12 for 2018-2019. About 40 fewer Nepalese students studied in the US for 2018-2019 compared to previous year, a drop of only about 0.3%.¹

Why do you think this poor country of almost 20 million people sends so many students to the US?

According to one Nepali student, those with means try their best to get out of the outdated Nepali education system. Most professors are old, and their methods of teaching are old-fashioned. In addition, there are many programs offered by US organizations to fund education for Nepalis – more than the Nepalese government itself offers.²



The result is that the country is suffering from brain drain. What is brain drain? **Brain drain happens when the talented people from a country or area leave for work in other places, leaving the country/area with less knowledgeable, less able, or less productive people. Poor countries often have brain drain. The people who can afford to go to school and get worthwhile degrees leave for countries that offer better lifestyles. Even in rich countries, rural areas lose talented young people who go away to work in urban areas.**

Nepalese go to the US to study in fields that students from many other countries do – math and computer science (28.5%), physical and life sciences (20.7%), and engineering (16.3%).³

* <https://www.imnepal.com/why-nepalese-students-go-abroad-study/>

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Flags: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal>

¹ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin/>

² <https://www.imnepal.com/why-nepalese-students-go-abroad-study/>

³ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/fields-of-study-by-place-of-origin/>

Himalayas: <https://himalayanecotrek.com/blog/visit-nepal-after-earthquake/>



#11 – Nigeria

13,423 students¹



As mentioned before, Nepal knocked Nigeria off the list for 2017-2018, but it's back this year after Iran dropped off.¹ Why do you think Iran dropped

off so much for the 2018-2019 school year? The Trump administration's sudden "Muslim ban" (not an accurate name for it as most Muslim countries were unaffected and other non-Muslim countries were. However, most countries that were banned from being able to enter the US were from majority Muslim countries.) made it very difficult for Iranians to enter the US. Some students who were about to come to the US suddenly had their pre-approved visas cancelled. Others saw the hostility the US showed against Iran and decided not to come.

Why have Nigerian foreign students in the US increased so much in the last few years? Nigerian culture greatly values education, much like many northeastern Asian countries do, and with its growing economy, more Nigerians have also been able to afford studying abroad.²

It might also have to do with the fact that, in the US, Nigerian immigrants are among the most successful, earning more per year on average than the average citizen born in the US.³

What do Nigerians study most in the US? Mostly engineering (21.5%), health (13.7%), and business (13.4%).⁴

* Nigeria moved up to #10 for the 2020/2021 school year.

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Flags: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria>

¹ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin/>

² <http://topstudentsng.com/why-do-most-nigerian-students-want-to-study-abroad/>

³ <https://medium.com/@joecarleton/why-nigerian-immigrants-are-the-most-successful-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s-23a7ea5a0832>

⁴ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/fields-of-study-by-place-of-origin/>

Kaduna Waterfalls: <https://www.nairaland.com/1942100/explore-nature-landscapes-nigeria-pictures>



#10 – Mexico

15,229 students¹

The US has a long border with Mexico, so it's no surprise that many Mexicans choose to study at a US university, often one close to the US-Mexican border, like the University of Texas in El Paso or New Mexico State University in Las Cruces (Mr. Parish's alma mater). Mexico kept fell from its #9 position from last year as a couple hundred fewer students came in 2018-2019.¹ Why do you think the numbers of Mexican students studying in the US fell



in those years? **Again, the Trump administration was very tough on Mexico even though many undocumented immigrants (sometimes called “illegal immigrants”) were from other countries. Mexico’s economy was actually pretty good during the Trump administration. However, for those who wanted to go to the US, America seemed less welcoming.**

Some of these students can drive over the border to attend classes in the US and then drive back home to Mexico afterwards (or on weekends – more likely in Mr. Parish's experience). Southern Texas, NM, Arizona, and California are in some ways culturally similar to Mexico, too.

As with students from many other countries, Mexicans like studying business (18.6%), engineering (16.2%) (Mr. Parish's alma mater is famous for engineering), and “other fields” (16.5%) in the US.²

(Note: The IIE breaks 10 fields of study down as follows – business, education, engineering, fine and applied arts, health, humanities, intensive English, math & computer science, physical & life sciences, and social sciences. Anything outside of these fields is considered “other fields of study.”)

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Flags: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico>

¹ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin/>

² <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/fields-of-study-by-place-of-origin/>

Sumidero Canyon: <https://www.journeymexico.com/itinerary/adventure-in-chiapas-ziplines-waterfalls-and-ruins>



#9 – Brazil

16,059 students¹



Brazil added almost 1,500 students to its ranks for 2018-2019 and squeezed Mexico out of the #9 position.¹

In 2011, the Brazilian government started a program to develop the human resources in its country by giving financial aid to up to 100,000 undergrad focus was on business and STEM fields, which could help develop Brazil's future development.² What is STEM?



Science, Tech, Engineering, and Math.

The largest bloc of Brazilians go to the US to study business at 23.3% and engineering at 12.6%. However, the second largest field for Brazilians is “other fields of study” at 19.3%.³

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Flags: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazil>

¹ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin/>

² <https://qz.com/296952/why-iran-and-brazil-are-sending-more-college-students-to-the-us/>

³ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/fields-of-study-by-place-of-origin/>

Iguazu Falls: <https://www.shutterstock.com/blog/landscape-photography-brazil>



#8 – Japan

18,105 students¹



About 650 fewer¹ Japanese students went to the US in the 2018-2019 school year compared to 2017-2018, but Japan has stayed steady at #8. Japan is known for its engineering prowess, so few Japanese students in US universities are there for that subject. Business (17.9%) and English (13.5%) are #2 and #3. However, “other fields” is at the top, with 22.7%.²

The percentage of Japanese studying English in the US is one of the highest rates among the top 12 countries.

According to some (rather anecdotal) sources,³ it's

difficult for Japanese students to go abroad and then return to Japan for employment. Once you're outside of Japan, you lose potential university connections that can later help you find a job. Thus, it seems many of the Japanese leaving their country to learn English may be looking to work abroad. English is an important skill for someone with this goal.

Why do you think more Japanese students don't learn English in their own country and then go abroad? **Japan's situation is similar to Korea's. I base this on my own knowledge of Korea and what my wife, who got her first bachelor's degree in Japan, has told me. For a long time, these countries have put so much emphasis on things like the TOEIC test instead of actual, real-life skills like speaking, interacting with native speakers, etc. The education systems have been set up more for rote memory rather than use. This might be OK for math, but not language. Also, the cultural fear of making mistakes and being embarrassed is a barrier. You must make mistakes in learning a new language. It's changing quickly in Korea, though.**

* Japan went down to #11 for the 2020/2021 school year.



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Flags: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan>

¹ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin/>

² <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/fields-of-study-by-place-of-origin/>

³ <https://www.quora.com/Why-are-there-so-few-Japanese-students-in-the-U-S-compared-to-the-number-of-students-from-other-Asian-countries-Do-Japanese-students-want-to-study-abroad-What-is-the-perception-and-motivation-of-studying-abroad-for-a-Japanese-student>

Mt. Fuji: <https://www.nakasendoway.com/the-japanese-landscape/>



#7 – Taiwan

23,369 students¹



As in many international surveys, Taiwan is not counted as being part of China (nor are Hong Kong and Macau) due to its different style of governance and political relationships. Every year, Taiwan sends a few more students to study at US universities than the previous year. For the 2018-2019 school year, it upped its numbers by almost 1,000 students.¹



As we've seen with other countries, Taiwanese students in the US are drawn to business (19.1%), engineering (17.4%), and math & computer science (13.4%). While the fourth choice for Taiwanese is "other fields" (11.8%), the fifth choice for Taiwanese students studying in US universities is one we haven't seen yet – A little more than 10% of them are there to study fine and applied arts.² While this has been a rising trend for northeast Asian students studying in the US in the last five or so years, Taiwan has had a high percentage of students learning arts abroad for a long time.

What's the difference between fine arts and applied arts? **Fine arts, traditionally, have had no other use except for entertainment or beauty – dancing, painting, sculpture, etc. Applied arts like pottery, though, can have useful purposes. A beautiful ceramic vase can hold flowers, for example. These days, though, it's hard to distinguish. For example, lots of people dance to keep in shape, not to entertain. The difference is not as clear.**



#6 – Vietnam

24,325 students¹



Vietnam's educational system has been improving in recent years as its economy has become more capitalistic and competitive. It's still not a world-class educational system despite it having one of the highest university enrollment rates in the world. The Vietnamese government doesn't have a lot of programs to help students who want to study abroad, the rising incomes of the country have made it more affordable. For example, in 2004, there were only about 10,000 Vietnamese students abroad. By 2014, that number had increased to 100,000!²



To get ahead in their society, many Vietnamese want to study business in foreign universities, and the country sends more students every year. To save money, lots of them attend community colleges, which are less expensive and have lower requirements for acceptance.² What is a community college? **Definitions differ by country, but in the US, a community college often offers two- and four-year degrees (no graduate school) and accept almost anyone. You don't have to take a test or something like that to gain entry – just high school graduation. They are often used by students for a couple of years before going to a larger university to complete a four-year or graduate school. They are much cheaper than most universities.**

Most Vietnamese foreign students in the US are there to study business (28.5%), far more than the second and third highest groups (not including “other” at 13.2%), math/computer science (14.2%) and engineering (10.9%).³



#5 – Canada



26,122 students¹

The US and Canada share the world's longest border, and most Canadians live quite close to the US. This, as well as the similar cultures and a shared language, makes the US a popular destination for Canadians wanting to study abroad. This is up almost 1% from the previous school year.¹

Lots of Canadians study abroad as the Canadian government has run programs encouraging and assisting students in studying abroad for many years.²



The main reason Canadians study in the US is for “other fields” (16.4%), with business (16.3%) as the second reason and health care (14%) as the third.³

What percentage of Canadian students went to the US to study English (as in ESL/EFL, not English literature or linguistics)? **0.9% or something really low like that. I assume they are native French speakers from Quebec or perhaps immigrants who got Canadian citizenship and want to improve their English skills. I'm not sure, though.**

*** Canada popped up to #4, switching places with (I'll tell you on the next slide) for the 2020/2021 school year.**

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Flags: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada>

¹ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin/>

² <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/is-canada-doing-enough-to-ensure-students-have-the-chance-to-study-abroad/article32834417/>

³ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/fields-of-study-by-place-of-origin/>

Moraine Lake: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nailbender/6101864996/in/faves-klduke/>




#4 – Saudi Arabia

37,080 students¹

Saudi Arabia sent almost 53,000 people to study at US universities for the 2016-2017 school year. However, the number dropped by almost 10,000 students for the 2017-2018 school year and another 8,000 or so for 2018-2019.¹

More than 30% of the students went to the US to study engineering. Business (18.8%) was also popular while math & computer science came in a distant third (9.6%).²

Why do so many people from Saudi Arabia, a country of less than 35 million people, study in the US? Since 2005, the Saudi government has been giving scholarships to students who want to study in Western countries. One of the objectives was to quickly modernize the ways Saudis learn, moving away from rote memorization and outdated educational methods. Before this scholarship program started, there were only 5,000 Saudis studying abroad. As of 2015, there were about 200,000. However, starting in 2016, the number of Saudis studying abroad began dropping, and not just in the US.³ Why do you think so? In 2016, oil prices went down a lot. Oil was so cheap that people started drinking it instead of milk or orange juice for breakfast (Joke!). This hit the Saudi economy hard, so they had to cut back on funding students' educations abroad.





#3 – South Korea

52,250 students¹



For a long time, South Korea was #3, but its numbers were falling every year. For the 2015-2016 school year, it finally fell to fourth place. However, for 2016-2017, it popped back up to #3, mainly because Saudi Arabia sent fewer students. It has maintained its #3 position for 2018-2019 despite sending about 200 fewer students than the previous year.¹



One reason Korea has been sending fewer students abroad in recent years has been economic. It's been harder to afford employment being so bad. Up until the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, Koreans going abroad lost valuable opportunities to make connections with people and companies for after-graduation employment. That changed for a while, but now, Koreans are finding that a degree from abroad is not as valuable as connections are...again.² What other country has a similar situation? **Japan. These days, if you're a Korean with a degree from the US, it's not so special. Korea is now a rich and relatively powerful country (compared to a couple of decades ago) that can provide its own talent (assuming they don't want to leave due to the bad working conditions here).**

The most popular fields for Korean students in the US were similar to those of many other countries – business (14%) is tied for #1 with “other fields,” with engineering (13.5%) and fine & applied arts (12.6%) coming next.³



#2 – India

202,014 students¹

In recent decades, India has become known for its engineers and computer science expertise. It should be no surprise that so many Indian students in the US were there to study math and computer science (37%) and engineering (34.2%). Business was a distant third, with a little more than 10%.² What's more, more than 15,000 more Indian students came to the US to study in 2018-2019 than in the previous school year.¹



Why are so many Indians taking university classes in the US? One reason is just that India is an incredibly populous country – more than 1.3 billion people. Also, for undergraduates, Indian universities are highly competitive and difficult to get into. Indians with the means would rather study abroad. While US universities are more difficult to get into than ones in say, Singapore (another popular choice for Indians wanting to study abroad), many Indians think that a degree from the US provides a better chance of getting a job, especially if one decides not to return to India after graduation.³

What is another reason that countries like the US, Singapore, Australia, etc., are popular with Indian students? **English is an official language in India, and it's also an official language in Singapore. The US, Australia, and New Zealand don't legally have an official language, but English is the main one.**



#1 – China

369,548 students¹

More than 30% of the foreign students studying in American universities in the 2018-2019 school year were from China.¹ There are many reasons why China sends so many students to study at US universities, most of which we've seen before. Getting into a good Chinese university is very difficult, so some students prefer to go abroad. Many Chinese think a degree from abroad will make them more employable, especially if they don't plan to return after graduation (or even if they do). Many Chinese want a different type of education to help them learn about and adapt to the global job market.² China is a very populous country, so it's natural that there would be many people sent abroad. The numbers keep rising every year, too, and grew by about 6,000 students in the 2018-2019 school year.¹



Chinese students in the US were studying fields we've become familiar with in this activity – math & computer science (19.9%), business (18.9%), and engineering (18%).³

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Flags: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China>

¹ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin/>

² <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/nine-reasons-why-chinese-students-choose-study-abroad>³ <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/fields-of-study-by-place-of-origin/>

Zhangjiajie: <https://www.wendywutours.co.uk/blog/china/10-facts-about-chinas-landscapes/>

America's Biggest Source Countries - 2018-2019

Questions

1. Were you surprised by any of the countries that were on this list? Why or why not?

We were surprised by Nepal. It's a small country, and it's poor. It's also very far away from the US.

2. Were you surprised at any of the countries that were NOT on this list? Why or why not? **Germany and other European countries should be on the list.**

Latin American countries, too.

Lots of European and Latin American countries are in the top 25 (Please review them for the quiz!). Lots of European students might have an easier time going to universities in other EU countries due to visa issues and such.

I'm surprised Pakistan and Bangladesh weren't on the list. They use English as an official language. And they are very populous countries.

Me, too! Pakistan is in the top 25, though.

3. Which of the above countries do you think have large percentages of English speakers? **India, Canada**

4. What are the reasons each of these countries send so many people to the US for university education? **Uh, I don't know why I have this question on the list. We've already answered it.**

5. The website gives a list of the top 25 source countries for US universities. What do you think some other countries on the top 25 list are? (Green = Yes, Purple = No)

The UK, Germany, Russia, France, Malaysia, Italy, Spain, Colombia, Costa Rica, Belize

6. What countries do you think people from the US often go abroad to study in? Why?

There's an activity I made about five years ago that had the top 10 countries for US exchange students at that time. They are (in order of 1st to last) – the UK, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, China, Ireland, Australia, Costa Rica, & Japan. Things have changed since then, of course.

7. What is the most popular study abroad destination for students from your country? Why?

Did we skip this question? I didn't write the answers – sorry!

8. What source countries commonly send students to study in your country? Why?

Mr. Parish's anecdotal experience: The number of students I've taught since I've been in S. Korea - 1st – Korea, 2nd – Uzbekistan, 3rd – Viet Nam, 4th – Russia, 5th – China, 6th – Indonesia

9. Do you know any students from any of the above countries at your school?

Outside of our class, we know students from Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea. No one seems to know any students from Russia and China.

I used to have Russian and Chinese students almost every semester until the end of 2019.