

2021

An Open Doors Report Update: International Enrollment at U.S. Intensive English Programs

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Recommended Citation

Baer, Julie (2021) "An Open Doors Report Update: International Enrollment at U.S. Intensive English Programs," *EnglishUSA Journal*: Vol. 5, Article 4.

Available at: https://surface.syr.edu/englishusa_journal/vol5/iss1/4

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According to the *Open Doors 2021 Report on International Educational Exchange*, the external shock of COVID-19 resulted in a decline in the number of international students studying at U.S. intensive English programs (IEP). In the 2020 calendar year, 37,365 international students studied in-person or online for a total of 514,685 student weeks at U.S. intensive English programs. This represents a 50 percent decline, the lowest level of IEP enrollment recorded in *Open Doors* since 1992.

Although the number of students and student weeks fell from the 2019 to the 2020 calendar year due to the impacts of COVID, a number of key characteristics remained stable. The length of time that students pursued their studies at U.S. IEPs did not change. International students studied at U.S. intensive English programs for 14 weeks on average, the same as before the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, more than half of the enrolled IEP students (54 percent) in 2020 planned to continue their studies in the United States, pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees at U.S. higher education institutions. Finally, the leading places of origin of China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and South Korea remained the same and comprised approximately 71 percent of all international intensive English students at U.S. programs.

COVID-19 Impacts at IEPs

Most IEPs in the United States pivoted to offering some level of online instruction in 2020 (Figure 1). By the summer of 2020, the

mode of instruction for 96 percent of programs were either fully or primarily online or offering a hybrid/hyflex option. In fall 2020, although most programs continued to offer online or hybrid options (78 percent), some institutions began to welcome students back to in-person classes on campus, noted by the uptick of programs fully or primarily in-person (20 percent). The data IIE collected on the mode of instruction showcases how U.S. IEPs remained resilient and pivoted to offer flexible programs to meet international students' needs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Open Doors also collected data in a special survey section about how COVID-19 affected IEP offices throughout the 2020 calendar year (Figure 2). An overwhelming majority of programs, 93 percent, indicated that COVID-19 resulted in investment or innovations within their programs. A large number of IEPs increased engagement in outreach and recruitment through virtual programming (80 percent). IEPs worked to ensure the safety and security of students, with 77 percent noting increased communication on health and well-being during this time. Furthermore, 65 percent took the time to invest in course or curriculum redevelopment, and more than half (59 percent) of IEPs invested in technological equipment for online study. This data highlights how IEPs continued to nimbly adapt to shifting circumstances and support students pursuing intensive English studies.

Likely due to the significant enrollment declines, 90 percent of IEPs reported adverse impacts, with a third of programs reporting budget cuts, staff furloughs or layoffs, and the need to combine classroom levels. In addition, eight percent of programs reported a program closure.

COVID-19 Global Impact at IEPs

IEP student enrollment declines were not unique to the United States, with similar

declines noted globally across the English language training industry. Leading host destinations for intensive English reported declines ranging from nearly 50 percent to more than 80 percent in the 2020 calendar year (Figure 3) (Bonard, 2021; English UK, 2021; ICEF Monitor, 2021a; ICEF Monitor, 2021b; Malta National Statistics Office, 2021). While each destination may have used different definitions to count students this last year, it is clear that COVID-19 resulted in significant declines across the global English language training market.

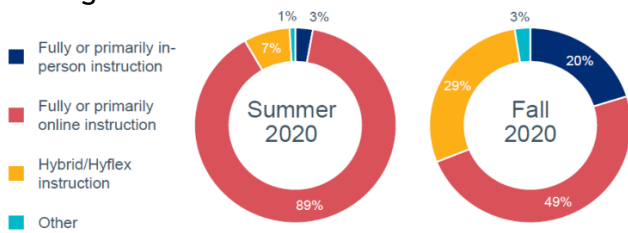


Figure 1: Mode of IEP Instruction by Term, 2020

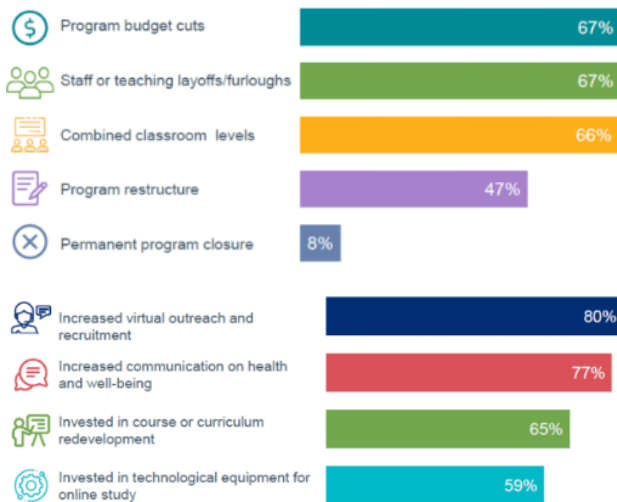


Figure 2: COVID-19 Impacts on Intensive English Programs, 2020

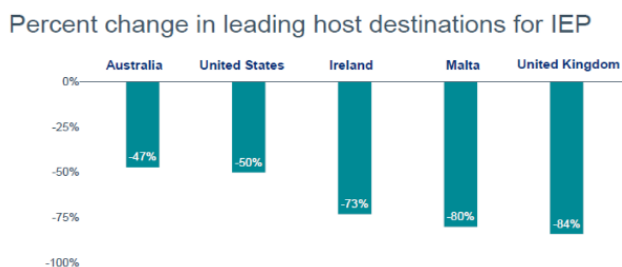


Figure 3: IEP Enrollments by Select Host Destination, 2019-2020

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About Open Doors Intensive English Programs Survey:

IIE, with the assistance of two leading professional intensive English program (IEP) associations, English USA and University and College Intensive English Programs (UCIEP), annually collects national-level data on IEP enrollments in the United States, a known pathway toward enrollment in full degree programs. Programs that are not English USA or UCIEP members were also invited to participate in the survey.

Reporting institutions include university and college-affiliated programs, as well as independent entities that offer English language training. The Open Doors 2021 IEP survey reflects student enrollment during the 2020 calendar year (January 1 to December 31, 2020). Data elements in this survey include place of origin, program sponsorship, percentage of students intending to continue further (non-IEP) study in the United States, and program duration (18 hours or more, fewer than 18 hours). Both total student enrollment and total student-weeks (one student studying for one week) are captured. These two measures provide a more complete picture of IEP enrollments in the United States. Because they cover different populations, enrollment data from the IEP survey are not always congruent with IEP enrollment data from the International Student Census.

Julie Baer is a Research Specialist at IIE where she manages the data collection and analysis for Open Doors and conducts specialized research for IIE program teams on strategic program design and planning. Her areas of expertise include analyzing trends in international academic mobility in U.S. higher education across sectors and using geospatial analysis to highlight trends in educational access. Ms. Baer holds an EdM in International Education Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and BS from Centre College. She was a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant to Malaysia in 2021.

