



Highlights of [GAO-08-878T](#), a testimony before Congressional Committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In the years following September 11, 2001, the United States experienced its first drop in the number of international students coming to the United States in over 30 years. The United States tightened its immigration policy during this time, which may have made it more difficult for foreign nationals, including international students, to apply for a visa and, subsequently may have fueled the perception that the United States is unwelcoming. While enrollment numbers have started to rebound, they have not returned to pre-September 11 levels.

This testimony is based on ongoing and published GAO work. It includes themes from a June 2007 testimony on challenges in attracting international students. It also includes ongoing work to review other countries' efforts to attract and fund international students.

What GAO Recommends

This testimony does not contain recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-878T](#). For more information, contact George Scott at (202) 512-5932 or ScottG@gao.gov.

HIGHER EDUCATION

United States' and Other Countries' Strategies for Attracting and Funding International Students

What GAO Found

The U.S. federal government seeks to improve global attitudes towards America through a variety of diplomatic means, including funding study for international students inside the United States. Such study, which is funded primarily through the U.S. Department of State (State), is aimed at fostering a sense of common interests and values between Americans and people throughout the world. However, this funding is one component of a larger effort to attract international students, with funding for the vast majority of students coming primarily from sources other than the federal government. GAO identified the following about the efforts of the U.S. Department of State and other countries we are reviewing as part of ongoing work with respect to funding study for international students:

- State funds a small number of programs having a public diplomacy focus, which bring a small number of international students to the United States for undergraduate study. Specifically, State funded eight programs for 321 undergraduate students in fiscal year 2007. Combined funding for these programs totaled approximately \$11.7 million. These programs allow undergraduate students the opportunity to study in both 2-year and 4-year institutions, with some leading to a degree. While State's programs target students from all regions in the world, participants typically come from only a few countries in Europe and South/Central Asia.
- As part of our ongoing work, GAO has been reviewing other countries' governments' efforts to attract and fund international students. International comparative analysis is complicated by different countries' national objectives and funding structures. The countries we are reviewing employ various strategies to attract diverse international student populations but also fund and administer programs in different ways. We will be learning more about these other countries' efforts as we continue our work. We expect to issue a report on our findings in early 2009.