

**“It can be chaos here”  
International student experiences of U.S. higher education during the  
COVID-19 pandemic**

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**Abstract**

*The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered life at higher education institutions in the US. International students were particularly affected because they lack the community and support structures upon which other stakeholder groups could rely. International student experiences of the pandemic may have been further exacerbated by uncertain immigration policies, their perceptions of more successful containment of the virus abroad, and xenophobia in the public discourse. This phenomenological study documents the experiences of international students in US higher education during the pandemic to determine how they adapted, how they were shaped, and how their attitudes toward study abroad in the US may have changed. It seeks to introduce the voices of these students to the scholarly literature. The findings reveal a sense of chaos, an aversion to online instruction, a lack of non-academic support from institutions, and a tarnished, but still attractive image of the US as a destination for study abroad.*

**Keywords:** Higher education, COVID-19, international student experiences, United States

Globalization has led to increasing numbers of students leaving their native countries to study abroad. Students pursuing higher education degrees outside their home countries more than doubled from 2 million in 2000 to 5.3 million in 2017 (UNESCO, 2019). The U.S. hosts many of the highest-ranked higher education institutions (HEIs) globally, driving demand for higher education as an important export sector of the U.S. economy. Higher education policy in the U.S. has tended to equate internationalization with international student recruitment, focusing on the economic benefits that international students bring to HEIs (Veerasingam, 2021). International students created 44 billion U.S. dollars in export income in 2019, nearly equal to the sum of soybean, corn, and textile exports (Bound et al., 2021; Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2020). International student participation in U.S. higher education helps foster global connections and provides university-educated workers to the U.S. and global labor markets. These international students help meet U.S. demand for human resources for engineers, chemists, mathematicians, geologists, computer experts, and other scientific and technical specialists (Gold, 2016). Furthermore, recent activities of private HEIs demonstrate their growing financial dependence on international students (Whatley & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered life at HEIs in the U.S. and around the world. As a result of the pandemic caused by COVID-19, thousands of schools around the world have canceled classes and closed schools. As of April 6, 2020, UNESCO (2020) reported that out of 91.3% of the total registered learners of all learning levels in 188 countries, a total of 1,576,021,818 learners, have been affected. As a result, international students were particularly affected because they lack the community and support structures upon which other groups can rely. Their experiences of the pandemic could impact sentiment towards the U.S. as a suitable destination for study abroad.

This phenomenological study explores international students' lived experiences in US higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. It seeks to capture and present the voices of international students within the literature. The study provides evidence on their experiences with online teaching, changes in their lifestyles, and sources and barriers to support. The findings reveal how these experiences impacted their views of U.S. higher education and its suitability as a destination for study abroad. The results provide insight into steps that policymakers and higher education leaders might take to meet the needs of international students and mitigate the impact of future uncertainty on their participation in U.S. higher education.

### **Literature Review**

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted our social lives, economies, formal learning, psychological well-being, and culture (Sá & Serpa, 2020). Countries and organizations sought to establish safety practices like work or study from home, social distancing measures, and mask mandates to allow for business and education to continue. The pandemic has had a huge impact on higher education and student experiences at an individual, organizational, and societal levels. 1.5 billion students in 165 countries worldwide lost access to face-to-face instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Souza et al., 2020). In higher education, sudden campus closures forced students to move off-campus leading to housing insecurity and inequitable access to technology, space, time, and living conditions that could have negatively impacted learning during remote instruction (Bolumole, 2020; Gomes et al., 2021). The psychological ramifications of grief, loneliness, lack of productivity, difficulty concentrating, career impact due to lack of job leads, stress, anxiety had an enormous impact on mental health and well-being (Bolumole, 2020, Son et al., 2020). These changes in higher education presented a struggle for all students, however international students, in particular, are a vulnerable population in the U.S.. International students often must adapt to a new culture, lack sufficient support, struggle with English language, and face indifference from faculty and administrators, alike (Agostinelli, 2021; Haan et al., 2017). International students struggled deciding whether to stay in the U.S. or return to their home country during the pandemic (Wang, 2021). Many international students suffered in terms of their mental health and sense of well being (Koo, 2021).

At the organizational level, questions remain regarding the transition to online instruction within higher education. Students have expressed concern over the lack of digital competencies, lower productivity, decreased quality of teaching, and higher workload as major challenges during the transition (Blue Brazelton & Buford, 2021; Aristonvik et al., 2020; Sá & Serpa, 2020, Souza, 2020). Further support is needed to foster digital literacy and enhanced infrastructure in higher education for new delivery methods, digital teaching, and learning tools, and flexible and renewed curriculum (Sá & Serpa, 2020). This support will allow higher education to retain its place and purpose in our society as we work through the changes to our way of life rooted in our shared experience of the pandemic (Bolumole, 2020).

The larger societal impact of the pandemic has made the international student community even more vulnerable. Growing xenophobia and negative sentiment towards internationalism in the U.S. may further impact international students' sense of comfort and belonging there. The Trump presidency led to political discourse, cultural climate, and a series of policies viewed as hostile to international students (Laws & Ammigan, 2020; Pottie-Sherman, 2018). Research suggests growing neo-nationalism (Lee, 2016) and prejudices against international students (Charles-Toussant & Crowson, 2010) already may serve as a barrier to a positive experience in U.S. higher education for international students. These influences are likely to disrupt the processes of self-formation and identity development experienced by many international students during their time abroad (Marginson, 2014). Further, these concerns will compound with any additional stress emerging from the pandemic.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) from major destination countries, such as the US, the UK, and Australia have anticipated a considerable decrease in incoming international students as a result of these disruptions (Mok et al., 2021). HEIs struggle with internationalization due to a lack of consensus and shared vision among stakeholders (Ghazarian, 2020). The barriers for students to pursue their further degrees overseas from the pandemic include travel bans, visa restrictions, and campus lockdowns in destination countries, including students and their families' worries on health and safety (Mok et al., 2021), adversely impacting access to international higher education (Souza et al., 2020). The anti-globalization trend associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has had many negative effects on international higher education. Policymakers, institutional administrators, and educators know that individual HEIs or even countries cannot single-handedly deal with this concern (Mok et al., 2021).

### **Conceptual Framework**

In the effort to determine how international students' experiences of COVID-19 in U.S. higher education might impact the attractiveness of the U.S. as a destination choice for study abroad, this study adopts Fakunle's (2020) framework for international students' rationales for studying abroad. Fakunle (2020) divides international student motivations for studying abroad into four major categories: educational, aspirational, experiential, and economic rationales. The educational component includes academic experiences and outcomes, the experiential component includes new and intercultural exposures, the aspirational covers personal and professional development, and the economic rationale includes cost consciousness and expected returns for earning a degree while abroad. This framework for understanding international students' rationale for studying abroad will help inform what implications may be drawn from the findings of this study.

### **Research Method**

This study describes the lived experiences of international students in U.S. higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study worked to identify the issues related to personal change, host institutions, relationships, modified instruction, and health concerns as described by the international students.

### **Design**

This study was conducted on the ontological foundation of critical realism, acknowledging the existence of an external, structured reality independent from individuals, but within which knowledge is a social product (Bhaskar, 2010). It is rooted in a constructivist (Piaget, 1967) epistemological perspective, positing that individuals construct knowledge and form meaning through their experiences and interactions. The study employed phenomenology, a paradigm for qualitative research that concentrates on describing, understanding, and explaining the meaning of lived experiences (Patton, 2015). The researchers sought to explore the experiences of international students in US higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. We aimed to capture the essence or essences of that shared lived experience (Patton, 2015) through participants' reflective description of their world (Roche, 1973; Ricoeur, 1976). These findings are reported in terms of the key issues raised by participants as determined through inductive, cross-case pattern analysis (Patton, 2015).

### Positionality

The researchers approached this study from a mixed insider/outsider perspective. All the researchers have experience living and studying abroad, albeit at different times, in different contexts, and under different circumstances. Two of the researchers have experience studying in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic. These shared experiences with participants may better allow the researchers to empathize with participants and their experiences. However, within the international student community, a wide variety of experiences exist across subgroups, and so while some experiences may be shared across those groups, others will be specific to particular individuals relative to which the researchers will be outsiders.

### Sampling & Participants

Maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015) was used to capture and describe themes that exist across the variation of international student experiences. Information about the study was initially spread through international student organizations and social media. Following the initial round of interviews, snowball sampling was used to pursue further cases of participants who adapted particularly well and those who struggled. Snowball sampling was used with these individuals to identify other potential participants. The study was approved by the local Human Subjects Research Board and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to inclusion in the study and recording of the interviews. A total of eleven individuals took part in the study. Their demographic information is provided below in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
*Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Nationality	Level
Lara	24	Germany	Undergraduate
Abhas	19	India	Undergraduate
Rui	24	China	Graduate
Elias	32	Nigeria	Graduate
Linlin	42	China	Graduate
Badri	23	India	Graduate
Rongjia	29	China	Graduate
Saxe	23	Netherlands	Undergraduate
Weifeng	29	China	Graduate
Lukshan	26	Nepal	Undergraduate
Xiu	26	China	Graduate

### **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews of 30-40 minutes were conducted with participants via video conference between February and May of 2021. Due to the ongoing effects of the pandemic, there were no face-to-face interviews. The interviews were video recorded to allow for the coding of both verbal and non-verbal communication. An interview guide was used to prompt participants about their pandemic story, feelings of personal change, views on their host institution, thoughts on modified instruction, health care concerns, and their current feelings. Two pilot interviews were conducted with a non-participant to trial the interview guide. The researchers studied video recordings of the pilot interviews and made revisions to the interview guide based on their observations. Interviews were conducted in English or Mandarin, according to participants' preferences. A native Mandarin speaker conducted the three Mandarin language interviews, transcribed them, and translated them into English for coding.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed continuously during the study. All researchers maintained regular, independent reflections on incoming interview recordings and transcriptions and results from the social media search and analysis. Each transcript was read to ensure immersion in the data and embed interpretation within participants' stories. Content analysis (Patton, 2015) was used to identify patterns and themes within the data. The researchers made use of investigator triangulation to compare, combine, and refine their analyses. Findings are reported in terms of the key issues raised by participants as determined through this inductive, cross-case pattern analysis (Patton, 2015).

### **Limitations**

We acknowledge that the sample size of 11 participants is low compared to the population of international students in the U.S.. However, we achieved data saturation (Patton, 2015) in our discussions with participants and that these interviews provide important documentation of the experiences of international students in U.S. higher education during the pandemic.

### **Results**

Five themes emerged from the interviews. These included: (1) chaos of the pandemic in the U.S., (2) online instruction, (3) the personal impact of the pandemic, (4) support: sources & barriers, and (5) perception of the US as a destination for study abroad.

#### **Chaos of the Pandemic in the U.S.**

As international students in US higher education, the participants described a sense of disorder and confusion around their experience of the pandemic. They felt that no one was reaching out to them and they were left to figure things on their own.

One participant put it especially succinctly: "sometimes it can be-- it can be chaos here." (Rongjia, China).

Respondents' families expressed mixed emotions about them being in the U.S. during the pandemic. Initially they believed that being in the U.S. was safer when other countries were dealing with the pandemic. These responses often changed as the situation in the U.S. worsened. The decision about whether to return home was a major choice for participants. The university email to shut down was a shock for most students as they were asked to vacate the university housing at very short notice. They were left to figure out for themselves. Most of them were fortunate enough to be able to move-in with their friends till they got tickets to fly back home. Some left almost immediately, but most chose to stay. Others who wanted to return home for a greater sense of stability and safety were reluctant to leave out of fear of being unable to return due to visa or political situations.

Many participants worked on campus and the COVID-19 closure had an impact on their jobs. International students relied on the campus jobs for financial stability, which immediately became a challenge as soon as the campus closed. In some cases, it also created work opportunities for them.

"At the time, I also used to work, in, uh, Minnesota as an assistant, nursing assistant. And, uh, uh a lot of our coworkers got scared and they didn't come and uh, I was an international student, I had to go because there was no one to look after the people, so yeah it made me like-- it gave me good working hours." (Lukshan, Nepal).

So, while some were able to benefit from the circumstances, most struggled with unexpected loss of income. In the case of Lukshan, the chance to work more could be understood as an opportunity, as he presented it. However, it also could be seen as exploitation of a vulnerable individual. His remarks suggest that as an international student, he felt obligated to go into work when his American peers deemed it unsafe to continue.

In addition to their experiences of housing insecurity, the participants also described experiences of financial insecurity and food insecurity during the pandemic. Since most countries were suffering from the pandemic, some were concerned that if situation worsens in their home country, it would impact the source of income and it would get difficult for them to be able to pay their tuitions. Loss of campus jobs worsened their worries and some of them became dependent on local residents or church.

"the Church, they dropped.. a grocery and food package for me at my-- my door" (Elias, Nigeria)

Ultimately, the experience of the pandemic for international students in US higher education was confusing and stressful. While there were also some opportunities, the participants shared a consistent sense of insecurity.

### **Online Instruction**

The participants felt that the shift to online instruction required more preparation, and that though some instructors were able to make that adjustment as the pandemic progressed, others struggled with the transition. The respondents mentioned lack of technical skills in the professors, ability to manage online assignment, encouragement of online discussions, ability to use breakout rooms for group participation, etc. as some of the challenges. Students were frustrated by the transition and found that overall, it was detrimental to the quality of their education. Specifically, the participants pointed to the lack of opportunities for informal communication with instructors and engagement during online instruction.

The perceived decline in communication was a major drawback associated with online teaching for many of the participants. They reported disconnect and lack of belonging. Furthermore, participants felt that increased flexibility in online instruction came at the detriment of rigor and that they needed to supplement the instruction they received. Reduced quality of instruction, attitude of students, seriousness of exams, and leniency in scoring, all led to inferior teaching standards, hence impacting learning. Participants confessed that they learnt more by themselves than by attending classes. The perceived decline in rigor was due to the nature of the online learning environment, but also due to a perceived shift in the attitudes of instructors.

These experiences of online instruction varied according to the discipline, with participants pointing out particular courses they felt needed face-to-face instruction. They agreed, pointing out that in certain fields, a physical presence is necessary to have the full learning experience around particular skills.

"I think for some courses, it was just annoying-- like I was taking an anatomy class and we were doing Cat dissections and all of a sudden it's like oh no they're just stay in the fridge for the rest of the semester" (Lisa, Germany).

Although most of their comments related to online instruction were negative, some participants did identify a few benefits. Some found it easier to focus and others appreciated the ability to record and rewatch their lessons.

"I still would prefer in-person, but I think this is-- this is something I noticed that um, online, where you're just sitting at home, looking at your laptop, you're able to see what the professor is talking about. So you don't have to look up at the board, take notes, look up at the board, take notes. Because you again, you have recordings so you don't have to take notes, you can go back and watch the lecture again and then you also have the ability to just focus on the lecture constantly" ( Badri, India)

Overall, however, the participants reported mostly negative experiences with online instruction.

### **Personal Impact of the Pandemic**

Participants reported changes in their lifestyle, friendships, personal motivation, and for many, the onset of depression. Some participants described how their lifestyle changed in some positive ways as a result of COVID-19.

"Uh, I feel like I started eating more healthier, like more healthy options. Yeah, and I-- I just focus on my health point of view, like as-- like I didn't focus on my health before the pandemic" (Abhas, India)

The impact on friendship and socializing differed. For most, it meant isolation, but for others it continued with contact among a bubble of close friends. Some of the participants shared that they continued to meet with close friends, even though the frequency was quite reduced. Those that completely isolated themselves also felt the greatest impact of the pandemic on their sense of well-being. This impacted the degree of motivation among participants and for some it led to depression. They mentioned that isolation and depression started to impact their interest in studies and the amount of effort they put into assignments. Some were impacted to such an extent that they considered seeking medical help.

Those who fared best tended to be those participants who felt connected to their host community during the pandemic. For instance, Rongjia (China) explained, "I personally didn't feel, uh... depressed because I live with an American family, so I have some people to talk with, socialize."

Even as the situation improved, that sense of fear and panic lingered. Participants described continued concern for the help and remorse that they would never be able to return back to pre-pandemic life.

"The fear of getting sick, um, is always there, was always there. I've, uh, I had COVID in November so also, just, I'm scared that things never will be back to normal, uh, like the things we used to and I think that changes me as a person as well, just the fear and longing of something that we have that seems so normal that isn't there." (Saxe, Netherlands)

### **Support: Sources & Barriers**

Participants revealed that they experienced varied levels of support from the university and their professors. They shared concerns about the fear of contracting the virus, being alone in this country, lack of clarity about medical support, and the financial implication of the treatment. They felt like their concerns

were not addressed by the administrative staff. Some of them did mention that the university health services were supportive and prioritized student well-being over assignments, but in general most of them reported lack of concern. While the participants felt that many of their questions and concerns were left unanswered, there were supports in place to ensure they could continue their studies even if they were to contract COVID-19.

Students reported very different levels of support from their instructors. Some seemed to have close personal relationships with some of their instructors, while others felt they got no support at all. The only students who did report a close, supportive personal relationship with an instructor was a white, male student from the Netherlands. None of the other participants shared having had that type of relationship or support from instructors. Some participants were upset by different treatment of international and domestic students that prevented them from getting a similar level of support. They reported that they got more support from local residents and church than their own university.

Some participants saw this as evidence of racism in US culture. The respondents reported that they felt that Asians in general were treated differently than others.

"At the beginning, the pandemic broke out in China, but since President Trump started to use the term 'Chinese virus,' I feel like everyone has been brainwashed." (Weifeng, China)

"Um... the Asian crime. [laughs] Yeah, the crime against Asian is, uh, I'm starting to notice it's really unbelievable" (Rui, China).

"I feel that the trust between people has decreased. Maybe because I am Asian, I feel that everyone will unconsciously stay away from me. I feel very oppressed psychologically" (Weifeng, China).

This experience contrasts sharply with that of those coming to the U.S. to study from Europe.

"people are so welcoming, uh at no point I thought oh no what if I don't have friends? Um, just because you're from a different place, people are interested in you and interested in your story and inside of no time you almost feel like a local, like you belong there" (Saxe, Netherlands).

### **Perception of the U.S. as a Destination for Study Abroad**

Participants described concerns about healthcare in the U.S., whether they would recommend the U.S. as a destination for other international students, and a sense that they were deprived of an experience they traveled great distances to pursue. Concern about the cost of healthcare fed into concern about the pandemic.

Views on the U.S. response to the pandemic varied. Some saw it is an important lesson in uncertainty for the U.S. Others were disappointed with the U.S. response. They felt that the leaders did not do enough to control the pandemic or support the people. They mentioned that the international students come so far not only for learning in-class but also to learn from the surrounding environment. They felt that many international students started to consider other countries as an option for higher education. In the case of those international students originating from China, the broader tensions with the U.S. involving the politics around the origin of COVID-19 and the ongoing trade war also seem to contribute to a growing negative sentiment.



Some felt the recommendation of the U.S. as a destination for study abroad would be conditional on the focus of studies and individual personality. For many, though, the benefits were greater than the disadvantages. A number of participants spoke of the U.S. as a place that helped them to fulfill their dreams.

"Yeah, it's definitely a good experience, but it depends on the personality. Like, if you are used to the outgoing and very enthusiastic lifestyle, like, oh, doing the best to enjoy the life there-- here. Um... then it will be suitable for you. But if you are a person that is, um, a little quiet and prefer to be alone, then it might not be a very good experience for you." (Rui, China)

### Discussion

The most striking finding from the interviews was the sense of chaos or disorder that the international students sensed in the U.S. during the pandemic. This feeling of confusion and panic that came at the outset of the pandemic in the spring of 2020 shifted into a general sense of fear and anxiety over the subsequent year. The combination of housing insecurity, food insecurity, and financial insecurity brought on by the pandemic clearly contributed to this initial panic and subsequent anxiety among the participants. A part of this sense of chaos and emotional disruption may also be rooted in the disruption of international students' process of adjustment and acculturation to life in the U.S. (Bochner, 1972; Marginson, 2014). International students working through the complex and difficult process of negotiating a new identity to suit their new cultural environment were suddenly confronted with insecurity at some of the most basic levels: shelter, foods, and access to resources. As a result, their sense of chaos or disorder may have been sensed externally in the response to the pandemic they experienced, as well as internally in their own disruption.

Overall, the participants reported dissatisfaction with online instruction in U.S. higher education, though they did note some benefits. These observations about the international students' experiences in U.S. higher education echo the findings of work done in other contexts. Students observed a lack of digital competency in some of their instructors, a decreased pace of instruction, impaired quality of teaching, and a greater personal responsibility for learning that felt burdensome that has also been observed in prior work (Aristonvik et al., 2020; Blue Brazelton & Buford, 2021; Sá & Serpa, 2020, Souza, 2020). Even so, some of the participants did note that having recorded lectures was a benefit that allowed them to focus more during their class meetings and some found the greater sense of personal responsibility for their learning to be helpful. Others found the experience to be demotivating.

Another concerning finding from the study was the perceived lack of support from HEIs and instructors during the pandemic. All of the international students who took part in the study had to rely on external sources of support such as other international students, American friends, or external organizations such as churches to provide them with the support that they needed. The international students described the email communication that they received as impersonal and insufficient and felt they were unable to find answers to the questions that they had. Some services, such as a 24-hour psychological support hotline were praised. However, the overall consensus was that without the aid from outside groups, the consequences of the pandemic on international students at U.S. HEIs could have been even more severe. It is likely that there were individual international students who lacked access to that informal social safety net. A number of participants shared their mental health struggles due to their lifestyle during the pandemic, a finding supporting past research work (Koo, 2021).

Many of the participants from Asian countries also described a growing sense of being unwelcome in the U.S. as a result of anti-Asian discourse, crime, and prejudice. Students linked a sense of alienation and isolation directly back to the political discourse and media coverage of the pandemic. Rising neo-nationalism leads to prejudicial treatment of individuals based on their nationality rather than their race (Lee, 2016) and dissimilarity to peers from the host country reduces receptivity towards international students of color (Katz et al, 2021). The findings from this study suggest that while there is certainly a sense of growing anti-Chinese sentiment, there is also a racialized component felt by individuals from East and

Southeast Asian countries. Their experiences contrast sharply with the participants from Europe who described the U.S. as an extremely welcoming place where they felt accepted and formed quick relationships with locals.

Finally, the findings suggest that while participants' view of the U.S. may have been tarnished as a result of their experiences of the pandemic in U.S. higher education, the vast majority would still recommend the U.S. as a destination for study abroad. Through the lens of Fakunle's (2020) conceptual framework, participants' remarks suggested that while the educational and experiential rationale for studying abroad in U.S. higher education may have been disrupted by the pandemic, their aspirational and economic rationales remained, for the most part, intact. Participants were clear that they felt the quality of the education and experiences of U.S. culture that they received as a result of their study at a U.S. HEI suffered as a result of the pandemic. However, participants were also confident that the experience would empower them to pursue their personal and professional goals and ultimately provide a good economic return on the cost. That said, some expressed concern that the pandemic would dampen their ability to find employment after completing their programs of study. Further, others felt that their host institutions should be sensitive to the reality of a decrease in the quality of the education and experiences for international students that should be reflected in the cost of their study.

The researchers recommend that schools provide more financial support to the nation's students during the pandemic, as all housing insecurity, food insecurity, and financial insecurity anxiety stems from student financial strain. In addition, colleges and universities can consider reducing or waiving some tuition fees as appropriate because, during the pandemic, online teaching methods did not meet the teaching commitments of in-person courses when international students were initially admitted. Universities should also cooperate more with external organizations. External resource support can be considered an additional supplement to the lack of college support services, and groups of the same race or faith are more likely to be trusted and accepted by international students.

Overall, participants expressed the belief that a U.S. education remains a valued commodity around the world and that studying in the U.S. provided one with great opportunities. Participants from China were the most hesitant to profess their recommendation of the U.S. for study abroad, often citing the deteriorating Sino-American relationship. This seems to support Ghazarian's (2016) finding that country-level relationships may be more important than the personal perception of country image in predicting the destination choice of international students in higher education.

### **Conclusion**

This study documented the experiences of international students in U.S. higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. We sought to capture the voices of these students to ensure that they enter into the research literature and are heard as a source of evidence for policymakers and university leaders for policymaking and planning. As U.S. HEIs continue to deal with population aging and subsequent declines in local students, international students present an opportunity for growth. The flow of international student revenue and human resources contributes to the development of U.S. higher education and the economy (Bound et al., 2021). Unfortunately, these students often report having felt underserved or even betrayed by their host institutions during their experiences of COVID-19 in U.S. higher education and had to rely on outside sources of support. Furthermore, deteriorating country-level relationships between the U.S. and other countries and subsequent immigration and policy barriers will likely further damage interest in the U.S. as a destination for study abroad. Policymakers and HEI leaders will need to carefully consider how they might better support international students to sustain this important source of students for U.S. higher education.

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