

## **Fall 2020 Survey: Financial Impact of COVID-19 on International Education**

**Ask:** To ease the financial impact on U.S. higher education institutions, and to revive and restore international student enrollment and study abroad programs, NAFSA urges Congress [to provide critical financial resources and adopt policy changes](#) to support international education in the next COVID-19 relief package.

In mid-September, NAFSA: Association of International Educators conducted a survey of senior leadership at U.S.-based higher education institutions and international education organizations to gauge the financial impact of COVID-19 on the field of international education. This survey follows up on our [April 2020 Financial Impact Survey](#), which found U.S. higher education lost approximately \$1 billion as a result of shortened or cancelled study abroad programs in Spring 2020 due to COVID-19.

Results from this latest survey indicate that, for the Fall 2020 semester, U.S. higher education has potentially lost **nearly \$700 million** due to cancelled study abroad programs and spent approximately **\$416 million** in financial support for international students. These high costs, coupled with the shrinking economic contributions of international students due to declining enrollments, are putting an increasing strain on colleges and universities. NAFSA recently released new economic data showing international students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities during the 2019-2020 academic year contributed \$38.7 billion to the U.S. economy. This contribution is down 4.4 percent (a loss of \$1.8 billion) from the prior academic year, mostly due to COVID-19, which hit halfway through the Spring 2020 semester.

Detailed findings:

### **Study Abroad**

- 86.7% of respondents with study abroad programs did not send any U.S. students abroad for Fall 2020, resulting in losses of nearly \$35 million; when estimated across all of U.S. higher education, potential losses total **nearly \$700 million**.
- Only 15.8% plan to send U.S. students abroad during the Spring 2021 semester, while 32.5% responded they would not send students abroad at all in the spring (this number has increased since the survey ran in September.)
- 38.3% responded that staff positions have or will be impacted by cancelled study abroad programs.
- Impacts included eliminated positions, furloughs, and reduction in hours. Respondents also indicated that vacancies were going unfilled and employees were being partially reassigned to other departments.

## **International Students**

- 50% of respondents indicated ongoing support for international students enrolled for Fall 2020, spending nearly \$24 million; when extrapolated across all of U.S. higher education, potential spending totals **\$416 million**.
- Types of support include scholarships to cover tuition, housing refunds, or money for food and/or rent.
- 30% noted staff positions have been or will be impacted due to financial costs of COVID-19, while another 19% were uncertain. Many expressed concerns for the upcoming budget year and long-term sustainability.
- Impacts included eliminated positions, furloughs, and reduction in hours.

## **International Scholars, Faculty, Staff**

- 17.4% of respondents who host or employ international scholars, faculty and staff indicated their institution or organization is providing financial support to international scholars impacted by COVID-19.
- 68% responded staff positions would not be impacted by COVID-19, while 15% said positions would be impacted and 16.5% did not know definitively.

## **Other Negative Financial Impacts**

- 51.8% reported additional negative financial impacts, such as loss of grants and contracts, enrollment declines due to the shift to online instruction, and compensation paid for cancelled programs.
- When asked to describe additional negative financial impacts due to COVID-19, many respondents described the harm the pandemic will have on enrollment:
  - “Students who came to our university specifically because they were interested in our study abroad may not persist if they cannot participate.” *Private University*
  - “Many international students have decided to either take a leave of absence or defer admission. This has an impact on tuition revenue. Other students need financial support for housing or internet capacity if they are studying from home in less-than-ideal circumstances.” *Private College*

## **Methodology**

NAFSA: Association of International Educators distributed a survey from September 9–22, 2020, to individuals in international education leadership positions at U.S.-based institutions and organizations. 131 institutional responses were received representing primarily U.S.-based higher education institutions. Responses by institutional type were: 12.2% Associate, 16% Baccalaureate, 31.3% Masters, 36.6% Research, and 3.8% Specialized. Financial estimations across U.S. higher education were calculated proportionally by institutional type using the average of dollar ranges selected by survey takers.

*December 2020*