

Article - <http://www.campusreview.com.au/pages/section/article.php?s=Topics&ss=International&idArticle=18326>

# New York ups the ante on foreign students

*13 Sep 10 by Susan Woodward | [Print this story](#) | [Send this story to a friend](#)*

America is no longer “comatose” when it comes to international students, says a New York university system chief.

Concerns that the US is upping the ante in the global competition for international students seem well founded, if plans underway at the State University of New York (SUNY) are a measure.

Representing 64 institutions and some 465,000 students, SUNY is one of America’s largest higher education conglomerates.

Recently, it took the unprecedented step of forming an international recruitment advisory council. The council’s goal? To nearly double SUNY’s international student numbers over the next five years - from about 18,000 to 32,000 - mostly by recruiting undergraduates.

“Some of our campuses historically have had their own recruitment strategies, but many have not,” explained Dr Mitch Leventhal, SUNY vice-chancellor for global affairs.

“Some are latecomers, some have an ad hoc approach to recruitment ... but we’re now very deliberately talking about developing a system-wide approach where we really can leverage the strength of the system.”

Although embryonic, the plan’s scope is ambitious.

With community colleges, technical colleges, universities and research institutions in the mix, Leventhal said SUNY could become the world’s first higher education system to virtually guarantee an international applicant a place.

“We actually can be a system where a student could theoretically apply, knowing that SUNY might be both their first choice and their safety pool,” he said.

“If we get it right, we can have a system where a student may select their first, second and third choice. And if they don’t get those, we’ll find a home where they will likely succeed.”

Pathway programs, conditional admissions and three-year degrees are all being examined as ways to better align SUNY institutions with the needs of international students, as SUNY strives to catch up with global trends in higher education and emerge as a new leader.

Leventhal said SUNY would not reach for the same levels of international student penetration as the Australian and British sectors, both near saturation.

However, he noted American recruitment strategies were maturing and would start to impact other countries.

“It does make the job harder to stay where you are, when you suddenly have another major competitive threat,” he said.

“The Australians always benchmark their performance against the American [system], but it’s always been very reassuring that the Americans have been decades behind in their sophistication of the global higher ed market.

“That reassurance, of knowing the competition is sort of comatose, no longer exists.”

Economy is a key driver behind the moves by SUNY. Leventhal estimated 14,000 more international students - his five-year goal - would generate an additional \$350 million annually.

Most of the money would be reinvested in broader internationalism initiatives, he said, especially more scholarships to entice Americans to study abroad and new curriculum and research opportunities on SUNY campuses.

"We see it as virtuous circle, a closed loop ... we've reached agreement within SUNY that a significant percentage of those monies will go back into providing these other opportunities to our own students, into our faculty, and so on," he said.

That idea was not an American invention, Leventhal conceded, and he was quick to give credit.

"Many Australian universities have been doing things similar to this for a couple of decades now," he said.

"To a large extent, we're learning."

As in Australia, SUNY's new recruitment efforts will rely heavily on the expanded use of agents. But only agents who have jumped through painstaking accreditation hoops, explained Leventhal, who is also founder and president of the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC).

Formed two years ago, the AIRC now represents about 120 colleges and universities.

Leventhal said the organisation was registered with the US Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission and was developing an accreditation process based on global best practices.

"This is a development that is directly relevant to the situation in Australia today because the Americans, through this, will have a more rigorous process of agency training and certification oversight than anything that exists in Australia," he said.

"We come along late, but we also have the advantage of learning from some of the lessons along the way."

The US saw a massive 10.9 per cent jump in international undergraduate enrolments in the 2008-09 academic year, one of several factors fanning concerns that undergraduate enrolments in Australia may dip in 2011.

Like other commentators, however, Leventhal agreed the pie of international students did not represent a zero-sum situation over the long term, especially considering wildly expanding projections for undergraduates.

He said the future would present nations with many opportunities for collaboration, such as joint-degree programs, which a more sophisticated student market would increasingly demand.

Related story [US targets foreign undergrads](#)

#### COMMENT ON THIS STORY

#### CONTACT THE EDITOR

Name

Email address

Your comment

Submit

*Note: your email address will not be displayed*