



English-language and Workforce Transition Support for Nonnative English-Speaking (NNES) International Students

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Introduction

Over 5.3 million students worldwide are enrolled in universities outside of their home country (UNESCO UIS, 2020). While the majority of these students come from non-English speaking countries, Anglophone countries continue to be their top destinations.¹

Top 5 origins of international students	Top 5 destinations of international students
China (369,548)	United States (1,095,299)
India (202,014)	United Kingdom (496, 570)
South Korea (52,250)	China (492,185)
Saudi Arabia (37,080)	Canada (435, 415)
Canada (26,122)	Australia (420, 501)

Data sources: IIE 2019, Project Atlas 2019

1 This trend is changing, as evidenced by the decline in international student enrolment in the US and UK as well as in the increase of enrolments in non-Anglophone countries such as China (see Choudaha, 2017 and Tian & Liu, 2020)

International students are drawn to foreign universities in search of credentials and academic and career opportunities unavailable in their home countries (ITA, 2016). The majority pursue degrees in STEM fields (in particular engineering, math, and computer science), followed closely by Business and Management (IIE, 2019). A prerequisite for admission to an English-speaking institution of higher education is English language proficiency, determined by standardized tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

Numerous studies have shown that even after admission to an English-speaking university, nonnative English-speaking (NNES) international students' English language proficiency presents obstacles to their integration and success in academic and non-academic settings (e.g. Andrade, 2009; Gebhard, 2012; Xing & Bolden, 2019; Shih & Brown, 2000). These obstacles are especially acute for NNES international students of color, for whom racial/ethnic and linguistic prejudices intersect (Yao et al, 2019; Lee & Rice, 2007; Asante et al, 2016; Fries-Britt et al, 2014; Mitchell Jr. et al, 2017; Beoku-Betts, 2004).

While much attention has been paid to NNES international students' experiences adapting to academic life in a foreign university, less attention has been paid to their college-workforce transitions and to the ways in which universities can better support this transition. International students face unique obstacles in their search for employment. If they choose to stay in the U.S. after graduation, they must contend not only with a crumbling job market due to COVID-19, but also with confusing, ever-changing, and increasingly hostile federal immigration policies.² Most international students have F-1 visas, which allows students to work but only under certain conditions. After graduation, many students compete for one of an ever-shrinking number of available H1B visas,³ which allow U.S. employers to temporarily employ foreign workers in specialty occupations. For international students, concerns about visa status are compounded with other issues such as "adapting to unfamiliar and often unspoken cultural job search norms, workplace etiquette, and conduct expectations" (McFadden & Sedorff, 2017, p. 37; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007).

This report examines policies and support-systems for NNES international students at the top five U.S. universities with the highest percentage of enrolled international students. In particular, it looks at English-language requirements for enrollment and ongoing English-language support for enrolled students; career counseling services and whether specific considerations and programming are offered for international students; and whether work preparedness and transitions are incorporated into language support programming. Specifically, this report addresses the following questions:

2 The Trump administration has attempted to enact numerous immigration policies that have severely impacted international students, such as setting fixed terms for student visas based on country of origin (Redden, 2020) and imposing more stringent guidelines on Optional Practical Training (OPT) visas (Quilantan, 2020).

3 The number of H1B visas are currently capped at 65,000. The Trump administration is currently being challenged in court due to its proposals of further narrowing the eligibility requirements for H1B visa holders (Redden, 2020).

- What are the demographics of international students at these schools?
- What are the English-language requirements for admission?
- What career counseling services are available and do they offer specific services for international students?
- What English-language support programs are available to international students?
- (How) are workforce transitions incorporated into these English-language support programs?

U.S. UNIVERSITIES WITH HIGHEST NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS		
School Name	Location	% of International Students
The New School	New York, NY	31%
Florida Institute of Technology	Melbourne, FL	28%
University of Rochester	Rochester, NY	27%
Carnegie Mellon University	Pittsburgh, PA	22%
Boston University	Boston, MA	21%

Data source: *US News & World Report* (2020)

Methods

The findings presented in this report were gathered through online searches of the top five universities' websites and is based entirely on publicly available data. Google search terms included: university name + international students, university name + ESL, university name + career counseling; university name + career counseling + international students; university name + international students + admission, university name + international students + support, and university name + international students + workforce transition.

Question 1: What are the demographics of international students at these universities?

School Name	Top ten countries of origin
The New School ⁴	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. China 2. South Korea 3. Canada 4. India 5. Taiwan 6. UK 7. Brazil 8. Turkey 9. Mexico 10. Japan
Florida Institute of Technology	No data publicly available
University of Rochester	No data publicly available
Carnegie Mellon University ⁵	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. China 2. India 3. South Korea 4. Taiwan 5. Canada 6. Singapore 7. Japan 8. Hong Kong 9. Germany 10. Australia
Boston University ⁶	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. China 2. India 3. South Korea 4. Taiwan 5. Canada 6. Saudi Arabia 7. Japan 8. Indonesia 9. Turkey 10. Thailand

⁴ <https://www.newschool.edu/provost/student-demographics.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.cmu.edu/oie/about/docs/fall-stats-2019.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.bu.edu/isso/about/statistics/>

Question 2: What are the English-language requirements for admission?

School Name	Minimum TOEFL score (120 max)	Minimum IELTS score (9.0 max)	Other accepted tests (minimum score)	Requirements for graduate assistantships
The New School ⁷	100	7.0	PTE ⁸ (68) DET ⁹ (120)	No information found
Florida Institute of Technology ¹⁰	79	6.0	PTE (58) Cambridge English Advanced test ¹¹ (180) DET (100) Gaokao test ¹² (120 or 96)	Teaching Assistantships: TOEFL - 100 IELTS - 7.0 PTE - 70 Cambridge English advanced - 193 Research Assistantships: TOEFL - 79 IELTS - 6.5 PTE - 53 Cambridge English Advanced - 180
University of Rochester ¹³	100	7.5	DET (120)	No information found
Carnegie Mellon University ¹⁴	102	7.5	none	TOEFL speaking scores (30 max): 28-30 - eligible for all TA duties and sole instructor assignments 26-27 - Eligible for all TA duties 22-25 - one-on-one interactions only
Boston University ¹⁵	90	7.0	Duolingo (120)	"An applicant would have to do better than these minimums to be considered for a teaching assistantship."

7 <https://www.newschool.edu/nssr/application-instructions/>

8 Pearson English Language Test, maximum score of 90

9 Duolingo English Test, maximum score of 160

10 <https://www.fit.edu/international-admissions/english-proficiency/>

11 Maximum score of 179

12 China national higher education entrance examination

13 <https://enrollment.rochester.edu/international-resources/#english-language-exams>

14 <https://admission.enrollment.cmu.edu/pages/international-admission-requirements>

15 <https://www.bu.edu/admissions/apply/international/>

Question 3: What career counseling services are available and do they offer specific services for international students?

The New School

The New School has a Career Development and Experience office¹⁶ that provides listings for jobs and internships for undergraduate and graduate students, and also holds events such as career development workshops, networking opportunities, and career fairs. The website also offers 15 pre-written guides on topics ranging from résumé writing to networking salary negotiation. One of these guides is titled “International Student Job Search Guide.”¹⁷ This 5-page guide offers a “career success plan” with advice on actions students can take in each year of their studies, a section on how to dress for an interview, meet and greet tips such as “S-H-E (Smile, Handshake, Eye Contact),” how to practice and engage in small talk, and lastly, tips for how to navigate and understand visa processes at each stage of a job search. The guide suggests international students speak to other international students and alumni who have been hired by U.S. companies to find companies “willing to hire international students.” It also points students to the online resource GoinGlobal, which has a H1B visa search engine where students can search a directory of employers that have previously applied for H1B visas. Lastly, the guide briefly speaks to the tension surrounding when students should disclose their employment status to prospective employers. It suggests leaving visa status off of résumés, instead presenting it in a cover letter or during an initial interview. It also cautions that “many employers do not know what is involved in hiring a foreign national, and it is therefore crucial that you are able to clearly and confidently communicate this process to them.”

In addition to the Career Development and Experience office, the International Student and Scholar Services office also provides information for employment.¹⁸ The resources listed in this office are focused more on making sure students understand visa guidelines, stressing repeatedly that “the U.S. government takes working without authorization very seriously.” Specific guidelines are available for F-1 students as well as J-1 exchange visitors.

Florida Institute of Technology

The Career Services Office¹⁹ at Florida Institute of Technology offers help with résumé building, job search assistance, mock interview, and organizes career fairs. On the office’s homepage is a link for information for international students, which leads to lists and guides to on and off campus employment.²⁰ Like the New School, the office directs students to search the GoinGlobal database to find potential employers.

The International Student and Scholar Services office also provides employment information for international students, with particular focus on on-campus employment.²¹ After discussions of eligibility requirements and taxes, the site has two sections that stress the importance that students follow federal visa guidelines.

16 <https://www.newschool.edu/career-services/>

17 <https://www.newschool.edu/career-services/international-student-job-guide.pdf>

18 <https://www.newschool.edu/international-students-scholars/employment/>

19 <https://www.fit.edu/career/>

20 <https://www.fit.edu/career/current-student-resources/career-resource-center/international-student-employment-information/>

21 <https://www.fit.edu/international-student-and-scholar-services/current-students/on-campus-employment-information/>

University of Rochester

The Greene Center for Career Education and Connections²² provides one-on-one career exploration and industry advising appointments, peer advising, graduate and professional school preparation, and recruitment activities. It also produces a podcast focused on different aspects of navigating the job market and has a Career Clothing Closet where students can access professional dress for interviews, presentations, etc. The site does not have any dedicated information for international students.

The International Services Office has a page dedicated to employment for international students²³; however, it only speaks to visa requirements and does not offer guidance on job search.

Carnegie Mellon University

The Career and Professional Development Center²⁴ offers career counseling services, career fairs, interview assistance, résumé and cover letter help, and graduate school advising. The Center has a page dedicated to international students.²⁵ Apart from a link to GoinGlobal's H1B Plus database, the page leads primarily to resources available at the Office of International Education for help with visa eligibility.

The Office of International Education's employment resource page provides on-campus employment information for F-1 and J-1 students as well as information about additional education/employment-related visas, such as Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT).²⁶

Boston University

The Center for Career Development²⁷ provides support for students to help them determine their career goals, find internships and career opportunities, write résumés and cover letters, and preparing for interviews and negotiating salaries. There is a page dedicated to international students that provides numerous resources for all stages of the job search.²⁸ The Center suggests international students adopt a global job search approach, citing high competition rates amongst international students for a small number of H1B visas. As part of the global job search, the site offers four online resources: Handshake and GoinGlobal, which provide databases of job listings; Big Interview, which lets students record mock interviews and get feedback; and Language Link, where students can join an English conversation group. There is also a section focused on interview tips for international students, with advice such as making sure to make eye-contact, how to handle any awkwardness that might arise if the student does not shake hands due to religious reasons, how to communicate strengths and weaknesses to a potential employer, the importance of sending a thank you note after an interview. Lastly, the page provides links to other offices at Boston University that can help international students, such as the Center for Writing and the International Students and Scholars Office.

22 <https://www.rochester.edu/careercenter/index.html>

23 <https://iso.rochester.edu/employment/index.html>

24 <https://www.cmu.edu/career/index.html>

25 <https://www.cmu.edu/career/students-and-alumni/international-students/index.html>

26 <https://www.cmu.edu/oie/foreign-students/employment.html>

27 <https://www.bu.edu/careers/>

28 <https://www.bu.edu/careers/resources/international-students/>

The International Students and Scholars Office website has a page dedicated to employment and internships.²⁹ Information is focused on ensuring that students understand and follow visa guidelines.

Question 4: What English-language support programs are available to NNES international students?

The New School

International students enrolled at The New School can receive ongoing English-language support through the University Learning Center.³⁰ According to the ULC website, “ESL-certified tutors provide support in writing, speaking, and pronunciation. For those seeking assistance with writing, tutors can help with grammar, content, structure, clarity, etc. ESL speech appointments are available for students looking to expand their vocabulary, improve their pronunciation, and practice presentations and daily conversation. Speech appointments also provide students with a valuable opportunity to enhance their listening skills.” In addition to individual tutoring, the ULC also holds regular pronunciation groups and conversation groups.

The Parsons School of Design offers language supported (LS) courses for students for whom English is a second language. LS courses cover the same content as non-LS courses, with “extra attention to vocabulary, cultural references, and support for reading and writing...Parsons LS faculty possess training specific to both the content area and the language support focus.”³¹

For students who do not meet the minimum English proficiency scores, The New School offers “ESL + certificate programs” where students both develop their English skills and study a subject they plan to pursue at the university level. Certificate programs include: ESL + university preparation, ESL + design at the Parsons School of Design, ESL + food, and ESL + music at the Mannes School of Music. Graduates of these certificate programs can pursue further studies at the New School or another university.

Florida Institute of Technology

English proficiency is not a requirement for admission to Florida Tech. Students who are admitted to Florida Tech but do not yet meet the English proficiency requirements can enroll in the ESL Bridge Program.³² This program usually takes two semesters to complete, upon which students can enroll in their academic program.

Florida Tech also offers two credit bearing ESL classes for admitted students who score just below the minimum English-language proficiency scores.³³ These students may begin their academic coursework in conjunction with their ESL classes.

29 <https://www.bu.edu/isso/employment-internships/>

30 <https://www.newschool.edu/learning-center/>

31 [https://www.newschool.edu/parsons/english-language-placement/#:-:text=Language%2DSupported%20\(LS\)%20Pathway,as%20History%20is%20also%20offered.](https://www.newschool.edu/parsons/english-language-placement/#:-:text=Language%2DSupported%20(LS)%20Pathway,as%20History%20is%20also%20offered.)

32 <https://www.fit.edu/psychology-and-liberal-arts/schools/arts-and-communication/academics-and-learning/english-as-a-second-language-esl-bridge-program/>

33 https://catalog.fit.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=1&poid=174

University of Rochester

The International Services Office (ISO) website has a page titled “US culture and adjustment,” which includes information on cultural adjustment, US social customs, common American values, and English language support.³⁴ The site lists three university classes and groups for international students: a ten-week non-credit bearing English language program for new international students (however, the link for more information on this program leads to an error message), a Writing, Speaking, and Argument program available to all university students who would need tutoring, and the Eastman School of Music English for Academic Purposes program, which helps students develop their English language skills with special attention to subjects related to music. The ISO website also lists six English language support services in the Rochester area, some of which are free and some of which require fees.

International students whose test scores do not yet meet the English proficiency requirements may gain admission to the university through the English for Academic Purposes Program (EAPP). The EAPP is a two-semester program for both native and non-native speakers of English with a focus on developing “critical reading, reasoning, writing, and communication skills”.³⁵

Carnegie Mellon University

The Intercultural Communication Center (ICC) serves “all international students seeking language and cultural training to reach academic and career goals.”³⁶ The ICC offers 4-6 week workshops on a variety of topics such as language and culture for teaching, advanced grammar monitoring, and fluency for presentations, one time seminars on topics such as communicating data effectively, elevator talk, email for academic purposes, and participating in classes, and 1-1 consultations that provide individualized feedback and coaching.³⁷ The ICC also offers cross-cultural training for native and nonnative English-speaking faculty, staff, and students.

Boston University

The Center for English Language & Orientation Programs (CELOP) offers intensive English classes at various levels, as well as specialized professional programs focusing on law, business, and hospitality management.³⁸ It also offers an English Plus Credit program where students can improve their English skills and earn BU credit.³⁹

The Educational Resource Center (ERC) and College of Communication Writing Center also provide support for all students at the university in writing and peer tutoring.

34 <https://www.iso.rochester.edu/living/culture/index.html>

35 <http://writing.rochester.edu/eapp/index.html>

36 <https://www.cmu.edu/icc/about/index.html>

37 <https://www.cmu.edu/icc/language-training/index.html>

38 <https://www.bu.edu/celop/academics/programs/>

39 <https://www.bu.edu/celop/academics/programs/english-plus-credit/>

Question 5: (How) are workforce transitions incorporated into these English-language support programs?

None of the program or university websites mentioned work preparedness or workforce transitions for NNES international students. English-language support programs focused primarily on helping students with academic English necessary to succeed in their courses. The programs that do entail professional/discipline specific English language support are listed in the table below:

School Name	Professional/discipline specific English language support
The New School	ESL + certificate programs (for non-enrolled students)
Florida Institute of Technology	None
University of Rochester	Eastman School of Music English for Academic Purposes Program
Carnegie Mellon University	None
Boston University	Professional programs focusing on law, business, and hospitality management (for enrolled and non-enrolled students)

Two universities did stand apart, however, in their attention to the need for professors to be better trained to support their NNES international students. At Carnegie Mellon University, the Intercultural Communication Center offers a workshop titled “Navigating Language and Cultural Differences when Interviewing Nonnative Speakers.” The ICC website explains that this workshop “was created in response to faculty concerns that interviews with international applicants are often more challenging due to language and cultural differences. Also, some faculty find that their lack of background with language assessment can lead to an inaccurate impression of an applicant’s command of spoken English. Participants become aware of the potential stumbling blocks and familiarized themselves with some basic techniques and procedures commonly used at ICC to communicate with nonnative English speakers.”⁴⁰ It is unclear from the site, however, how many professors have taken this workshop, whether it is mandatory or volunteer, how often the workshop is offered, and what other types of support the ICC offers for professors.

⁴⁰ <https://www.cmu.edu/icc/programs/crosscultural/>

At The New School, a survey was conducted amongst faculty in 2017 to “assess the experiences, perceptions, and needs of faculty” working with NNES students.⁴¹ The report continues, “the data generated from this study will help us prioritize the next steps in building greater support for faculty and improving the integration of NNES students into our learning community.” Results of this survey showed that most faculty did not feel prepared to effectively teach NNES students. The report also offered seven recommendations, ranging from better utilizing and expanding existing support for faculty and students to creating clearer guidelines for grading NNES students’ writing. It is unclear from the school’s website, however, whether further surveys were conducted and what changes were made as a result of findings.

Discussion

These findings present a gap in university support for workforce transitions and work-preparedness for international students on the one hand, and language support for NNES international students on the other. Job search advice and support for international students is, for the most part, identical to that offered for domestic students, and career counseling centers and international student offices are more focused on visa regulations than helping international students navigate and adapt to linguistic and culture differences. When these issues were address, advice was superficial, such as reminding students to make eye contact. Markedly absent from any of the university websites is a discussion or acknowledgement of additional obstacles facing NNES international students of color on the job market. It is thus unclear if career counselors at these universities are attuned to these students’ particular needs.

Regarding English-language support, the trend at the five universities is to focus on helping students better communicate with their peers and professors, thus putting the onus solely on NNES international students to navigate not only new academic and social mores, but also figure out how to leverage these relationships for career placement and advancement. As researchers have shown, building relationships with peers, professors, advisers, and mentors is a key way international university students learn about and obtain career opportunities (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2013; Pham et al, 2019). It is therefore important that universities provide support not only to NNES students, but to faculty and administrators who play significant roles in helping students transition to the workforce.

Recommendations for further research

This report offers a preliminary overview of five universities’ offerings for NNES international students with special attention to workforce preparedness and transition. Further research into this area is necessary in order to better understand student and faculty experiences and ensure that NNES students have access to the same post-graduation career opportunities as their native English-speaking peers.

⁴¹ <https://www.newschool.edu/provost/institutional-research/>

Below, I provide areas and questions that require further study and research:

- Qualitative studies are needed that focus specifically on NNES international students' experiences with college-workforce transitions.⁴² Are they able to find employment in their chosen field after graduating? What social networks do they utilize to find employment? Are professors, administrators, etc. equipped to help NNES international students navigate job markets? Do NNES international students feel supported by their universities in regard to workforce transitions?
- Research is needed into NNES international students' experiences with internships. Do NNES international students have the same access to internships as their native English-speaking peers? How do companies and organizations feel about hiring NNES international students as interns?
- Similar to The New School survey, universities need to assess the ability of their instructors and faculty to support NNES students. How do professors, in particular those in STEM and business disciplines, feel about their ability to support their NNES international students? What trainings and other forms of support are available within and across different departments for instructors and administrators?
- More research is needed that focuses on NNES international students of color, in particular those from Africa, and their experiences with workforce transitions. (How) do these students' experiences differ from other NNES international students? Do NNES international students from countries other than the top five (China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada) feel supported and seen by their universities? Are professors, administrators, etc. equipped to help these students navigate the linguistic and racial obstacles they may face in transitioning to the workforce?

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⁴² An example of this type of study is Sangganjananich et al (2011) and Popadiuk and Arthur (2013).

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