

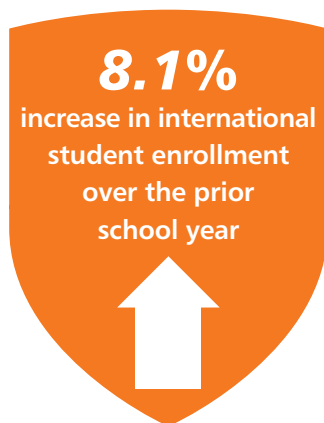
3 WAYS TO IMPROVE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SUPPORT DURING THE HOLIDAYS

International student enrollment is growing at a record pace.

In fact, the recently released 2013-14 Open Doors report indicates a full 8.1% increase in international student enrollment over the prior school year, with the total number of international students studying in the U.S. tallied at 886,052.¹ For many colleges and universities, however, the goal is to increase that number. They understand that in order to do so, they need to offer a wide range of support services to both recruit and retain international students who not only add cultural diversity to campus, but also add significant impact to the bottom line.

While many schools do have a number of programs in place to help international students feel more at home, and there are national initiatives like [International Education Week](#) that help involve the broader community, there are still areas of student support that can be overlooked. One such area is winter break. Some campuses shut down during this time leaving those international students who stay scrambling to make living arrangements and fill their empty schedules. Other colleges and universities, however, view winter break as yet another opportunity to differentiate themselves by providing their international students multiple options to enhance their U.S. experience. Our research into the subject shows that programs currently being offered range from the basic – keeping dormitories open—to the not so basic.

If your school is looking for ways to augment its international student programming over the holidays, a good place to start is to look at what others are already doing successfully. Here are some ideas based on what we've found:



1

Address Housing Needs

Traditionally, dormitories close during the winter break as domestic students go home to spend time with their families. International students who stay in the U.S. during the holidays are left in need of temporary housing and deal with a lot of added stress.

Simple solutions to address this issue include:

- Keeping select dormitories open with limited meal service. This does not have to be free. Students should apply and pay an additional fee to help cover the added costs.
- Arranging for students to stay with a host family in the community.
- Partnering with local off-campus housing such as hotels or apartments to offer students a discounted rate for a short-term stay.



2

Coordinate Local & Campus Activities

Even when housing is covered, international students who stay on or near campus over winter break can find themselves alone with a lot of time to fill. Planned activities allow students to be social, stay connected, and fend off homesickness.

Holiday break events and activities don't need to be all that much different from the ones you offer year round. Examples of things you can do to engage your students who remain on campus during break include:

- Organizing on-campus activities such as movie nights or a karaoke party.
- Planning community outings to local venues or sporting events.
- Involving the community by hosting a dinner or other event.

For an example of holiday programming in action (and some ideas to spark your own programs), check out the [University of Minnesota](#) Global Programs & Strategy Alliance website. It highlights several activities that were offered this past year—from a Christmas dinner, to rock climbing, ice skating, a bowling party, and more.



3

Organize Trips

While some students may be happy staying in town or near campus, others may view break as an opportunity to explore other areas of their host country. Make it simpler and more enjoyable for them by arranging group trips that will not only expose them to other areas of the U.S., but will also help them connect and engage with their fellow travelers.

Here are some ideas:

- Give students a reason to explore other areas of the country by arranging fun trips to iconic American destinations out of state.
- Encourage servant leadership through service-based trips.
- Coordinate “weekend-warrior” type trips to local ski-lodges or other outdoor adventures.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison, and their [Wisconsin Union Directorate](#), provide an example of this kind of planning. While not specifically geared towards only international students, their “alternative breaks” program offers students of all kinds opportunities for service-oriented trips to various destinations around the U.S.



fun trips to iconic American destinations out of state...



Here are a few examples of how a number of institutions support their international students during winter break:

UCLA offers a program known as “Winter Break on the Hill” that provides housing assistance and several organized activities for international students.

[Check out this year’s activities.](#)

Purdue University organized a winter break trip to Florida to help elderly and impoverished families as part of their Boiler Way Out! Program.

[Read more about the Purdue trip.](#)

Michigan State University offers on-campus winter break housing to students in select dorms and an off-campus option as well.

[Read more about the Michigan State University program.](#)

As we said in last month’s article, ***Engaging and Embracing Your International Students***, the more engaged international students are, the better the outcome. It may be too late to institute new holiday programming options for the 2014-2015 school year, but it is certainly not too late to get the wheels in motion for next year. Hopefully some of the ideas we’ve shared here will help you as you work to define and implement winter break programs for your international students.



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¹<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/11/17/open-doors-report-finds-increases-international-enrollment-study-abroad>