



## Global Urban Challenges: The Role of Research Universities

# Meeting the Global Demand for Higher Ed

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With all the headlines about the ‘crisis in higher education’, it is easy to forget that here in the United States we are blessed with a cornucopia of educational assets—a physical and administrative infrastructure that supports an extraordinarily productive national cohort of researchers and scholars.

With over 4,000 colleges and universities spread across our nation, the United States offers its citizens—and the world—a wide range of options for academic study. This historically innovative sector is [poised to transform itself once again](#) in response to social, economic, technological, pedagogical, and other rapidly shifting dimensions of our society. I plan to explore some of the anticipated changes to the higher education landscape in a series of commentaries, and [welcome reader comments](#).

Further, as will be explored in the upcoming [conference](#), our research universities will continue to play a particularly critical role in the development of strategies to address the challenges of a rapidly urbanizing global population.

Our colleges and universities are rapidly adapting to the increasing mobility of non-US students, to demand for global credentials and study programs offered in English, and to rising middle class aspirations in developing countries—to name just a few global trends. On the one hand, schools are expanding their international recruitment activities and, on the other, they are increasing their study abroad options to ensure their students get an international perspective and are prepared to compete in a global marketplace.

The US higher education sector is seeing more and more tuition revenue from international students. We will have new data next month, however the trends over the past decade are clear and for 2011-2012, the Institute for International Education (IIE) [reported](#) that the US hosted over 760,000 international students, an increase of 6 percent over the prior year.

Notwithstanding the spread of MOOCs and other new technologies for distance learning, most observers expect the number of students traveling outside their borders for at least some portion of their education to increase by more than 50 percent over the next decade. And [the numbers are huge](#) (PDF): by some estimates, 167,000,000 students from around the world are enrolled in higher education institutions this year...and by 2025, an estimated 267,000,000 students will be seeking such opportunities.

Where will they go? Everywhere! While the US, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand will continue to enroll significant cohorts of students, universities across the globe are scrambling to offer subject matter teaching in their undergraduate and graduate programs in the English language, and Europe and even China are seeing increased “foreign” student enrollment.

So while the future is bright for institutions that invest in their ability to meet this global demand, there is a capacity gap that will drive increased investment in higher education. More on that in my next commentary.

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