

PROSPECTS OF INCREASING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT Kathmandu University (KU)

BACKGROUND

An increased number of universities worldwide are competing to attract students who wish to study abroad. Universities take great pride in diversity of their student population and the presence of international students is key to this diversity. The benefit international students bring to the host university are manifold. They enrich the research and learning environment with their perspectives informed by their unique socio-cultural upbringing and their diversity of thought. This helps to enliven the classroom discussion and seminars among students and professors. On the other hand, in interacting inside and outside the university complex with these foreign students, the home students get opportunity to develop and polish their communication skills which is one of the most important skills to acquire if they are to succeed when they themselves go abroad for either job or study. For the host university, the strong presence of international student poses a challenge and so provides an opportunity to continually update and make their programs relevant and compatible in the global educational scene. Otherwise, there is a danger of them falling out of favour among prospective international students. Thus, these foreign students gradually contribute in the reshaping of academic disciplines as well as culture and practices of university itself.

The mobility of foreign students also strengthens the relationship between their home country and the country of their university. The relationships will be a reciprocal one where the country of origin will have a soft corner for the host country as it is educating its citizen and training them into skilled workers for its development. The country of the host university stands to benefit as well. International students increase the host country's soft power when they return home and become informal ambassadors for it and universities, strengthening trade, research and diplomatic ties. Besides, some of these international students will remain in the country to work; contributing in developing the high skilled professionals in high-value sectors in the country.

In this context, Kathmandu University is planning to increase the number of foreign students to 10% of its total student number in the future. Kathmandu University needs to consider number of factors which will be crucial in its effort to bring international students to various programs offered by its schools. Firstly, most of the universities from Global North seek a partnership in the Global South based on joint research interests and complementary competencies and resources. They normally include research, education, innovation and outreach to society, often with a focus on capacity development in the South. In doing so, they often propose for student exchange program.

Secondly, affordable tuition fee is a priority for many students when selecting a university for their further study. Kathmandu University should use affordability of its program and cheap living cost in Nepal to its advantage in its initiative to recruit international students who are looking for university education in a lower cost. Therefore, KU should aggressively promote its affordable tuition fee and project itself as a viable alternative to students for Undergraduate and Graduate programs in Social Sciences, Management, Medicine, Engineering etc. For example, currently some of the 2-years MA programs in Social Sciences costs only US \$ 500 per semester in KU. This could be crucial for many foreign students to seek admission at KU.

FOREIGN STUDENTS AT KU

The record shows that in the past 26 years, from 1995-2020, almost 13% of the total Kathmandu University graduates were foreign nationals. They were from 48 different countries of the world. Neighboring countries, India with more than 11% and Sri Lanka with almost 1% had occupied the first and second position among the countries from where these foreign nationals had come to study in KU. The USA was the third country with 60 students (0.17%). In fact the university feels proud to have hosted 26 students from Germany and Maldives, 19 from Canada, 18 from Zambia and Britain, 17 from Bangladesh, 14 from South Africa, 13 from Pakistan, 9 from Norway and 7 from Russia. The variation of foreign nationals who have graduated from KU shows that it has a potential to attract not only South Asian but also African, American and European students for their higher study.

CURRENT PROVISIONS

There is no specific policy to attract foreign national to study at Kathmandu University. Foreign nationals who are interested to study while staying in Nepal, and those who could secure funding for the purpose could come and join the University. Currently, these prospective students are just required to pay according to the following fee structure to study any of the program offered by KU:

- For students from SAARC Countries: 1.5 times of the fee applicable for Nepali students
- For students other than from SAARC Countries: 2 times of the fee applicable for Nepali students

BENEFITS OF BRINGING IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- Quality enhancement – Bringing in international students leads to teaching/learning in English language, leading to the enhancement of English language skills of the teaching faculties. It

increases the exposure of the faculties to the global student market and the home students to the global learning scenario.

- Accreditation – With the increased international student population, the chance of receiving accreditation from various regulatory institutions improves. This helps in the global visibility of the university in the international ranking list.
- Diverse Learning Environment – Nepali students get opportunity to learn with diverse group of people. They will get a culturally diverse learning environment, in which they can have a lively and productive learning experience. It fosters their communication skills and cross-cultural understanding, enhancing their value in the job market.
- Financial benefit to the university – The university has the system of charging students from SAARC countries 1.5 times the normal fees and non-SAARC countries 2 times the normal fees applicable to Nepali students. It is a good source of revenue generation for the university through short-term courses as well as full-time courses.
- Enhancement of Overall performance – With exposure to the global education system, the teaching and non-teaching staffs are required to deliver the best quality service, academically as well as administratively. Ultimately, overall performance of the Schools along with the Central administration will improve in the delivery of quality service.

ESSENTIAL BACKGROUND WORK TO BE ACCOMPLISHED:

- A global campaign ‘Study in Nepal’, to be launched in partnership with the Government of Nepal. KU should take a lead in the campaign.
- Promote KU's academic programs aggressively emphasizing on making them visible and accessible. Since official website is the main source of information and plays critical role in the final decision of probable students, maintain an updated, optimized website of KU. The website should be mobile friendly and have an appealing yet simple user interface to keep users engaged. We can create a separate web page dedicated for the international students with links to other key information pages like scholarships, visa application, financial aid, accommodation information and contact details of an international admission counselor.
 1. Enhance the social media of KU with an increase in coverage of stories of international students. Since KU has only been using Facebook handle, Twitter and Instagram can be brought into use to target more of the younger generation. Tik Tok at KU can also be used for promotions.

2. Identify popular courses (e.g. Buddhist Studies) and Nepal-based exclusive courses (e. g. Ethnomusic and courses based on cultural heritage and architectures of Nepal) to promote with priority.
 3. Create a database of the international students (current and alumni) and have their experiences of studying at Kathmandu University documented either in video or in small anecdotes and write ups to share.
- Make provision of dedicated office to facilitate **visa** process to ensure that determined students succeed in attending KU.
 - Prepare and share recruitment plans for international students, offering scholarships, career placements, and internship that can be a huge incentive for students to enroll. The University need to explore the possibility to announce the **Vice-Chancellor Scholarship Scheme** for at least one foreign student in every school in the merit basis.

In order to boost the research activities in the various departments, the university has recently decided to assign at least one Research Fellow (RF) to each Professor and Associate Professor. While recruiting those RFs, the preference will be given to those KU students enrolled as MS by research, M. Phil and Ph.D., and their fees will be waived for the service they provide to the Department in the capacity of RFs of Professors and Associate Professors. Foreign students enrolled in the above-mentioned programs can also have an opportunity to work as RF and get the benefit of fee waiver. It can be a start up in the beginning. However, the University need to encourage those Professors and Associate Professors to recruit foreign students as their RFs with access to small additional funding i.e., to offer free local accommodation for foreign RFs either at KUIC, or at KU Guest House or at International Hostel, wherever it is available.

- Lobby partner universities to prioritize in collaborating in joint degree programs that mandate a student to spend **25% to 50% time in both universities** to get a degree. School of Education and the Hebei University of Economics and Business, China have already completed a four-year cycle of 2+2-year Undergraduate program (first and fourth-year courses would be delivered at Kathmandu University and second and third year courses would be taught at Hebei University) and School of Arts and the Western Sydney University (WSU) are preparing for similar programs in Undergraduate, Graduate and PhD level.
- Work on delivering quality education as it is central to becoming an institute of reputation.
- Focus to strengthen Global Ranking (GR) of KU (as it is one of the best ways to attract foreign students), and implement the programs and schemes that helps to increase the indicators for GR.

- Continue to explore/review the added value for a foreign student to come to study at a university in Nepal, and come up with the programs that is special, unique and according to the interest of foreign students. While doing so, KU keeps in mind to design globally relevant syllabus that cannot be taught elsewhere, but only in KU.
- Implement one-window policy for foreign students at KU. GED website will have an information corner where potential foreign students can get all the information required for administrative procedure from one place.
- GED will coordinate with different school to facilitate the visa process for foreign students.
- Introduce a clear policy of credit transfer to foreign students and universities.
- Provide accommodation either on-campus housing or in the locality of the university. This gives opportunity to foreign students to meet and mingle with local people and as a result they adjust to the new environment quickly. Explore the potentiality of establishing International Hostel at Central campus and developing a rented place into International Hostel in Kathmandu valley for Schools of Arts, Education and Management.
- Negotiate with Nepal Rastra Bank and the Ministry of Finance to ease the process of opening the bank account and money transfer so that foreign students can easily pay tuition and other fees.
- Mobilize the Nepali diaspora (especially those who are working in the higher education sectors globally) to marketize our courses and strengths to attract foreign students.
- **Visa Procedure Details**

Necessary Document for Student Visa Process

S N	Particulars	Remarks
1	No Objection Letter from Concerned Embassy	
2	Bank Statement of US\$3000 for each student (with Bank Stamp)	Additional US\$2000 for each Dependent
3	Student Admission Receipt from Concerned College/University	if Exchange Student, then MOU
4	Curriculum Vitae and Marksheet of Last Exam or Admit Card	
5	Valid Passport with Visa	
6	School/College Recommendation letter for Visa Request	
7	Relationship Certificate in case of dependent (Birth/Marriage)	
8	Student Admission Confirmation Letter	
9	University Registration Number	
10	Other Required Document	

CHALLENGES

Attracting more foreign students at KU is not free from challenges. One of the major concerns of Nepal Immigration office today is about some people who want to become students in Nepal but their purpose is not to study, but to get the student visa and then work elsewhere. Some of them want student visa just to stay or roam around because they like staying in Nepal. Also, quite a few foreigners want the student status for their own research, and activities. The main challenge here is to find potential students that they will be here in Nepal only for the study purpose and hence, they will not be involved in any other activities apart from their study related activities.

Due to Nepal's critical geo-political position, it has become of a place of interest for students of international relations and diplomacy. As such KU needs to be alert to it being used by rival countries in embedding their nationals for political activities. KU must make provision of monitoring activities of those foreign students enrolled in its program so that it can defuse any danger to inter-country relations particularly between India-China, India-Pakistan, China-USA. The university will not tolerate any of them involving and working in spying or carrying out other activities for intelligence organizations.