

Colleges Vie for International Students in Ever-Smaller World

By Jennifer Wake



Lin Larson

Photo by Jennifer Wake

Having international students on college campuses is nothing new, but what has changed in recent years is the fierce competition to garner those qualified applicants from abroad.

According to the Educational Information and Resources Branch of the U.S. Department of State, more than \$13 billion dollars flooded into the United States economy during 2004-05 in the form of tuition, books, and lodging from international students – more than \$2 billion of that in California alone. As a way to entice students to come here, Colleges and universities like Saint Mary's College offer scholarships to help offset some of the costs.

“When a student applies, if they meet the academic and language proficiency requirements, they qualify for a merit scholarship of \$8,000 a year,” said Lin Larson, Senior Assistant Director and Coordinator of International Admissions at Saint Mary's. “Other countries (such as Australia, Malaysia, the U.K., and New Zealand) have national funding for international student recruitment efforts.”

Following 9/11, more regulations were put into place which hampered the ability for international students to study in the United States, but thanks to educational efforts by the Association for International Educators

(NAFSA), the Institute of International Education (IIE), and professionals such as Larson, that the process is now smoother.

“People understand these are students and scholars trying to come for an education,” Larson said. “Everyone will benefit from the shared experience.”

Although Larson agrees there is an economic component to bringing students here from other countries, her main reason to bring students to the college is more profound. “If we bring students here to sit down and at least understand their differences, maybe we can stop the fear and stop the hate,” she said. “Then I'll know I am doing my job.”

Last fall, Saint Mary's College had 64 international students attending classes, as apposed to approximately 150 in the 1980s. Larson would like to have about 30 new international students enroll per fall semester in the next three to five years, and travels the world to find them.

“It's a fabulous opportunity for students to learn from one another,” said Larson, who encourages local students to study abroad. Saint Mary's international students are more than willing to share their culture, food, and music with schools, community groups and in public forums. “It's an issue of sharing and diversifying. If you look at it in the big picture, with the advent of the Internet and the ease of travel, the world has gotten smaller. It's a disadvantage to keep students isolated from the rest of the world.”

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