

DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst
German Academic Exchange Service

Perceptions of European higher education in third countries



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What the world thinks of Europe: the ACA study



**ACA study on perceptions of Europe
and its higher education in third countries, November 2004 to December 2005**

**in response to a call for tender issued by the European Commission's Directorate for
Education and Culture**



Aims of the study



Two overriding aims:

- **Acquire an** in-depth understanding of the perception of European higher education **in third countries**
- **Advise the European Commission regarding a possible** European higher education brand



Methodology

Methods: **large-scale surveys, interviews, desk research**

Instruments:

- Questionnaires **focusing on different target groups, distributed online and in hard copy**
- Interviews: **focus groups and individual interviews**





Methodology (2)

Six target countries: **China, India, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, and Thailand**

Online questionnaire **open to students world-wide (control group)**

International students in the US (**control group; separate questionnaire distributed by email**)





Participation

Approximately 20 000 responses

- paper questionnaires (**target countries**):
 - **11 471 students**
 - **1235 staff members**
- online questionnaire: **8 939 valid responses (slight majority from target countries)**
- US survey: **over 400 valid responses**





What did we ask?

Three “blocks“ of questions:

- Europe and its higher education
 - **Characteristics of Europe and its higher education**
 - **Europe’s relative position with regard to major competitors (mainly US, AUS)**
- Decision making:
 - **Motivation for pursuing an international education**
 - **Factors influencing the choice of destination**
- Sources of information





Does Europe exist on the students' mental map?

Europe is perceived as

- **an** economic and political union **but as**
- **a** range of countries for higher education **and culture**

Dominance of “core Europe”

Perceived discrepancies regarding quality, **cost-related issues, student support**





Europe and its competitors

Students rank own destination above others

Regardless of destination:

- **“traditional Europe, dynamic US”**
- **“cultural Europe”**

Clear regional preference pattern

- **Asian target countries: US/AUS**
- **Russia/Latin American countries: Europe**





Europe and its competitors



Positive perception of quality of **European education**, but doubts about “consistency”

Asian respondents: US at the top for

- **Quality of education and laboratories, prestige of universities and degrees**
- **Work opportunities during/after studies**

Europe and Australia above US:

- **Safety, accessibility, chances of obtaining a visa**



European “myths” and reality

Clear regional pattern

Free tuition: **asset**, but **Europe not seen as particularly affordable**

Diversity of cultures and languages

- **mainly seen as attractive, (especially Brazilians/Mexicans)**
- **“abundance” a problem for significant group of Asians (barrier to communication, confusing)**

Europe’s single major disadvantage in Asia is that English is not the mother tongue.





Europe's attributes

Perceptions varies **depending on country of origin**

Among top five in most countries: elegant, clean, organised and modern

Europe lacks **innovation, tolerance and joie de vivre**





Decision making



Motivation **to study abroad**: mostly career-oriented, **plus personal and professional growth**

Preference to study a Master's degree abroad (and do an undergraduate degree in home country)



Destination choice

Most respondents did not care about world region where they were going to study

Prestige, quality of education and reputation of degrees most important **in destination choice**

Other important factors **influencing decision:**

- **affordability, accessibility and safety**
- **also: transparent admission structures, student support, well-structured programmes**





Obstacles and changes of mind



Ideal and final destination **country did not match for a quarter of the respondents**

Main obstacles related to financing, visa availability, language preparation



(Sources of) information

Main message: lack of information
on study opportunities in Europe

- **Information missing or hard to access**
- **No clear “sender”**
- **Lack of information on financial issues (scholarships/cost), rankings and suitable programmes**

Main sources are web-based

- **Internet, websites of individual universities and websites/ offices of internationalisation agencies**
- **Also important: personal contact/agents (interviews)**





How to make Europe more attractive?

Bologna measures / Erasmus Mundus-**type models are** good but not sufficient

Most essential:

- information portal
- **Europe-wide** rankings
- financial support **for non-European students**





Recommendations

Clear potential for a European brand

- **challenge: create perception of entire Europe**
- **brand: elements common to all European countries**
- **one brand worldwide necessary for clear identity; umbrella for tailor-made campaigns**
- **selling points:**
 - **quality education, tradition, internationally compatible degrees**
 - **other attributes (safety, accessibility, etc.) in specific campaigns**





Recommendations (2)

A clearly identifiable European
“sender” is essential

- to reinforce Europe’s identity on the global education market
- to coordinate campaigns carried out under the European umbrella

Set-up:

- a widely promoted Internet portal
- a European office with coordinating functions
- cooperation with member states in implementation of marketing campaigns





Recommendations (3)



Brand necessary but not sufficient:

- Sound quality of European higher education: **provide necessary institutional autonomy**
- **Flexible** immigration and visa policies **allowing foreign students to stay on and work after graduation**
- English is the key, **especially in the less popular destination countries**
- Capacity to diversify: **European countries and higher education institutions should attempt to find their niche and invest into their specific strengths**



The Report



Final Report “Perceptions of European
Higher Education in Third Countries”

- **soon to be published at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/>**

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Thank you for
your kind attention.

