



Can a better admissions experience increase international student enrollment?

2022 RESEARCH REPORT



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About Interstride

Interstride is an ed-tech company that helps higher-ed institutions attract and retain international students. We have partnered with over 150 colleges and universities in the U.S., supporting 80,000+ students and alumni in their international journey.

Interstride is introducing a new Admissions platform to help institutions engage and convert international applicants while providing transparency to prospective international students on career outcomes, finances, and immigration outlook.





Introduction

The admissions process can be confusing and overwhelming for international students. From choosing the right program to understanding the career and immigration options, students often have difficulty understanding the value of the education they are pursuing.

As international enrollment in the U.S. continues to decline in comparison to pre-pandemic numbers, now is a crucial time to understand how students experience the admissions process and whether improving the admissions experience can positively impact enrollment goals.

We surveyed current international students at higher-ed institutions in the U.S. to understand their experience around questions such as:

- Was the overall admissions experience positive?
- What resources did students rely on during admissions?
- What were the challenges that students faced during the admissions journey?
- How satisfied were they with the information they received?
- What factors might have influenced the student's decision to attend a particular institution?

With these insights, higher-ed institutions can better understand what is working and improve the admissions experience for international applicants and prospective students. How might a better experience where students feel engaged and supported translate to better conversion results for admissions offices? **The research suggests new approaches that will be a win-win for both applicants and admissions teams.**



Key findings:

01

International students reported choosing the right institution as the top challenge during the admissions process. Students also found it difficult to finance their tuition fees, choose the right program, complete their application, find housing, and navigate the visa and immigration process.

02

Students rely most heavily on university websites for support and information during admissions. Students reported information on finances, visas and immigration, careers, housing, and travel hard to find on the admissions websites.

03

Besides university websites, U.S. News & World Report and Niche are the most utilized online resources during admissions.

04

Support and guidance from an institution during the admissions and application process can heavily influence students' decision to pursue one institution over another.

05

Clarity on career outcomes and financing options can strongly influence admissions decisions.

Recommendations

- Colleges and universities must understand the unique challenges facing international students and proactively support them throughout the admissions process.
- Institutions have a unique opportunity to differentiate and demonstrate their value and support system for international students through their websites. **Leverage students' reliance on university websites by making the admissions website more interactive and informative.**
- **International students want closer engagement with the admissions office.** Finding tools and services to engage international students during the prospecting phase can improve prospect conversion, diversify the applicant pool, and provide a better admissions experience to potential candidates.
- **Facilitate conversations and connections between prospects and existing international students and alumni** to reduce the communication burden on admissions staff while providing close engagement and accurate information to prospective students.
- Offer clear guidance on financing, visa and immigration, on-campus employment, off-campus employment, housing, and travel at the onset of international students' educational journey.



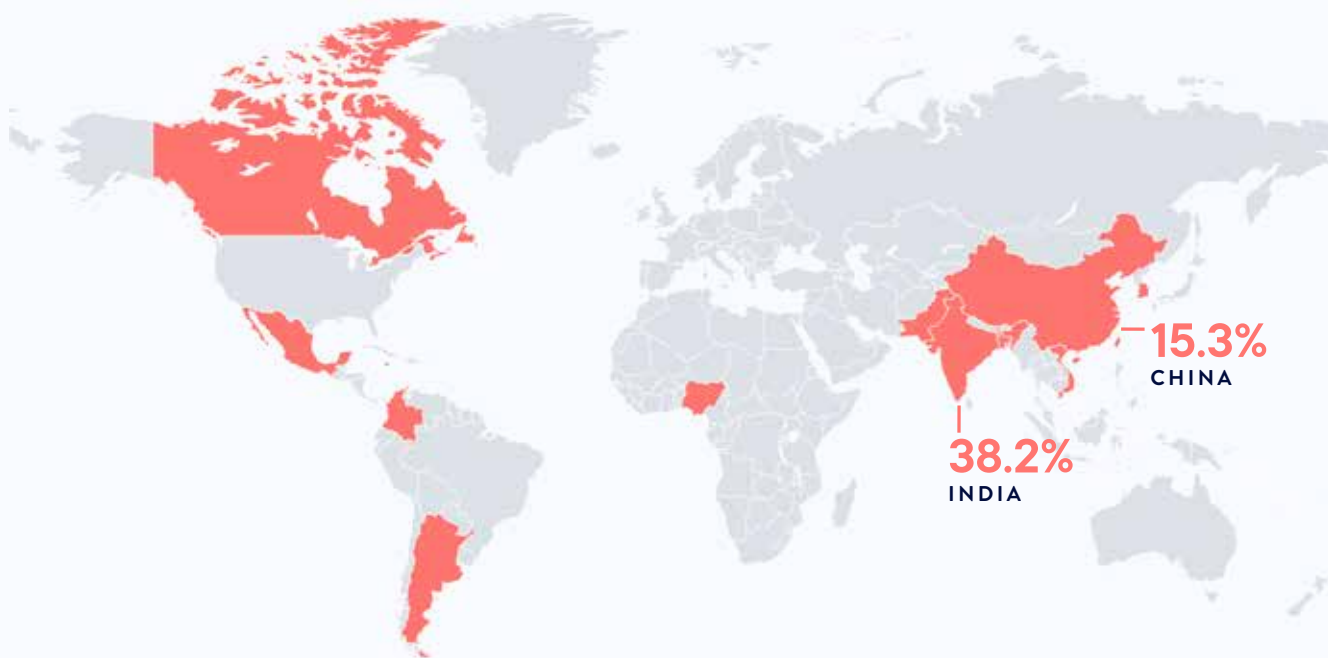
Methodology

In August 2022, Interstride surveyed 476 international students (n=476) on how they felt about their admissions experience. All students surveyed had enrolled in their program in the U.S. within the last two years.

The respondents come from 77 countries at 120+ U.S. universities and colleges, with 25% undergraduate, 61% graduates, and 13% Ph.D. and post-doctoral students

Overview of participants in the Interstride survey

476 Students **38** Countries



61.1%
MASTER'S

25.0%
BACHELOR'S

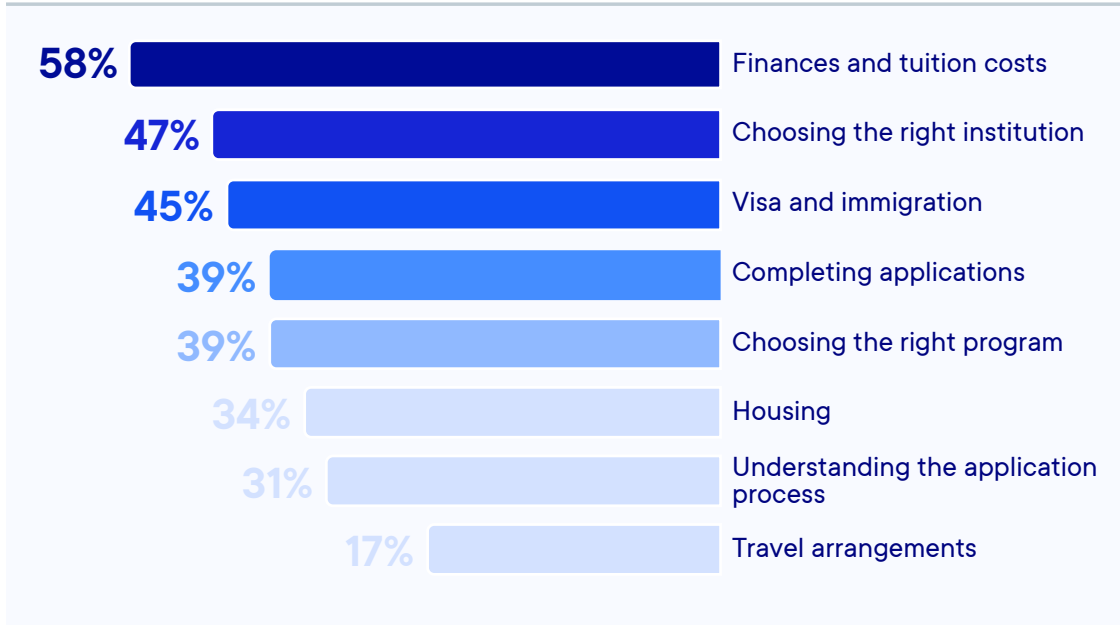
13.2% DOCTORATE **0.4%** ASSOCIATE'S



Research Results

International students face a host of challenges in their educational journey. To better understand the most prominent challenges prospective students and applicants face in their admissions process, we asked them to identify the top challenges.

What were the most challenging aspects of the admissions process?



The top three challenges revolve around logistics and finding the right fit. Navigating finances and tuition costs was a challenge for 58% of respondents, followed by choosing the right institution for 47% and navigating visas and immigration for 45% of respondents.



Some respondents elaborated on the specific challenges they faced.

Regarding finances and tuition, respondents cited high costs, exchange rates, limited availability of financial aid and scholarships, and lack of clarity throughout the process.

“ Due to the low amount of aid offered to international students, I was unable to attend several institutions that I was admitted to.

“ The cost of tuition is very high, and also there should be more scholarship opportunities and graduate assistantship opportunities for international [students].

“ Balancing finances, ROI, program content, prestige of the university is extremely tricky.

“ I had trouble understanding how scholarships worked and what the interactions between different kinds of financial aid would be. There was a lot of unknown terminology that took me a long time to understand, as well as the intricacies of what makes grants, outside and inside scholarships, subsidized and unsubsidized loans [different].

When choosing the right program or institution, some international students were overwhelmed by the choices and uncertain how to weigh them.

“ Selecting the right college for the course I wanted to pursue was quite a challenge since the factors were different, rankings were different and the employment statistics were different for different colleges too.

“ I had difficulties choosing the right schools to apply to. It was also difficult to know whether or not the schools I was applying to were reach, target, or [safety schools] because it seems like the standards are a little bit skewed for

“ It is difficult to see the key differences between institutions only from the internet, since all college websites pretty much sound the same. Once you attend college, however, you realize some are definitely better than

“ I had to find clear reasons for wanting to study in the US over other countries including Australia, UK, and [South] Korea.

Regarding immigration challenges, some respondents cited Covid-induced delays, while others reflected on how lengthy, confusing, and anxiety-inducing the process can be, especially with limited guidance.

“ The visa process was confusing with many things that were not known. I would have liked a [walkthrough] of what was required.

“ The visa process as a whole was hard to grasp as an international student. It is a long and lengthy process which I didn't receive much

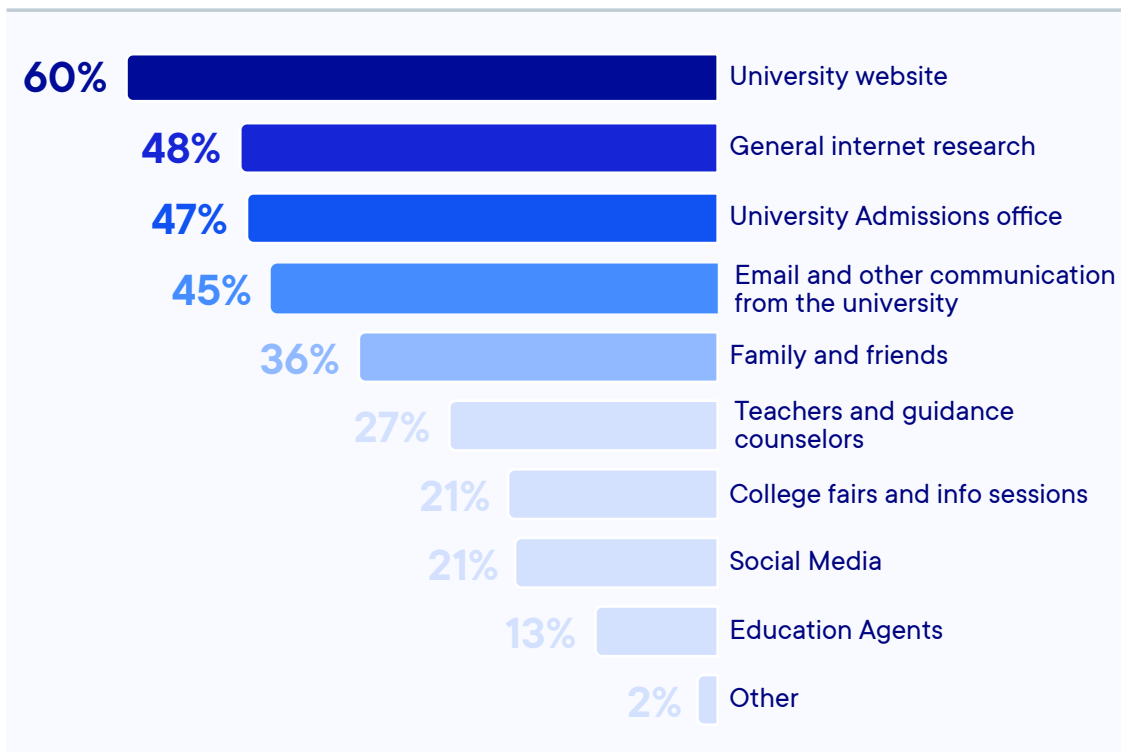
“ Visa appointments and understanding the finances associated with it [were challenging].



What were the most helpful resources during the admissions process?

Given these wide-ranging challenges, we asked respondents what resources found most helpful throughout the process.

What were the most helpful resources during the admissions process?



60% of the respondents cited university websites as a helpful resource, followed by 48% citing general internet search, and 47% citing the university's admissions office. QS Quacquarelli Symonds' research validates that international students overwhelmingly rely on university websites as the primary source of information.

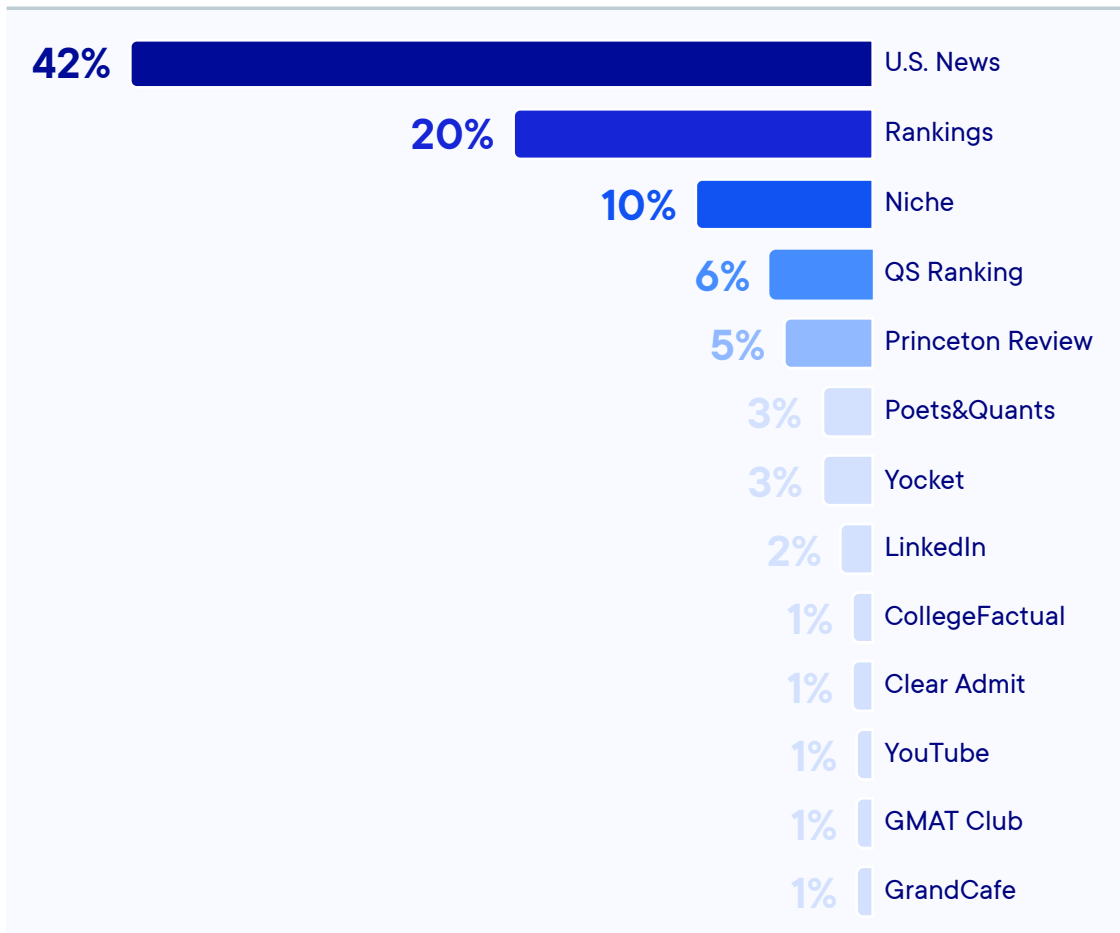
University websites are the most helpful resource for international prospects during the admissions journey. However, students proactively seek information online from various websites and university sources. Most of these channels are not interactive, static and infrequently updated.



Which online resource did you rely most heavily on for admissions research?

Since almost half of the respondents found general internet research helpful, we wanted to identify the specific resources they relied on the most.

Which online resource did you rely most heavily on for admissions research?



Respondents overwhelmingly relied on ranking websites, with 42% specifically citing U.S. News. Besides rankings, a small percentage of respondents relied on social media and specific admissions support like Poets&Quants.

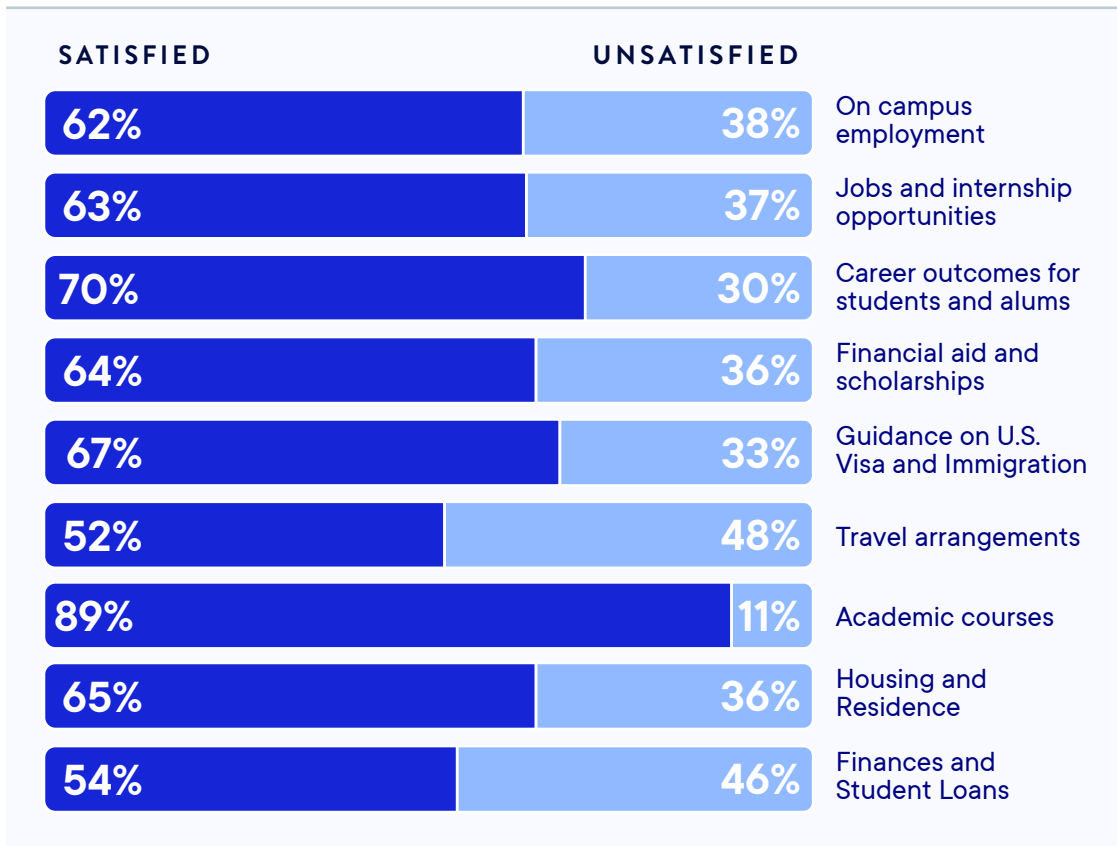
Most of these resources provide general information, focusing primarily on rankings instead of addressing student needs for personalized information or guidance on the best fit for a prospect based on potential career outcomes. They also fail to address other critical challenges for students, such as information on financing or navigating the visa and immigration process.



Did you receive satisfactory information from the admissions office on these below topics?

We asked respondents if they were satisfied with the information they received on key topics.

Did you receive satisfactory information from the admissions office on these below topics?



Student satisfaction is mixed. Notably, 46% of respondents are unsatisfied with information about “finances and student loans,” 38% about on-campus employment, and 37% about jobs and internship opportunities. 48% of respondents were unsatisfied with the information on travel arrangements. It might not be a top priority for institutions to improve upon since it was not cited as a major challenge by students

Respondents are overwhelmingly happy with information on academics, which may be unsurprising since that is the core of what universities and colleges offer.

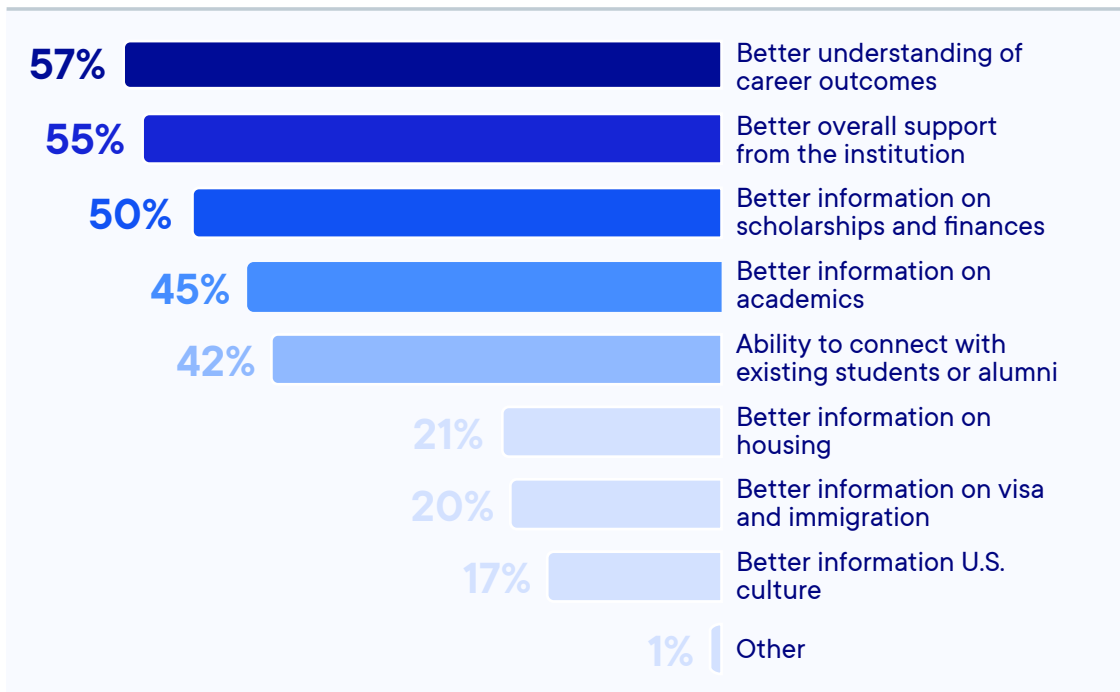


Which of the following would have influenced your choices of institutions during the admissions process?

How might student experience and satisfaction affect tangible outcomes in terms of admissions?

Students identified factors that could have influenced their decision on which institution to attend.

Which of the following would have influenced your choices of institutions during the admissions process?



57% of respondents said a better understanding of career outcomes would have influenced their choice of institutions. This is followed by 55% who cited better overall support from the institution and 50% who said better information on scholarships and financial aid.



This speaks to the importance of career support and respondents' sensitivity to the return on investment of their education. According to a Hobsons report, 90% of international students cite career outcomes as the key driver for studying abroad. In addition, Interstride's research in March 2022 shows that over 70% of international students want to live and work in the U.S. after graduation.

Notably, while visa and immigration is a top challenge for respondents (45%), better information from the institution in this area has a less decisive influence (20%). While higher-ed institutions cannot solve systemic and bureaucratic difficulties in the visa process and immigration system, they can provide better guidance around the process.

These responses connect student experience with a crucial, tangible outcome: choice of institutions. As universities seek to convert applicants and prospective students throughout every step of the admissions process, how might better information and support achieve that?



Quotes from international students on better support from the admissions office

“

Provide us information on immigration, on-campus jobs and most importantly should have helped students who face racism.

“

Provide clear information about the kind of opportunities available for international students both financially and at the program.

“

Personally connect with me and offer support through my transition. A one-on-one session, even a short one, would've been much appreciated.

“

Being clearer with processes and checklists for specific cases. Being transparent with the financial requirements of studying and living on campus as an international

“

Seamless platform for assistance.

“

More legal information about F-1 visa, CPT, and OPT.

“

“International students are second-class citizens and are made to feel like so. For the most part, all support systems are superficial. Real issues are not looked at. Most staff

“

Prepare international students for the challenges of setting a new life in the US (banking, credit score, renting an apartment, legal advice on what we can do or not with our

“

More personalized counseling rather than just directing the students to readily available information on the websites. Just to better understand the needs and hesitations of the

“

Communicating more about what to expect when coming into the U.S. From culture to travel arrangements there could have been more information.

“

Be more responsive and informative in terms of communication with incoming students.

“

Guidance on the available student resources and how to use them for a smooth admissions process.



Interstride

Success beyond boundaries

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