

ABROAD PERSPECTIVE

Singapore to Hike Fees by 30 Per Cent

Fees for foreigners studying at public educational institutions in Singapore are to be increased by 30 per cent as of 2009, the island city-state's Ministry of Education announced recently. The increases come after a decision by the government to put in place a clearer differentiation of education fees paid by citizens, permanent residents and foreigners.

The new fee structure will mean that foreign students at Singapore universities will be paying 50 per cent more than Singapore citizens. There is some concern that the hike, combined with other rising costs, may put the city's schools out of the financial reach of Indian students. The government, however, says it's confident international demand for its schools will increase, especially given the ever-increasing range of programs they offer.

About 43,700 students attend Singapore's public universities, about 20 per cent of whom are foreign. Of these, most are from China and India.

Source: "[Pay 30% More to Study in Singapore](#)," *Business Standard*, Feb. 1, 2007

OVER THE COUNTER

U.S. Groups Press for Easier Visas

An alliance of U.S. universities, private companies, students' groups and think tanks is pressing the White House and Congress for reforms to ease the entry of foreign students and workers into the country.

Among the demands of the group are that the U.S. extend its "visa waiver programme" to more countries, and that it do away with the requirement that all visa applicants must have personal interviews at U.S. consular offices.

"Foreign universities [are] attracting more students by advertising the fact that they don't have a U.S.-style visa regime," one lobbyist said recently.

The State Department says it has already made U.S. visas easier to get than they were in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, adding that the number of visas granted to foreign students recently stopped declining.

Source: "[U.S. Visa Policy to Come Under Attack](#)," MSNBC, Jan. 31, 2007

THE PLAYING FIELD

In Australia, Controversial Report Spurs Tougher English Testing

International students hoping to study in Australia will be facing more difficult English-language entrance tests in coming years. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee and the country's Immigration department are planning to put a new requirement in place in July, 2008, Committee president Gerald Sutton said last week.

The announcement followed the release last month of a report by Monash University demographer Bob Birrell—a report whose results have found their way into news headlines across Australia. According to the study, more than a third of the foreign students graduating from Australian universities have such low levels of English that they should not have been admitted in the first place. The study also claims that a third of Australia's international university entrants avoid taking mandatory English tests.

Foreign students contribute about 15 per cent of the revenues of Australian universities. About a third of the 239,000 international students in the country are expected to remain after their studies to look for work. They are welcomed by Australian governments, which are concerned about shortages of skilled workers.

Dr. Sutton denied claims that Australian universities have been lowering their standards to allow foreign students to graduate, and Education Minister Julie Bishop condemned the study as an "extraordinary" attack on Australian universities.

Source: "[Foreign Students Facing Tougher Tests](#)," *The Age*, Jan. 29, 2007

GLOBE TIPPING

Bird Flu and the Traveler

Although bird flu tends to loom prominently in world news, the risk of catching the disease seems to be so far confined to those who come into direct contact with infected poultry or their droppings (apart from a very small number of human-to-human transmissions). Since the H5N1 virus is sensitive to heat, it is even considered safe to eat infected birds, as long as the meat is thoroughly cooked.

One good resource for information on the disease is the World Health Organization's [Avian Influenza Page](#).