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British are coming to help OSU find foreign students

Portland Business Journal - by Aliza Earnshaw Business Journal staff writer

A deal with a private British firm could double the number of foreign students at Oregon State University, while adding \$20 million per year to university coffers.

That's the idea behind OSU's decision to engage Into University Partnerships Ltd., a London-based company that recruits foreign students on behalf of five British universities. The first 150 international students recruited by Into are expected to arrive in the fall of 2009.

Oregon State has tried to increase its international student enrollment for several years, said provost Sabah Randhawa, but has fallen short. When the university decided nearly five years ago to double its number of international students, it had about 950 altogether. That's how many international students are enrolled at OSU today, less than 5 percent of the 19,800 people studying at the Corvallis-based university.

Numbers are stagnant because Oregon State simply hasn't had the funds to hire enough people and create a recruitment, branding and marketing campaign abroad.

The Into partnership should change all that. The company has agreed to recruit students for OSU for a one-year "Pathways" program that will include not only English but also prerequisite courses in four subject areas: engineering, business, science and a general category for people intending to major in other areas.

Randhawa hopes to accomplish several goals through the partnership, which should expand to as many as 600 new students per year by the fifth year.

University officials want to boost international student enrollment to about 2,000 out of an increased student body of about 22,000, restoring its proportion of international students to what it was a decade ago. They'd particularly like to increase the number of international undergraduates, as most international students now at OSU are at the graduate level. It's just as

important for undergraduates to get a diverse, international experience while they're studying.

The university would like to recruit students from many different countries to increase diversity, and to spread word of OSU in more places around the world. Most international students now at OSU are from China and India.

OSU also wants more international students because it will increase revenue. Non-Oregon residents pay \$18,823 per year for full-time undergraduate enrollment, while residents pay \$6,187. The extra money can help pay for more faculty and other academic needs.

Boosting international enrollment is a goal for many U.S. universities, which suffered a setback after Sept. 11, 2001, when the federal government tightened restrictions on student visas.

That situation has improved over the last couple of years, said Jay Kenton, vice president for finance and administration for the Oregon University System.

Other Oregon universities have been able to boost international enrollment to what it once was by holding recruitment fairs in many countries, Kenton said, staffed by their own employees. OSU is choosing another way to restore its own international student population.

Kenton teaches a public finance course at Portland State, and finds that the international students add a valuable dimension.

"These kids from Asian or African countries bring a very different perspective into the classroom about how things work in their own countries," he said.

The cultural depth and diversity foreign students add is so important that the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges advises its members to try to increase the number of international students on their campuses, particularly the undergraduates. Oregon State, which was established with a grant of federal land, is a member of NASULGC.

Though land grant universities' primary mission is to serve state residents, "most land grant universities have room for more international students without crowding out in-state students," said Kerry Bolognese, vice president of international programs for NASULGC.

Their higher tuition payments also help cash-strapped universities.

"Serving nonresident students allows us to serve more Oregonians," Kenton said.

Into's British partners have found that 70 percent to 75 percent of their Pathways students remain at the universities to complete their degrees. OSU's financial plan for its Into partnership will work if even just 60 percent of the Pathways students choose to enroll as full-time OSU students, Randhawa said.

"One thousand students bringing in nonresident tuition is a tremendous resource we don't have right now," said Randhawa. "How do we judiciously use that resource to plan for all our students? If we don't provide a good experience, the word will get out pretty fast."

Global outlook

The financial side of Oregon State University's deal with Into University Partnerships is designed to cover all the costs of creating a new program for international students, with some extra on top.

Students recruited by Into for a one-year "Pathway" program at OSU will pay the full nonresident tuition: \$18,823 per year for full-time undergraduate instruction. Out of that, OSU will pay all the costs of creating and running the program before splitting the remainder with Into. These costs include repayments on \$50 million in bonds to finance a new facility for Pathway students, as well as paying instructors for the Pathway year.

Provost Sabah Randhawa estimates that these costs will come to roughly \$10,000 per student, and that Into and OSU will split about \$8,000 per student for the Pathways year.

Once a Pathways student enrolls as a full-time OSU student, all his or her tuition will go to the university. It's likely OSU will pay 1 percent to 2 percent of full-time tuition to Into as an incentive to keep recruiting.

One difference between the programs Into runs for five British universities and what it will do for OSU is in instruction. In Britain, Into hires the instructors for students' Pathways year. At OSU, the university will hire instructors for the Pathways year. These will be contract instructors, not tenured-track faculty.

The countries students come from is likely to be determined by several factors, including political relationships between the United States and countries where Into can recruit. Several Middle Eastern countries in particular give full scholarships to students who attend school abroad.

"For the Pathways program, we'll want students who can fully pay their own way," and won't need support from Oregon State, Randhawa said.

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