# GLOBAL LEARNING IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
# A STRATEGIC NECESSITY

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ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES

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# Global Learning in Community Colleges: A Strategic Necessity

In the Fall of 2024, Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) launched a collaborative effort to explore the current and future state of global education in U.S. community colleges.

Global education has been a part of community, technical and vocational education for decades and both CCID and ACCT agreed that these institutions must remain true to their origins as key workforce development contributors while continuing to meet the demands of an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. In recognition of this imperative, a working group was established in Summer of 2025 as a coordinated effort to assess the current state of global education in community colleges, highlight good practices, and develop advocacy messages for local, national and international audiences. The working group was composed of expert representatives from 11 higher education organizations and six U.S.-based community colleges.

This report is a result of these efforts. In includes a summary of findings and key data points, as well as separate messaging guides for key audiences.

In addition to the working group members, ACCT and CCID are grateful to Lindsey P. Myers of Learn Forward, LLC, for her contributions to writing and editing the report.

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# Introduction

Global learning in community college classrooms is not a new phenomenon, but its strategic importance to community colleges has never been greater. In an age when every local economy is connected to international markets, technology flows, and global trends and challenges, community colleges are not only well positioned but obligated by their collective mission to deliver high quality, globally-relevant knowledge and skills to their learners.

Two-year colleges prepare the majority of America's technical workforce and are the most accessible entry point for students seeking economic and social mobility. These institutions differ in notable ways from their four-year and university counterparts, including a primary focus on teaching (rather than research), serving as entry points to local economies (versus broader job specializations) and providing the services and support needed to ensure the success of students from a wide array of backgrounds. Embedding global education into strategy, instruction, partnerships, and workforce programs is a strategic necessity, not only for student success, but for institutional vitality, community prosperity, and national competitiveness.

## Defining Global Education in the Community College Context

Global learning is not limited to travel. Global education encompasses the full range of learning experiences, institutional strategies, and community partnerships that prepare students to succeed in an interconnected world. It includes:

- Curriculum integration of global and intercultural perspectives across disciplines;
- Virtual exchange (VE) programs that connect students with peers abroad through collaborative online learning;
- Study abroad experiences, internships, and service-learning programs grounded in real-world global challenges;
- Faculty and staff development that equips educators to embed global learning into coursework;
- Training and opportunities for students to work and communicate effectively across language and cultural differences;
- Institutional and community partnerships with global industries, nonprofits, and government entities.

A globally educated student demonstrates the ability to investigate the world, weigh perspectives, communicate ideas effectively, and take informed action—core domains identified by Mansilla & Jackson (2011) and adopted by the U.S. Department of Education. These competencies serve students in their local communities just as much as in international contexts.

## Global Learning Outcomes and Workforce Readiness

The most effective global learning experiences align industry-specific skills, global "enduring skills," and personal capacities, a combination that prepares students both for jobs that exist today and those yet to emerge. Students who engage in global learning gain:

- **Industry-specific skills:** Technical expertise tied to global industry standards and evolving technologies; mentorship, mastery of project planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- **Global enduring skills:** Communication across differences, empathy, teamwork, leadership in multicultural environments, analytical problem-solving, and the ability to collaborate with global partners. These are precisely the skills employers say recent graduates lack most.
- **Personal capacities:** Critical thinking, adaptability, self-awareness, accountability, digital literacy, creativity and continuous learning, which are essential attributes for navigating disruption and innovation. A "culture of competence"—built on curiosity, accountability, collaboration, and reflective practice—fosters these capacities and equips students with the durable dispositions needed for long-term workforce success.

## The Case for Global Education: Key Data and Economic Impact

### Higher education as an economic imperative

- OECD's Education at a Glance 2025 highlights that higher education remains the strongest driver of economic mobility in the United States. Americans with a bachelor's degree earn approximately 57% more than those without postsecondary education, a premium that grows over time.
- For community college graduates, recent research finds that students at two-year institutions generate $20.7 billion in additional annual earnings, relative to a typical high school graduate, including $5 billion attributable to low-income students (Institute for Higher Education Policy 2025).

### Global learning as an academic and career differentiator

- Adding global learning to higher education further amplifies outcomes. Research from The Forum on Education Abroad (2025), for instance, shows that students who majored in business and who study or intern abroad earn an average of $4,159 more in their first job than peers who do not (Dietrich et al., 2025). Research from the Institute of International Education (IIE) and The Forum on Education Abroad dating back to 2017 consistently shows that employers are looking for 21st century skills developed on study abroad programs (e.g. confidence, flexibility, self-awareness, interpersonal and problem-solving) (IIE, 2017; Dietrich & Torres, 2025; Skiilfy, 2025).
- A tracer study, Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE), conducted by the University of Minnesota in 2007 that included input from thousands of student alumni who studied abroad in college from 1960-2005, showed that students who study abroad are more civically-engaged as adults (e.g. more likely to vote, attend graduate school, care for the environment, participate in philanthropy, pursue international careers, etc.).
- Virtual exchange, too, strengthens academic engagement and intercultural effectiveness at scale, making high-impact global learning accessible to more students (Whatley, Labs & Wood, 2024).

### International students as economic engines

- NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NAFSA, 2025) reports that international students generate $42.9 billion for the U.S. economy and support 355,736 jobs. In addition to tuition, international students invest in housing markets, the automobile industry, grocery chains and the entertainment industry while studying in the U.S. Student spending in smaller communities and suburban areas where community colleges are located sustain local businesses.
- Conversely, declines in international student numbers immediately and adversely impact local economies. Emerging data indicate that in 2025, the U.S. may have already lost close to $1 billion as a result of lower international student numbers, with projections of $7 billion in losses by the end of the 2025-2026 academic year (Clemens, 2025).

## The Bigger Picture: Institutional and Community Benefits

For institutions, global engagement expands partnerships, enhances reputation, and diversifies funding streams, strengthening both academic quality and long-term sustainability. International collaborations, faculty exchanges, and globally connected programs open doors to innovation in curriculum, workforce development, and applied learning. These initiatives enrich the student experience while supporting recruitment, retention, and transfer outcomes.

For communities, global engagement drives economic development by attracting investment, supporting local industries, and preparing a workforce equipped with the skills employers increasingly demand, such as communication across differences, digital fluency, adaptability, and the ability to work in multidimensional teams. International students, in particular, contribute significantly to local economies through spending and job creation, while globally competent graduates help businesses remain competitive in a world shaped by international markets and rapid technological change.

By opening doors to global learning through curriculum integration, virtual exchange, work-based learning, and accessible study abroad, community colleges ensure that students from every background can participate in and contribute to an interconnected world. In doing so, they strengthen regional resilience, expand opportunity, and build the foundation for a vibrant and competitive local economy.

## Conclusion: A Strategic Necessity

Global education is no longer a luxury or an optional appendage to the curriculum. It is a core aspect of educational infrastructure that is critical for workforce readiness, institutional sustainability, economic resilience, and the civic health of communities. Community colleges, with their access mission, pipelines to employment needs, and wide range of student populations, are uniquely positioned to engage global learning through curriculum, virtual exchange, partnerships, study abroad, and community engagement.

By embedding global competencies into every program, community colleges prepare graduates who can adapt, innovate, and lead, not only within their communities, but across borders. Investing in global education is therefore an investment in America's workforce, its communities, and its future prosperity.

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# Why Global Education Matters: For Trustees & Institutional Leaders

Global education is a strategic lever for trustees because it directly strengthens what matters most: student success, workforce alignment, community vitality, and institutional resilience. In a labor market where every local employer is tied to global supply chains, international populations, and rapidly advancing technologies, community colleges cannot prepare a competitive workforce without embedding global competencies—communication across differences, digital fluency, critical thinking, cultural agility, and adaptability—into programs and policies.

Whether in technical/vocational or traditional academic fields, these skills are precisely what employers say they cannot find enough of, and employer surveys show younger hiring managers (e.g. Millennials and Gen Z) are likely to favor candidates with global, civic, and community-engaged learning experiences.[1] Global engagement also expands partnerships, diversifies revenue, and attracts international students whose presence strengthens both campus learning environments and local economies. At the same time, scalable models like virtual exchange make global learning accessible to all students, reducing cost barriers, lowering risk, accommodating more varied learning styles and expanding global learning at scale.

The case is simple: colleges that invest in global learning are better positioned to fulfill their mission, remain competitive in a shifting higher education landscape, and contribute to the long-term vitality of the communities we serve. Global education is not an add-on; it is infrastructure for institutional and regional prosperity.

## Key Data

- International students contribute $42.9 billion to the U.S. economy and support 355,763 jobs annually.[2] Even a modest decline in enrollment produces measurable local losses. This makes global engagement a clear economic development strategy, not just an educational priority.
- Students who attend public two-year colleges generate an estimated $20.7 billion in additional annual earnings, relative to the typical high school graduate – a direct infusion of economic value that supports local businesses, tax bases, and community stability. This includes $5 billion generated by students from low-income backgrounds.[3]

1 Finneman, B., Spagnuolo, E. & Rahilly, L. (Interviewer/Host). (2020, September 28). How Gen Z and millennials are shaping the future of US retail. [Podcast]. Publisher. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/how-gen-z-and-millennials-are-shaping-the-future-of-us-retail

2 NAFSA: Association of International Educators. (2025). *International student economic value tool.* https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

3 Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2025, October 8). *Higher education's economic benefits to communities.* https://www.ihep.org/higher-educations-economic-benefits-to-communities/

- Research suggests that global competencies can translate directly into higher wages and stronger employment outcomes. In one study, for instance, students majoring in business who participated in study abroad or other global learning experiences earned an average of $4,159 more in their first job than peers who did not.[4]
- Employers increasingly demand "enduring skills" such as communication, teamwork across differences, digital fluency, and adaptability—all of which are strengthened by global learning. These skills consistently rank among the top competencies employers say recent graduates lack, making global education an essential tool for closing readiness gaps.

## Questions & Considerations

### 1. How does global education strengthen our college's core mission?

Global education directly advances student success, workforce readiness, and community economic development—central pillars of your governance role. By embedding global competencies such as communication across differences, digital fluency, and problem-solving into every program, the college prepares learners for industries that operate within global supply chains and workplaces. These competencies are exactly what employers say they need most yet cannot reliably find, making global learning a strategic investment in regional economic competitiveness.

### 2. What is the return on investment for our students and community?

ROI is significant and measurable. As cited above, one study found that students majoring in business who participated in global learning earned $4,159 more in their first job than peers without such experiences, and developed the enduring skills employers consistently prioritize. Another study found that study abroad alumni in other professions (e.g. Information Technology, Healthcare, Finance, Marketing, Sales, Professional and Technical Services) saw increased annual earnings in addition to greater rates of advancement into management positions and employee retention.[5] At the community level, the $42.9 billion international students contribute annually flows directly into local economies through housing, goods, and services.

### 3. What role should trustees play in advancing global engagement?

Trustees play a critical role by ensuring that policy, strategy, and resource allocation support global learning as core to the college's mission. This includes asking the right questions during program review and budget cycles, ensuring institutional protocols are in place, and leveraging their networks to connect the college with employers, chambers of commerce, and philanthropy. Trustees also help make the case to legislators and community leaders, articulating how global engagement strengthens local workforce pipelines, attracts investment, and positions the college as a leader in regional economic vitality.

4 Dietrich, A., et al. (2025). *International experience as a career asset: Exploring the earnings impact of education abroad participation. The Forum on Education Abroad.* https://doi.org/10.36366/R.SS2025

5 Lightcast. (2025). The Value of Education Abroad to Employees and Employers. The Forum on Education Abroad. https://www.forumea.org/economic-impact-study-2025.html.

## Additional Resources

### 1. NAFSA: Association of International Educators – International Student Economic Value Tool

What it provides: State-by-state and district-level economic impact data on international students.
Why it's useful: Offers concrete ROI and workforce implications tied directly to your college's region.
https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

### 2. OECD – Education at a Glance

What it provides: Global comparisons of education systems, workforce outcomes, earnings premiums, and skills needs.
Why it's useful: Helps trustees contextualize U.S. workforce competitiveness and understand why global competencies matter.
https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/

### 3. Institute of International Education (IIE) – Gaining an Employment Edge: The Impact of Study Abroad

What it provides: Data connecting global learning experiences to career outcomes, including earnings gains and employer-valued skills.
Why it's useful: Trustees often want evidence of student ROI—this provides it.
https://www.iie.org/publications/gaining-an-employment-edge-the-impact-of-study-abroad/

### 4. Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) – Advocacy & Resources

What it provides: Sector-specific guidance for two-year institutions, including partnership models, global workforce strategies, and funding mechanisms.
Why it's useful: Tailored to community college realities—budgets, enrollment pressures, regional workforce pipelines.
https://www.ccidinc.org/

### 5. The Forum on Education Abroad – International Experience as a Career Asset Report

What it provides: Data on increased earnings for business majors in particular who take part in a global experience.
Why it's useful: Illustrates a direct link between global learning and better wages post-graduation.
https://www.forumea.org/salary-study-2025.html

### 6. U.S. Department of Commerce – SelectUSA & Foreign Direct Investment State Reports

What it provides: Data on global companies operating in each state.
Why it's useful: Helps connect global education to local economic development and employer pipelines.
https://www.selectusa.gov

# Why Global Education Matters: For Media Representatives

Global education at community colleges is not a niche offering or a luxury enrichment program, but an economic, workforce, and community development story hiding in plain sight. As community colleges prepare the majority of America's technical workforce, global competencies such as communication across differences, digital fluency, cultural agility, and critical thinking are no longer "nice-to-have" skills; they are the baseline for success in a labor market defined by global supply chains, international technology flows, and local communities composed of individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds. Embedding global perspectives into curriculum, partnerships, and workforce programs helps colleges keep pace with rapidly shifting industry needs, attract and retain international students who generate billions in economic activity, and ensure graduates are equipped for jobs that demand cross-cultural collaboration and adaptability.

Historical notions of international travel and experiences being almost exclusive to privileged university students have persisted for decades, even as community colleges began internationalizing more quietly, but meaningfully. In the current era, for journalists, the story is simple: global education is one of the most underreported drivers of local economic vitality, talent development, and institutional sustainability—one that is reshaping how community colleges deliver on the democratic promise of opportunity and mobility.

## Key Data

- International students contribute $42.9 billion to the U.S. economy and support 355,763 jobs annually[1], with direct impacts on housing, retail, transportation, and local tax bases. Declines in international enrollment can immediately translate into local economic contraction.
- Students who attend public two-year colleges generate an estimated $20.7 billion in additional annual earnings, relative to the typical high school graduate, including $5 billion generated by students from low-income backgrounds—a major boost to local tax bases and spending power.[2]
- Research has shown that recent study abroad alumni in various professions (e.g. Information Technology, Healthcare, Finance, Marketing, Sales, Professional and Technical Services) see increased annual earnings in addition to greater rates of advancement into management positions and employee retention.[3] As a quantified example, students majoring in business who participated in global learning earned $4,159 more in their first job than peers without such experiences.[4]
- Employers consistently rank communication across differences, teamwork, adaptability, and digital fluency among the most lacking competencies in new graduates. These "enduring skills" align directly with global education outcomes and are essential for local workforce readiness.

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1 NAFSA: Association of International Educators. (2025). *International student economic value tool.* https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

2 Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2025, October 8). *Higher education's economic benefits to communities.* https://www.ihep.org/higher-educations-economic-benefits-to-communities/

3 Lightcast. (2025). The Value of Education Abroad to Employees and Employers. The Forum on Education Abroad. https://www.forumea.org/economic-impact-study-2025.html.

4 Dietrich, A., et al. (2025). *International experience as a career asset: Exploring the earnings impact of education abroad participation.* The Forum on Education Abroad. https://doi.org/10.36366/R.SS2025

## Questions & Considerations

### 1. Why is global education a workforce story?

Employers in industries from health systems to advanced manufacturing to logistics depend on workers who can collaborate with individuals from varied backgrounds, navigate global technologies, and adapt to rapidly evolving markets. Community colleges embed these competencies through internationally connected programs, virtual exchanges, and curricula aligned with global industry standards.

### 2. How does global engagement affect local economies?

International students inject billions into the U.S. economy each year, supporting jobs in housing, retail, and service sectors. Colleges that engage globally also draw research partnerships, industry collaborations, and foreign investment—drivers of local economic development and competitiveness.

### 3. Why should media pay attention now?

Shifts in international enrollment and visa policies, demographic changes, and new employer and learner demands are converging to reshape the higher education landscape. Global programs, often misunderstood as expensive or elite, are actually one of the most scalable ways community colleges prepare students from a wide variety of backgrounds for a changing workforce. The stakes for regional economies and workforce pipelines have never been higher.

## Additional Resources

### 1. NAFSA: Association of International Educators – International Student Economic Value Tool

What it provides: State-by-state and district-level economic impact data on international students.
Why it's useful: Offers concrete ROI and workforce implications tied directly to specific regions.
https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

### 2. OECD – Education at a Glance

What it provides: Global comparisons of education systems, workforce outcomes, earnings premiums, and skills needs.
Why it's useful: Helps contextualize U.S. workforce competitiveness and why global competencies matter
https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/

### 3. Institute of International Education (IIE) – Gaining an Employment Edge: The Impact of Study Abroad

What it provides: Data connecting global learning experiences to career outcomes, including earnings gains and employer-valued skills.
Why it's useful: Provides evidence of student ROI.
https://www.iie.org/publications/gaining-an-employment-edge-the-impact-of-study-abroad/

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https://www.selectusa.gov

# Why Global Education Matters: For Local Organizations & Foundations

Global education is a powerful tool for advancing the missions of local organizations and foundations committed to community well-being, economic mobility, workforce development, and civic vitality. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to bring global learning to scale because they enroll students from every background, serve as regional workforce engines, and anchor the communities where local organizations and funders live and work. When students gain global competencies such as communication across differences, empathy, digital fluency, adaptability, and the ability to collaborate on complex problems, they are better prepared not only for employment but for civic engagement and leadership. These skills directly support community priorities such as bridging cultures, fostering social cohesion, strengthening local economies, and expanding opportunity.

Global learning also helps cultivate young people who are curious, open-minded, accountable, and capable of contributing to "collective well-being," the shared prosperity that foundations and community organizations seek to advance. Through partnerships with community colleges, philanthropies and local organizations can play a transformative role in equipping the next generation with the mindsets, skills, and experiences needed to thrive in an interconnected world, but also doing so from a place of pride in one's hometown or city. Examples of such partnerships operating throughout the U.S. include:

- Sister City partnerships generate millions of dollars in communities across the country through foreign investments and sponsorships. Some of these investments include Japanese and Korean car plants, annual cultural festivals, solar plants and farm installations, computer chip manufacturing and engineering companies – all on U.S. soil, employing and engaging U.S. citizens, and bringing revenue to cities and outlying towns.[1]
- Rotary International clubs – a global network of more than 1.2 million business and professional leaders in 35,000+ clubs, including in the U.S. – facilitate humanitarian service, fostering world peace and understanding. Notable contributions by Rotary International include helping to nearly eradicate polio through their health and disease education programs, training Peace Fellows, creating Future Farmers for America (FFA) scholarships, building green spaces across the US, and administering cultural exchange programs.[2]

1 Forster, R. 27 May 2014. *How sister city partnerships can play a new role in a global economy*. Cities Today. https://cities-today.com/how-sister-city-partnerships-can-play-a-new-role-in-a-global-economy/.

He B., Tang M. & Wei, A. (2025). The impact of city diplomacy on foreign direct investment: Evidence from international sister city diplomacy agreements. *International Review of Economics & Finance, 99* (104076). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iref.2025.104076.

2 Rotary. (2020). *Annual Report*. https://www.rotary.org/en/annual-report-2020/increase-our-impact.

## Key Data

- Community college students generate more than $20.7 billion in additional annual earnings, relative to the typical high school graduate, and $5 billion of that comes from students from low-income backgrounds.[3]
- Research has shown that study abroad alumni in various professions (e.g. Information Technology, Healthcare, Finance, Marketing, Sales, Professional and Technical Services) see increased annual earnings in addition to greater rates of advancement into management positions and employee retention.[4] As a quantified example, students majoring in business who participated in global learning earned $4,159 more in their first job than peers without such experiences.[5]
- International students contribute $42.9 billion to the U.S. economy and support 355,763 jobs.[6] Their presence enriches local communities culturally and economically, while global partnerships help attract new businesses, investments, and talent.
- Employers report that communication, teamwork, leadership, cross-cultural fluency, and problem-solving are among the most lacking skills in new graduates, all of which are strengthened through global learning, virtual exchange, and intercultural community engagement.
- A tracer study, Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE), conducted by the University of Minnesota in 2007 that included input from thousands of student alumni who studied abroad in college from 1960-2005, showed that students who study abroad are more civically-engaged as adults (e.g. more likely to vote, attend graduate school, care for the environment, participate in philanthropy, pursue international careers, etc.).[7]

3 Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2025, October 8). *Higher education's economic benefits to communities.* https://www.ihep.org/higher-educations-economic-benefits-to-communities/

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6 NAFSA: Association of International Educators. (2025). *International student economic value tool.* https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

7 Paige, R.M., Fry, G.W., Stallman, E.M., Josić, J., & Jon, J.E. (2009). Study abroad for global engagement: The long-term impact of mobility experiences. *Intercultural Education, 20(sup1), S29-44.*

## Questions & Considerations

### 1. How does global education align with our mission?

Global learning develops skills and mindsets such as empathy, cross-cultural communication, civic action, and problem-solving that directly support community development, youth empowerment, health, education, and workforce initiatives.

### 2. What is the community-level return on investment?

Students with global competencies have higher earning potential, are better aligned with employer needs, and contribute to stronger, more resilient communities. International students bolster local economies, while global partnerships attract new opportunities. College graduates and individuals who advance in employment, especially if better prepared at the outset with global learning, also make future civic leaders with an intrinsic understanding and deep appreciation for the array of backgrounds within their communities, and the relationships needed at home and abroad to innovate and help communities grow.

### 3. How can local organizations and foundations partner with community colleges?

Local organizations and foundations can play a pivotal role in expanding global education by funding student experiences such as study abroad, virtual exchange, and global internships; partnering with colleges to create talent pathways aligned with regional workforce needs; and offering community-based learning opportunities that build intercultural competence. They can strengthen community capacity by co-hosting cultural events, workshops, and global dialogues; contribute to institutional innovation through support for curriculum development, faculty training, and global credentials; and help connect communities to the world by leveraging relationships with Sister Cities, consulates, international nonprofits, and cultural organizations. These partnerships create shared value—supporting student success, advancing organizational missions, and contributing to more prosperous, cohesive, and globally connected communities.

## Additional Resources

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What it provides: State-by-state and district-level economic impact data on international students.
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### 3. Institute of International Education (IIE) – Gaining an Employment Edge: The Impact of Study Abroad

What it provides: Data connecting global learning experiences to career outcomes, including earnings gains and employer-valued skills.
Why it's useful: Provides evidence of student ROI.
https://www.iie.org/publications/gaining-an-employment-edge-the-impact-of-study-abroad/

### 4. Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) – Advocacy & Resources

What it provides: Sector-specific guidance for two-year institutions, including partnership models, global workforce strategies, and funding mechanisms.
Why it's useful: Tailored to community college realities—budgets, enrollment pressures, regional workforce pipelines.
https://www.ccidinc.org/

### 5. U.S. Department of Commerce – SelectUSA & Foreign Direct Investment State Reports

What it provides: Data on global companies operating in each state.
Why it's useful: Helps connect global education to local economic development and employer pipelines.
https://www.selectusa.gov

# Why Global Education Matters: For Business & Industry Leaders

Global education is increasingly central to the talent, innovation, and competitiveness strategies of businesses across every sector. In today's economy, even the most "local" companies operate within global supply chains, work with international clients or vendors, compete with companies across borders, and rely on technologies shaped by global markets. For industry leaders facing rapid technological change, skills shortages, and heightened competition, community colleges are essential partners in developing a workforce that is adaptable, culturally agile, digitally fluent, and prepared to collaborate across borders and differences.

Global education, through curriculum integration, virtual exchange, global internships, and applied learning, cultivates exactly these capabilities. It strengthens regional talent pipelines, accelerates innovation, and supports a more resilient and future-ready workforce. For business and industry leaders, global learning is not a peripheral academic enhancement; it is a strategic investment in the people and skills that drive productivity, competitiveness, and economic growth.

## Key Data

- Companies increasingly require global and intercultural skills. Employers consistently rank communication across differences, adaptability, teamwork, professionalism, and digital fluency among the most lacking competencies in recent graduates—skills global learning measurably improves.
- A more globally prepared workforce strengthens local economies. Students who attend public two-year colleges generate an estimated $20.7 billion in additional annual earnings, relative to the typical high school graduate, including $5 billion generated by students from low-income backgrounds[1]—fueling consumer spending, innovation, and regional growth.
- International students are essential to local industries. They contribute $42.9 billion to the U.S. economy, support 355,763 jobs[2] and in many regions sustain STEM, healthcare, and technical programs that employers depend on. Declines in international enrollment create immediate labor pipeline pressures
- Artificial intelligence is becoming an accelerated strategy for business growth. Students need AI fluency skills to manage and navigate AI, and their global mindsight strengthens critical thinking that can also influence productive AI usage.

1 Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2025, October 8). *Higher education's economic benefits to communities.* https://www.ihep.org/higher-educations-economic-benefits-to-communities/

2 NAFSA: Association of International Educators. (2025). *International student economic value tool.* https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

## Questions & Considerations

### 1. How does global education help businesses address workforce needs?

Global education develops workers who are job-ready on day one, equipped with the technical, digital, and interpersonal skills employers struggle most to find. Students engaged in global learning, whether through globally infused coursework, virtual exchange, or international internships, build the ability to communicate across differences, adapt quickly to new technologies, and solve complex problems. These are the "enduring skills" that employers repeatedly rank as essential to productivity and innovation. A globally prepared workforce strengthens a company's ability to compete, manage international relationships, work with a wide range of customers, and respond to rapid market changes.

### 2. How does global engagement strengthen regional talent pipelines and economic competitiveness?

When community colleges embed global competencies into their programs, they produce graduates who can meet the evolving demands of industries connected to global markets from healthcare and IT to advanced manufacturing, logistics, and business services. These graduates bring traits that drive innovation and operational efficiency, including cultural agility, digital fluency, and adaptability. At the regional level, this globally competent workforce attracts investment, supports expansion of local industries, and helps employers fill persistent skill gaps. International students further bolster local economies and contribute directly to specialized workforce pipelines in high-need fields.

### 3. How can business and industry leaders partner with community colleges to strengthen global talent development?

Businesses can play a central role in shaping and expanding global learning opportunities that directly benefit their talent pipelines. Employers can co-design curriculum and competency frameworks aligned with global industry standards, ensuring graduates have the skills required for real-world roles. Companies can offer internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and project-based learning with global or intercultural components, or participate in virtual exchange collaborations where students work on international problem-solving teams. Business leaders can also support global learning through scholarships, technology investments, or joint programs that promote global certificates and microcredentials. Serving on advisory boards and engaging in international partnerships with colleges further ensures that education and workforce systems remain aligned, agile, and responsive to emerging market needs.

## Additional Resources

### 1. U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation – Talent Pipeline Management

What it provides: Employer-led frameworks for building and strengthening regional talent pipelines, aligning education and training systems with workforce needs.
Why it's useful: Offers actionable models businesses can use to shape education partnerships and address persistent skill gaps.
https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/talent-pipeline-management

### 2. Brookings Institution – Workforce & Competitiveness Research

What it provides: Analysis on emerging skills, global competitiveness, regional economic development, and the future of work.
Why it's useful: Helps employers understand workforce trends and the importance of globally competent talent in driving economic growth.
https://www.brookings.edu

### 3.Institute of International Education (IIE) – Global Learning & Internships Research

What it provides: Evidence on the employability, skills, and career advantages gained through international internships, study abroad, and virtual exchange.
Why it's useful: Demonstrates how global learning improves job readiness and develops competencies employers value.
https://www.iie.org

### 4. Community Colleges for International Development (CCID)

What it provides: Sector-specific global workforce models, institutional case studies, and partnership opportunities for two-year colleges and employers.
Why it's useful: Helps businesses engage directly with colleges on global talent development and international partnerships.
https://www.ccidinc.org/

### 5. Asia Society Center for Global Education – Global Competence Frameworks

What it provides: Definitions and tools for understanding global competence, including communication skills, cultural agility, and collaborative problem-solving.
Why it's useful: Clarifies the specific global skills employers need and how institutions can cultivate them.
https://asiasociety.org/education

### 6. *The Forum on Education Abroad – International Experience as a Career Asset Report*

What it provides: Data on increased earnings for students majoring in business who take part in a global experience.
Why it's useful: Illustrates a direct link between global learning and better wages post-graduation.
https://www.forumea.org/salary-study-2025.html

# Why Global Education Matters: For Students & Families

Global education is not just for students who can afford to travel—it's for everyone. At community colleges, global learning is designed to fit into the lives of students who balance work, family, transportation challenges, limited budgets, or uncertain schedules. Global education can happen in the classroom, online through virtual exchange, with international classmates, in community-based projects, while interning at a local international company or through short, low-cost programs that don't require taking a semester away. These experiences help students build the skills employers value most: communication, teamwork, cultural awareness, problem-solving, and digital fluency. These skills, in turn, strengthen confidence and open doors whether a student plans to enter the workforce after earning a credential, transfer to a university, or advance in a trade or technical field.

Most importantly, global learning gives students a broader sense of what is possible for their education, career, and future by bringing the world to them through people, perspectives, and experiences that enrich their learning and help them feel more connected, capable, and confident. For families, the question becomes: How can my student get ahead? Global education is one of the most accessible ways to help students gain the knowledge, skills, and relationships that support long-term success, whether or not travel is part of the journey.

## Key Data

- Global learning strengthens employability, even without travel.
  - More than nine in ten employers agreed that it is either "very" or "somewhat important" for graduates to have gained knowledge through interdisciplinary study and by addressing "real-life" problems while in college, [1] —experiences that global learning directly provides.
  - According to a global survey, 90% of executives report that "cross-cultural management" is their top challenge when working across borders[2]—skills students developing through global learning with no travel required.
  - The World Economic Forum identifies critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-management as the most in-demand skills for the global workforce[3]—precisely the competencies strengthened through classroom-based global learning, intercultural collaboration, and virtual exchange.

1 Finley, A. P. (2023). *The career-ready graduate: What employers say about the difference college makes. American Association of Colleges and Universities.* https://dgmg81phhvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/Research/PDFs/AACU-2023-Employer-Report.pdf

2 Fedcap (2018). Maximizing organizational intelligence: Building capacity to create and strategically use knowledge. https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/68fa851aded83bd5814d41dc/693085995040ad2b04277cb2_Why-Book_Maximizing-Final.pdf

3 World Economic Forum (2020). Future of jobs report 2020. https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/.

- Among students who studied abroad (including short-term programs):
  - 85% list their international experience on their résumé.[4]
  - 73% reference their global experience during job interviews.[5]
  - 50% believe their global experience directly contributed to receiving a job offer.[6]

- Global internships and virtual global work experience support long-term career goals.
  - In joint IIE & CIEE research, 86% of global internship alumni said the experience positively shaped their career path—even when the internship was online.[7]

- Short-term or low-cost global experiences improve academic outcomes.
  - Research[8] shows that students—especially community college, first-generation, and low-income learners—who participate in study abroad or virtual exchange demonstrate increased confidence, motivation, and persistence, and are more likely to complete their degrees.

## Questions & Considerations

### 1. Is global education really relevant for students who don't plan to travel or aren't pursuing a four-year degree?

Yes. Today's workplaces, including local hospitals, restaurants, manufacturing plants, childcare centers, small businesses, and tech firms, serve multidimensional communities and rely on global supply chains, non-English language skills, culturally-savvy viewpoints, technologies, and customers. Community college students benefit when they learn to communicate with people from different backgrounds, navigate new situations, and collaborate on real-world problems. Virtual exchange allows students here at home to work with peers abroad on projects, practice teamwork, and build digital skills—no passport, no plane ticket, and no time away from work required.

Students in trades, certificates, and associate programs gain competitive advantages too: welders work on international standards, automotive technicians learn global systems, early childhood educators work with multilingual families, and nursing students serve multicultural communities. Global learning strengthens these competencies from right inside the classroom.

4 Sanger, J. (2019). *IIE Centennial Impact Report. Institute of International Education.* https://p.widencdn.net/yzmz1f/IIE-Centennial-Impact-Report

5 Sanger, J. (2019). *IIE Centennial Impact Report. Institute of International Education.* https://p.widencdn.net/yzmz1f/IIE-Centennial-Impact-Report

6 IES Abroad alumni survey: https://www.iesabroad.org/about/alumni-survey-results.

7 Mason, L., & Monroe, S. (2024). *Standing out in a competitive market: The impact of a global internship on career readiness. Institute of International Education.* https://www.iie.org/publications/standing-out-in-a-competitive-market-the-impact-of-a-global-internship-on-career-readiness/

8 For example: https://globaledresearch.com/study-abroad-impact.asp#:~:text=Students%20who%20studied%20abroad%20had%20a%2017.8%25%20higher%204%2Dyear,88.6%25).

### 2. Is global education affordable for students who are working, supporting families, or living on tight budgets?

Absolutely. Many global learning options cost nothing beyond regular tuition. Globally connected courses, virtual exchange, and local-global community projects are built into existing classes and can satisfy degree requirements. For students who do consider short-term travel, community colleges offer more affordable, shorter, flexible programs than four-year institutions. There are an array of sources of external funding available from government programs (e.g. Gillman Scholarship, Boren Scholarship, Fulbright Program), government affiliates (e.g. IDEAS grants, Stevens Initiative for virtual exchange), third party provider discounts and scholarships for community college students and the colleges themselves that earmark a certain amount of money each year for student travel. The Gilman Scholarship,[9] for instance, specifically targets community college students, first-generation students, students with disabilities, and student-parents. Global learning is accessible without major financial strain, and help exists for students who want to explore additional opportunities.

### 3. What about safety? Is it safe for my student if travel is involved?

As part of their Duty of Care obligations and policies, colleges must prioritize safety, preparation, and support. If a travel component is included, programs use U.S. Department of State travel advisories, have trained staff on the ground, provide orientations for students and families, and offer structured itineraries and vetted housing options. Of course, students can gain global skills without traveling at all. Virtual exchange, globally focused courses, work-based learning, and interactions with international students and local community organizations offer many of the same benefits with no added risk.

## Additional Resources

### 1. Institute of International Education – Making the Case for Study Abroad / Generation Study Abroad Hub

What it provides: Student-friendly materials describing academic, career, and personal benefits; includes short programs and funding options.
Why it's useful: Encourages students who might not see travel as possible by showing flexible models and real stories.
https://www.iie.org/programs/generation-study-abroad/

### 2. "10 Great Reasons to Study Abroad" (IIE/AIFS)

What it provides: A simple overview of why global exposure—with or without travel—matters for college and career success.
Why it's useful: A quick resource for students undecided about exploring global opportunities.
https://www.iie.org/blog/2017-nov-14-10-great-reasons-to-study-abroad/

### 3. AFS & IIE – A Family Guide to Study Abroad

What it provides: A comprehensive, bilingual resource for parents on benefits, options, safety, finances, and supporting students.
Why it's useful: Addresses common concerns and reinforces that short, safe, affordable options exist.
https://www.iie.org/publications/a-family-guide-to-study-abroad

9 https://www.gilmanscholarship.org/

### 4. Aid & Affordability Resources (U.S. Dept. of Education, NAFSA)

What they provide: Clear explanations of how financial aid works, scholarship opportunities, payment planning, and programs for students with disabilities or dependents.
Why they're useful: Helps families understand costs and funding early in the decision-making process.
https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/international
https://www.nafsa.org/professional-resources/browse-by-interest/financial-aid-study-abroad-basic-facts-students

### 5. Safety & Risk Resources (U.S. Department of State, Forum on Education Abroad Student Risk Reports)

What they provide: Country-specific safety information and data-informed practices colleges use to keep students safe.
Why they're useful: Provides reassurance to families, especially those worried about first-time travel.
https://travel.state.gov/en/international-travel/travel-advisories.html https://www.forumea.org/critical-incidents--student-risk.html

# Why Global Education Matters: For Elected Officials & Federal Agencies

Global education is a strategic asset that strengthens America's workforce, fuels local and national economies, supports rural and urban competitiveness, advances national security, and keeps U.S. higher education globally relevant. Community colleges are on the front lines of delivering this value: their students comprise more than 40% of U.S. higher education enrollment, and include first-generation students, veterans, working parents, and rural learners whose main exposure to the global economy may come through internationally-oriented classrooms, curricula, or virtual exchange.

Global learning equips students with the skills employers say they need—communication across differences, problem-solving, cultural agility, and digital fluency—and expands the talent pipelines essential to U.S. industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, agriculture, IT, and energy. International students, meanwhile, bolster enrollment, strengthen STEM programs, and generate billions in economic activity. As policymakers confront workforce shortages, an enrollment cliff due to demographic declines, and increasing global competition, global education offers a high-ROI strategy to support community stability, national prosperity, and America's long-standing leadership in innovation and international engagement.

## Key Data

- International students contributed $42.9 billion to the U.S. economy and supported 355,763 jobs in the 2023–24 academic year.[1] If current international enrollment declines continue, the U.S. economy could lose $7 billion and 60,000 jobs by 2026.[2]
- International students are vital to STEM and innovation.
  - A substantial proportion of U.S. postgraduate engineering students are international,[3] and they contribute significantly to R&D, patent production, and the tech sector workforce. Companies such as Google, Zoom, NVIDIA, WhatsApp, Uber, Tesla, and DoorDash were founded or led by immigrants who began as international students.
- Rural impact is disproportionately high.
  - Declining international enrollment reduces global competencies, cultural exchange, and workforce pipelines in rural regions already facing demographic decline. Rural colleges often serve first-generation students whose only global exposure comes through international peers or virtual exchange. Farming and agriculture, in particular, are not only amongst the oldest professions in the world, but are still a part of every country's economy, so international students can bring valuable agricultural knowledge, skills and backgrounds to rural communities.

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1 NAFSA: Association of International Educators. (2025). *International student economic value tool.* https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

2 NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2025). U.S. economy could suffer at $7 billion loss from precipitous drop in international students. https://www.nafsa.org/about/about-nafsa/us-economy-could-suffer-7-billion-loss-precipitous-drop-international-students.

3 Redden, E. (2021, August 18). *Report focuses on graduate international enrollment. Inside Higher Ed.* https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2021/08/19/report-focuses-graduate-international-enrollment

- Visa backlogs and administrative delays are suppressing enrollment.
  - Colleges report declines directly tied to visa wait times, shifting destinations, targeted travel bans and policy uncertainty. These delays undermine U.S. competitiveness in a global education market now actively contested by Europe, Australia, and China. Canada is investing $1 billion CAD to attract researchers,[4] prevent brain drain to the U.S., and fast-track high-level talent post-graduation as a response to U.S. restrictions on attracting and retaining top talent at colleges and universities. Asian universities, too, are launching initiatives to attract global academic talent. Thirty-six percent of Asian higher education institutions surveyed by StudyPortals in Fall 2025 reported international undergraduate enrollment increases, while 48% of American higher education institutions indicated that their international undergraduate enrollments have decreased.[5]

## Questions & Considerations

### 1. How does global education support America's workforce and economic competitiveness?

Global education produces workers with communication, teamwork, digital literacy, and cultural agility, the skills employers across sectors consistently identify as most lacking. This is especially important in healthcare (serving multidimensional populations), agriculture (operating in global markets), advanced manufacturing (global supply chains), and energy (international standards). International students also sustain entire programs and industries; without them, many STEM and technical programs would shrink or disappear. Global learning ensures that local workers can compete in—and contribute to—the global economy.

### 2. What are the national and local risks of declining international enrollment?

Declines in international students lead to revenue losses, workforce shortages, and reduced innovation capacity. At the local level, fewer international students mean fewer jobs, less economic activity, and diminished global learning opportunities for domestic students. International students attending community colleges, similar to domestic students, can work at needed on-campus jobs, obtain internships with local employers as part of their degree, transfer to four-year universities to become specialists and contribute to research, or return to their home countries to improve their communities and foster good relations with the country that hosted them (soft power). For rural areas, the losses compound: fewer programs, fewer qualified workers, and reduced ability to attract foreign investment. At the national level, declines weaken America's talent pipeline, push top students to competitor nations, and undermine U.S. leadership in science, technology, and diplomacy.

### 3. How does global education contribute to national security and international stability?

International education is a cornerstone of U.S. soft power. For decades, federal programs, from Fulbright to USAID to the Community College Initiative (CCI), have advanced U.S. diplomacy, trained future global leaders, and strengthened alliances. International students often become long-term partners of the U.S., contributing to stability, trade, and global cooperation. A reduction in these programs diminishes American influence, weakens global ties, and cedes ground to competitor nations expanding their own education diplomacy.

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4 Government of Canada, December 9, 2025: https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-science-economic-development/news/2025/12/government-of-canada-launches-new-initiative-to-recruit-world-leading-researchers.html

5 Studyportals. (2025). The global enrolment benchmark survey. https://studyportals.com/reports/the-global-enrolment-benchmark-survey-aug-oct-2025-intake/?utm_source=website&utm_medium=digital-collateral&utm_campaign=20251117-RPT-The-Global-Enrolment-Benchmark-Report-August/October-2025-intake&utm_content=20/11/2025

### 4. What role can elected officials and federal agencies play?

- Recognize international education as infrastructure, critical to economic development, national security, and talent competitiveness.
- Stabilize budgets for exchange programs that promote U.S. values abroad and support domestic workforce development.
- Encourage collaboration between colleges, employers, and workforce boards to integrate global skills into regional economic strategies.
- Support policies that reduce visa backlogs and provide clear, predictable pathways for student mobility.
- Highlight the role of international students in rural revitalization, entrepreneurship, and workforce pipelines.

## Additional Resources

### 1. NAFSA – International Student Economic Value Tool

What it provides: State-by-state and district-level data on economic impact.
Why it's useful: Allows policymakers to understand local revenue, job creation, and economic consequences of enrollment trends.
https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2

### 2. ACCT – Legislative Priorities

What it provides: National advocacy priorities for community colleges.
Why it's useful: Helps elected officials understand community college needs, including global programs.
https://www.acct.org/advocacy/legislative-priorities

### 3. RCAP (Rural Community Assistance Partnership)

What it provides: Data and support for rural regions facing economic and demographic decline.
Why it's useful: Frames global education as a rural competitiveness strategy.
https://www.rcap.org/

### 4. NAFSA – Policy Briefs on Administrative Actions, Visa Policy, and Federal Priorities

What it provides: Analyses of federal policy shifts affecting international students.
Why it's useful: Helps elected officials understand real-time impacts of policy choices.
https://www.nafsa.org/current-us-administration

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