Recruiting Indian Students for Master Level Programs: Klagenfurt’ Experiences

Koteswara Rao Anne
Institute for smart systems technologies
University of Kalgenfurt
Klagenfurt, Austria
rao.anne@uni-klu.ac.at

Kyandoghere Kyamakya
Institute for smart systems technologies
University of Kalgenfurt
Klagenfurt, Austria
kyandoghere.kyamakya@uni-klu.ac.at

Abstract—In an attempt to attract the quality students, individual universities and national governments are looking to differentiate themselves from their competitors by developing targeted recruitment and residence policies. The major motivational factors in the decision-making process for student applicant to an overseas education include employment and residency opportunities after studies, the quality of the ‘student experience’, including accommodation and social activities, and the costs associated with an international education. In recent years, majority of the continental European universities with its low tuition fees are competing with the traditionally more attractive international student destinations like USA, UK and Australia. In this paper, a brief descriptive analysis on the mobility of Indian students for the master level study programs is presented. We also share our experiences in recruiting Indian students with our very own targeted recruitment policy.

Keywords— Masters programs, indian student mobility

I. INTRODUCTION

International higher education trends are changing as many universities across the globe offering master level study programs targeting international students. India with it’s over 300 Universities and 45,000 Colleges of various types is one of the major sources of student for international higher education market [1]. The University Grants Commission (UGC) of India, a regulator body for the establishment of universities and colleges, estimates states that there are 9,227, 833 enrolments in various Universities & Colleges, out of which 3,695,964 (40.05%) are women students [1]. After the tremendous economic growth of Indian economy in the present decade, an Indian student coming from a middle class well to do family started looking at the possibility of studying abroad, right from the day he enters the university – sometime even as he is completing his high school studies. The motivation of students to move abroad to study is a product of a complex blend of economic, political, social, cultural and personal matters. Every aspiring student dream of having a dream job in a dream company and they believe that their education in a foreign university or elite Indian university would help them in fulfilling their dream. Many students first try to get into the elite universities in India for their studies either at bachelor's or master's level. And when they don't tend to get an admission in any of these universities then they look to move into other countries to pursue their education.

Most of the students who intend to pursue their education would first think of USA as their destination with its attractive job market and flexible residence conditions. It stands as the most prominent destination for students. The Institute of International Education report, Open Doors 2008 [2], shows that the number of Indian students at U.S. colleges and universities had another all time high during the 2007-2008 academic year – reaching a total of 94,563 students. Other interesting aspect is highlighted by the estimates provided by the Department of Commerce in the US indicating that the American economy is enriched by roughly $14 billion dollars [3] annually as a result of the presence of International students in that country.

The next in line is UK with its long standing cultural and political relation with India. Like USA, Australia is fast becoming the dream destination of many students with its liberal working and residence opportunities after finishing the course. According to Australian Education International (AEI), in the year 2008, 40,010 Indian students are enrolled in Australian educational institutions, a 55 percent increase from the previous year [4]. First and foremost reason for these countries being the main destinations for students is that, they are English speaking countries. Another reason is the potential of the country to absorb the students into the local market, once they are done with the course. Another reason is the marketing strategy that they follow individually as universities and also together with attractive national policies to attract the students. The lucrative schemes and the incentives that the students obtain during their term in terms of scholarships, assistantships at the university make it their destination for building their career. It has been a win-win situation for both the host countries and the students themselves.

In much of continental Europe, the previous higher education system is not uniform and its comparability with rest of the world is not clearly understood. The introduction of the Bologna process made academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe and synchronized with majority of the world. This enabled many universities to look for international students into their master level programs which are mainly held in English language. Many of these universities have an
advantage on their counterparts in terms of low tuition fee, but the language with in the countries, national policies dealing with work permit and residence policies after completing the studies are not very encouraging.

The situation has been changing with most of the countries in Europe trying to improve the marketing schemes when it comes to higher education for international students. European universities are not only competing with the universities in international student friendly countries but also competing with the high quality universities in India itself. The standards in some of the universities in India are on par with many of the European universities. Vinod Khosla, co-founder of Sun Microsystems commented that "the education system in some of the top universities in India is excellent and the students trained from these universities will be capable of surviving any situation in the industry. It is taught in the class that engineers are meant to mend with the resources in hand and this is what we see in the engineers from Indian Universities". In the case of no working and residence opportunities after studies, many students prefer to compete for a study place in the Indian elite universities.

II. KLAGENFURT APPROACH

Recruiting a quality student to a new program is always a difficult task to accomplish. Recruiting an international student is much more complex in this heavily competitive international student market given many constrains. Even though Austria has a very high reputation as a developed country, its educational institutes and its smaller cities are not well-known for many Indian students. The promotional activity for the Austrian education in India is very minimal to nil. In addition to this, University of Klagenfurt and Austria have few rigid constraints obstructing from the very beginning process of sending an application compared with many other countries who are actively recruiting international students. The two important constraints are:

- **Special University Entrance Qualification:** In addition to the General University Entrance Qualification, students holding foreign certificates must provide evidence that they satisfy the conditions for admission specific to the field of studies, including proof that they would be admitted directly to the degree program in the country issuing the document. The holder of the school leaving certificate must be actually entitled to immediately commence the course of study for which he/she has applied to admission in Austria at a university without any further entrance examination, admission examination, supplementary examination, or other restrictions in the country of issue ("Special University Entrance Qualification"). However producing such a special document from Indian universities registrar with thousands of students going for studies abroad is not trivial and many students get discouraged to run after the offices.

- **Authentications of documents:** Authentication must be provided by the competent authorities of the state of issue and confirmed by the Austrian representation (Embassy/Consulate). In order to get it verified from Austrian embassy, they should follow at least 5 prior steps involving state and central government offices. However this process is simplified from 2007 as India signed “The Hague Convention treaty” on authentication of document. Now the documents require the special authentication in the form of an Apostille certificate (official confirmation) issued by the foreign ministry authorities. In order to obtain the foreign ministry apostille students need to obtain the verification first from the respective state department. The bureaucratic process involved in finally getting the apostle discourages many students even from trying to send the application. However the legalization requirements from the countries mention in section I is simple but also robust to some extent.

- **Length visa process:** The visa process to Austria is also very time consuming and requires lot of documentation. This lengthy process discourages many students from choosing Austria as a primary choice.

By considering these constrains, University of Klagenfurt adapted some of the novel methods followed by different universities aggressively involved in recruiting international students namely:

- **Targeted recruitment policy:** Targeted recruitment policy than a broader promotional activity in recruiting the Indian students is foreseen as a best case for our university. The best available option with the given constraints is to look for an agent who can represent University of Klagenfurt and also who is capable of promoting the university effectively and also helping the students in fulfilling the legally required special constraints listed in this section.

- **Interview onsite:** Even though interviewing in India for a university study place abroad is not new, we have adopted a novel interview method. In our interview process, student is invited together with the parent/guardian. The student defends his bachelor thesis work apart from other technical questions. This guarantees the quality of student to some extent and it will also help to check the language capabilities on the site. We also inform the parent/guardian on the financial commitment needed from them and the total expenditure. The pictures can be seen at the end as annex.

- **Information to selected students:** After the selection process is over, all the selected students are invited for a gathering where the finer details about the course and the living in Klagenfurt is explained. This activity helps students to know each other before coming, to better understand the formal processes need to obtain the admission, the curriculum in details and what efforts it demand. The pictures can be seen at the end as annex.
These approaches allowed maximum number of students to apply without considering the general constraints for the admission. This will also provide a first contact with the student before receiving a formal application and students also benefit as they are assured of the study place before they really start the formal application process. With this systematic approach and by fulfilling all the required obligations, the formal application processing times have been greatly reduced. Students are guided with the necessary requirements from the selection till they arrive through a mentor. Mentor also coordinates the complete process with all the concerned people like agent, admissions department, students etc. This coordination helps in reducing the dropouts after selection, reduces the delays and reassures the students about the ongoing process.

III. EXPERIENCES IN KLagenfurt

In this section we will enlist various experiences both from student’s perspective and professor’s perspective.

A. Student perspective

Majority of the students are satisfied with the university academic standards and the curriculum of information technology (IT). Even though some students expressed that few things can be better in terms of cooperation overall academic experience is rated very high in their feedback which is taken periodically. They particularly liked the total guidance and coaching process involved during their studies. The overall quality of the ‘student experience’, including accommodation and social activities, and the costs associated with an international education is always rated as very good.

B. Professors perspective

The IT program is mainly covered by two institutes namely Institute for smart systems technologies and institute for networked and embedded systems. The six research groups in these two institutes primarily contribute to teaching activity. The overall opinion of the research groups is that the quality of the some/majority of the students is not up to the expected level. The program is only three years old (started in WS06/07 with two research groups) and also all the research groups started functioning only from winter semester 08/09, attracting high quality students is always a difficult task. Some research groups are more than satisfied with the students working in their research groups for their internships and master thesis’s. Some groups are initially not very satisfied as they felt students don’t have the necessary bachelor background for their master level courses and research, but they are also satisfied as the program moves into next phase. The lack of necessary bachelor background for their master level study program is one major concern expressed by many research groups.

C. Performance results

We have around 70 students studying the master programs in an average of 20 students per year (starting both summer and winter). The program started with 14 students in WS 08/09 and in that 4 students already finished with distinction and one has submitted his thesis. The interesting point is among these 5 students, 4 have chosen to do PhD as their next career step in various institutes in UK and Klagenfurt. Around 30% of the total students have gained industrial experience by doing internship and master thesis in industry in Germany, Austria, Netherlands, and Italy. The other important aspect is we have only dropout rate of 5% till now from the total students, this is mainly attributed to the coordination of all the research groups in the study program.

IV. CONCLUSION

The recruiting of international students is a very complex task involving many issues like quality of education and benefits to students during and after study. Our experience shows, getting high quality students to a relatively new program with no previous international students in a small country with limited options during and after finishing studies is a daunting task. The recruiting model adopted at our university is fairly increasing the chances of getting the motivated students. However in order to get the high quality students with targeted recruitment policy, we should improve the total ‘student experience’ policy. We foresee an improved student experience service like accommodation, social activities and mentoring together with performance dependent scholarships can attract better quality students to Klagenfurt. By selecting the high quality students, we also expect the student in flow and out flow numbers can be normalized in next 5 years. The perspectives after completing the course in Austria are also restricted to high quality students. The work permit regulation in Austria is also suitable only for highly skilled workers (Minimum salary of € 2,412,- gross/month [5]). However, in practice to get a job with limited language knowledge for the higher salaries is not very easy. Apart from the job, highly skilled students also have an option to take a research position leading to PhD or work in research centers where the work permit rules are flexible and also language requirements are also not very rigid. However, the Austrian regulation concerning the foreign students is not flexible like USA, UK, Australia, Germany etc where students have various options after finishing job to look for jobs.

V. REFERENCES


These photos are taken during the selection process and after the selection. This process seems to be playing a key role in attracting and motivating the students to come to Austria even though it is not one of their dream destinations when they are planning studies abroad. The parents are also informed about the financial commitment needed for the studies and the living conditions in India during the selection process and after selection processes. This meeting also provides an opportunity for the parents from previous year to come and interact with the professors from Klagenfurt. This also helps the professors to understand what the students are expecting and also the feedback from parents.