

# Australian Universities Set Records in Foreign Enrollments

BY GEOFFREY MASLEN

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA  
**D**ESPITE the economic crisis from which several Asian nations are still recovering, universities in Australia are experiencing record foreign enrollments.

Some institutions have reported international-enrollment gains of up to 40 per cent for the new academic year, which began in late February. While the flow of students from some parts of Asia has slowed, the losses have been more than countered by successful recruiting in other parts of the world.

The foreign-student totals have been helped considerably by growing enrollment—some 26,000 students this year—in “off-shore” programs offered by Australian institutions in other countries. But many universities also have recorded sharp increases in students seeking places on their campuses in Australia.

Earlier this year, after it was reported that the number of student visas issued in December was down 23 per cent from December 1997, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee warned that the country faced the prospect of a massive decline in foreign enrollments. January saw a small increase in visas, but the total for the two months was still well below the same period a year earlier.

## INCREASES OVER LAST YEAR

However, in February almost 13,500 visas were granted to international students—a 3-per-cent increase over the same month in 1998. Visas issued to Hong Kong students were up 60 per cent, to 553; to Thais, up 44 per cent, to 375; and to students from China, up 36 per cent, to 304.

In the eight months ending in February, some 72,000 visas were issued by Australian immigration officials to students seek-

ing to enroll at schools, colleges, and universities in Australia. The indicators suggest that the total this year is likely to exceed 110,000 by the end of June. For the 12 months ending in June 1998, some 90,000 visas were granted.

Foreign-student enrollment at Australian institutions has grown significantly over the past decade. The country now ranks third, behind only the United States and Britain, in international-student numbers. While the United States remains the most popular destination for students from the 10 countries that send the largest numbers abroad for higher education, Australia ranks second among five of them—China, Hong Kong (which is still counted separately), India, Indonesia, and Thailand.

More than 1,000 Australian visas were issued in February to students from Indonesia, many of whom were ethnic Chinese seeking to escape social unrest in that

country. Also in February, Malaysians collected 817 visas, 800 went to U.S. students, 700 to students from India, and 674 to Singaporeans.

As is the case with intensive-English programs in the United States, enrollment at Australia's English-language-training colleges has been hurt most by economic turmoil in Asia. Universities, however, appear to have escaped the worst effects of the crisis. In 1998, a record 60,000 fee-paying foreigners were enrolled at Australian universities, a 10-per-cent increase over 1997.

International students contribute an estimated US\$660-million annually to university budgets in Australia. When some 100,000 other international students enrolled in schools and colleges are included, the estimated total that foreign students add to the Australian economy each year is more than US\$2-billion.

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