

Student Trends: North America

Is North America a target market for your international student recruitment? Our findings can help you update your understanding of how students from Canada and the United States are thinking about study abroad and making decisions in 2021 and beyond.

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Our International Higher Education Survey reached 431 prospective students across North America and more than 10,000 prospective students from around the world overall. View respondent data and customize country groupings with our [Student Insights 2021-2022 Dashboard](#) to find out more about specific regions or countries.

North America: Canada, United States

Looking for the rest of North America? Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central America, and the Caribbean are included in **Student Trends: Latin America.*

Highlights

1. North American students are growing less likely to begin their study abroad journey with a country-first approach. A country first has steadily dropped from 41% of students' first decision to only 33% of students since 2019.
2. About 42% of students from the U.S. are prioritizing a flexible study mode as an important program factor when deciding where to study. This is 40.1% more important to U.S. students than for students in the rest of the world.
3. More and more North Americans want to study in a Master's program abroad each year. There has been a 25.2% rise in the percentage of prospective students interested in Master's degrees since last year.
4. Although still the most anxious region in the world about not speaking a local language when studying abroad, North American students are growing steadily less concerned. 24.1% fewer students cited this as a

concern despite an overall increased interest in non-English-speaking destinations.

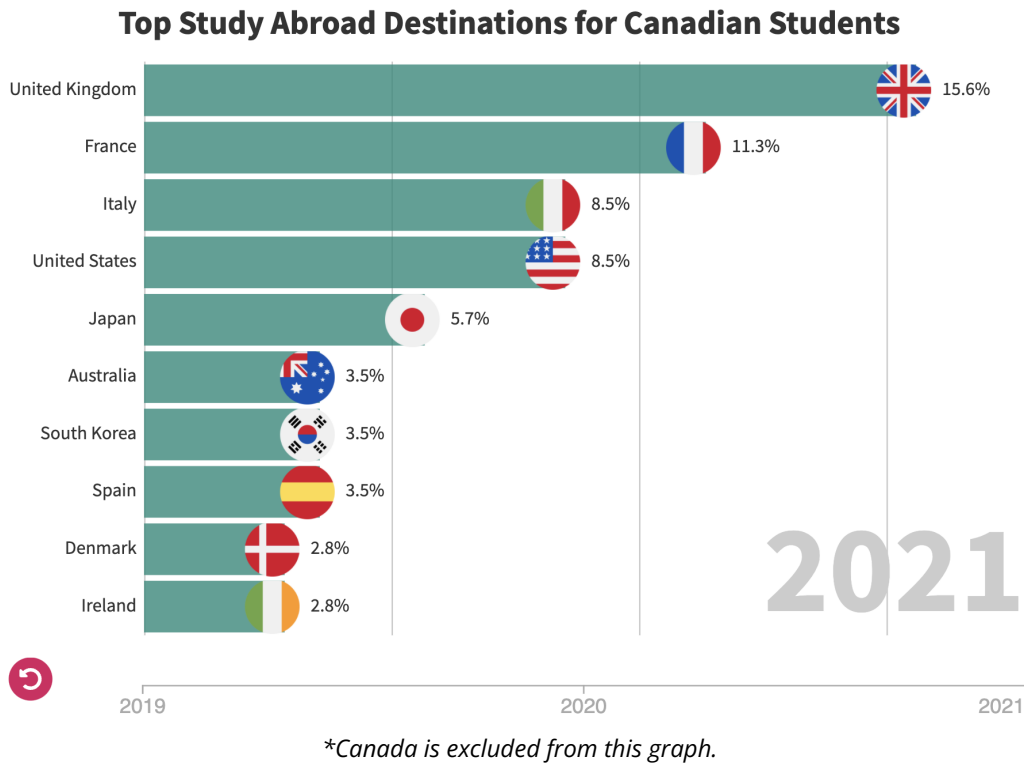
5. South Korea has risen sharply in popularity as a study abroad destination for both Americans and Canadians while the UK and Italy make gains and Australia plummets.

Study Abroad Trend Overview

Top Destinations: South Korea and the UK make big gains while Germany and Australia decline in popularity

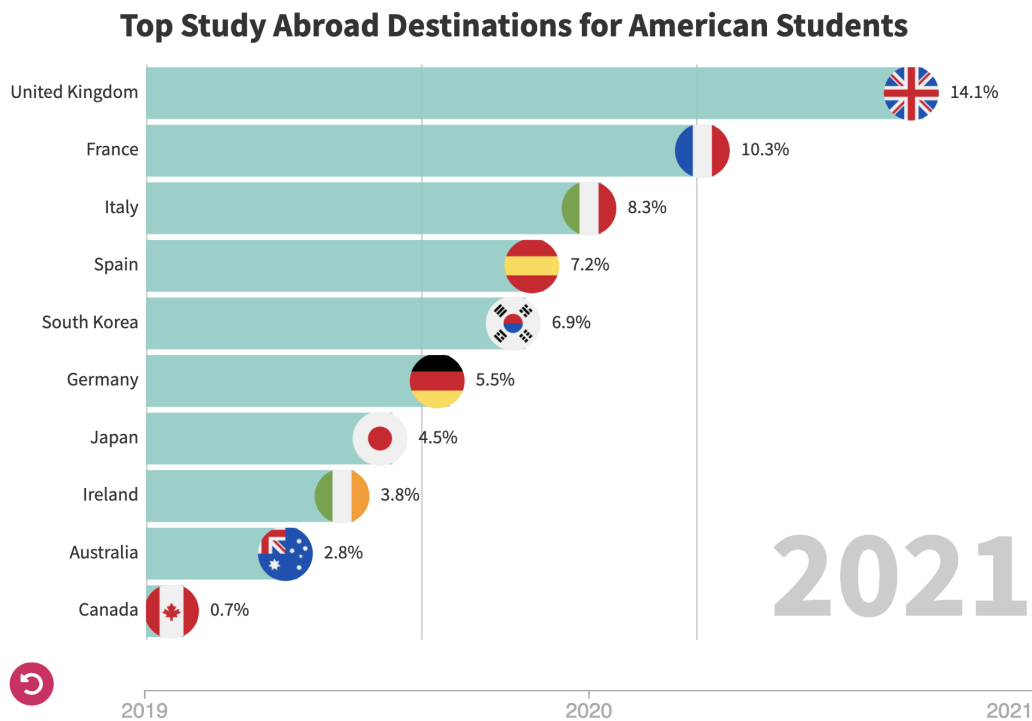
Now, first things first. Where do these students want to go? To give you a better idea of the preferences between Canada and the United States, we'll show the top destinations for Canadians and Americans separately.

[Click here](#) to see an animated visualization of the graph below.



This year's survey shows a noticeable shift in the most popular study abroad destinations as compared to previous years. For Canadian students, the UK has become the top destination country, with France and Italy rising to second and third. South Korea and Denmark have also become notably more popular, while Australia has experienced quite the opposite with a drop to 7th this year after being the most popular country last year. Germany is a destination that also doesn't have the same popularity this year, falling to 11th after ranking at 6th place for the last two years.

[Click here](#) to see an animated visualization of the graph below.

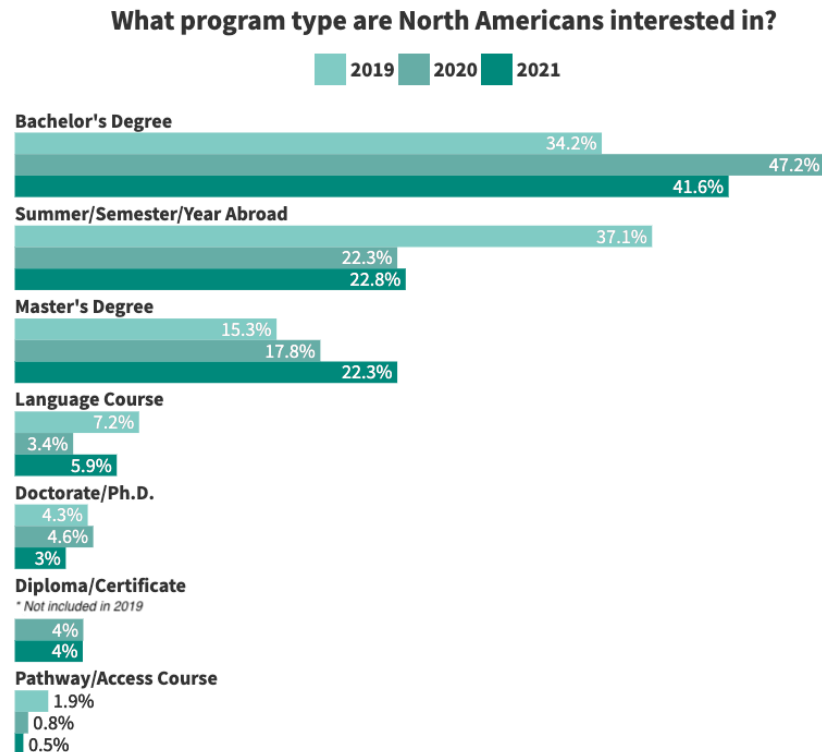


*The United States is excluded from this graph.

European countries take the top four spots for American students looking to study abroad. Similar to the noticeable trends with Canadian students, South Korea has continued to rise in popularity, reaching 5th in the ranking this year.

Top Programs: North Americans are more interested in studying Master's programs overseas

As in past years, North America holds the most prospective students interested in summer, semester, or year programs abroad, reflecting the earlier mentioned preference for heading abroad for shorter periods of time.



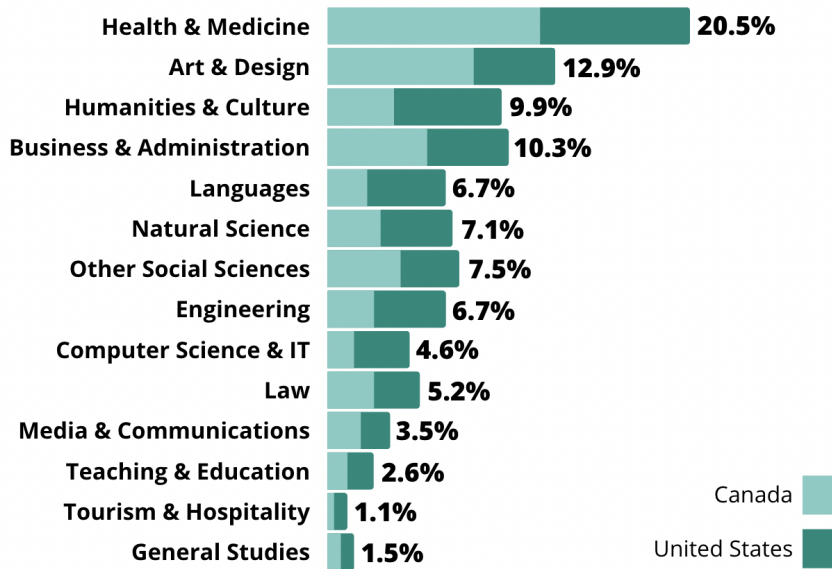
At first glance, you'll see that North American students show much more interest in getting a Bachelor's degree overseas over a Master's degree as compared to other regions. However, more and more North Americans actually want to study in a Master's program abroad each year. There are 25.2% more prospective students interested in Master's degrees since 2020.

Looking for more international students in your shorter programs? This group is more interested in studying abroad for a shorter period of time than any other region in the world. Programs that are 2 years or less in length attract more than 80% of North American prospective students.

What can we learn by looking at the top fields of study for North Americans wanting to head overseas?



What subject do North Americans want to study?



*This graph shows top study programs by average percentage. This differs from the data shown on the Student Insights 2021-2022 Dashboard, which is calculated by average respondent number.

Canadian students are especially interested in Art & Design. This subject is preferred by 16.5% of prospective students, the highest proportion out of any other global region in the world. General Studies, however, has fallen to the bottom of the list in Canada as compared to taking 9th last year. For Americans, the subject of Humanities & Culture attracts more than twice as much attention as it does for the average international student!

So, when do they want to start their studies abroad? With the limitations on travel as a continuing reality, almost 90% of students are looking to begin their travels in 2022 or later. When looking at last year’s data, students were nearly twice as eager to head overseas in the same year as the survey was taken.

Marketing Insights

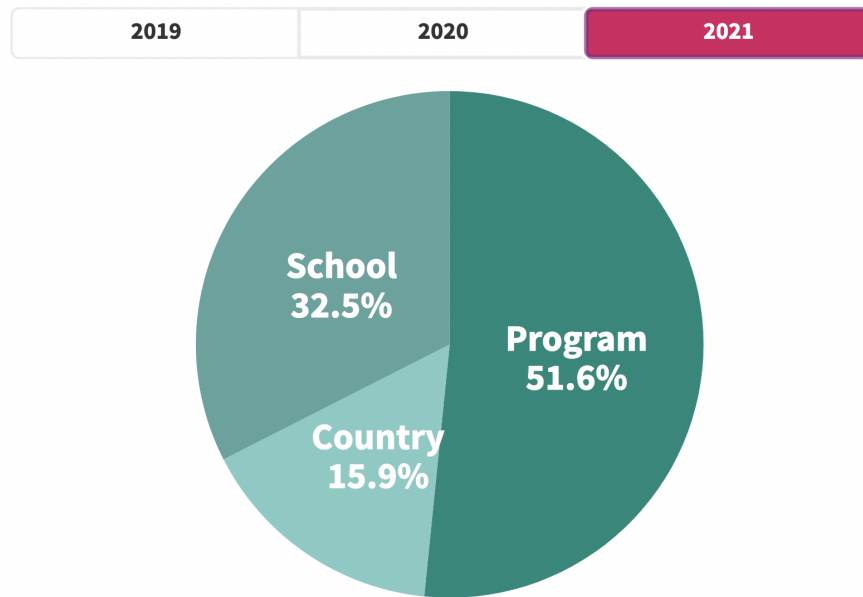
Top Considerations: Student stories are top indicators of teaching quality to Americans, while more Canadians judge quality using program ranking



To learn about how North Americans make study abroad decisions, we asked what they consider first when deciding where to study abroad.

[Click here](#) to see an interactive visualization of the graph below.

What do North Americans consider first when deciding where to study abroad?

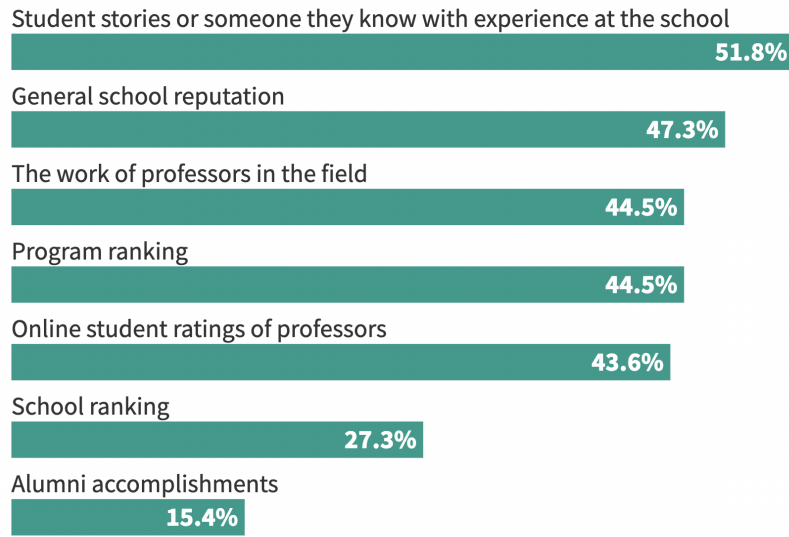


Since 2019, there has been a 24.6% decline in the proportion of North American students who consider the country first when deciding on a study abroad program. Study abroad programs and schools, however, have become first considerations more often over the last two years.

What is most important in a program to North American students who prioritize a program first? More than half consider the quality of professors and teaching as the most important factor when choosing a program. Just under work placement or internship opportunities at second, the content and modules of a program have become much more important to students this year (49.5%) than in last year's survey (33.3%).

An additional interesting difference within the region is that the study mode and flexibility of a course have double the importance to American students (41.8%) than for Canadians (20.4%).

How do North American students judge teaching quality?



Up to two answers allowed.

As student judgment of teaching quality seems to be the most important factor overall, let's take an inside look at how teaching quality is actually judged by those who prioritize it. When you look at the region overall, students say that hearing about personal experiences is key. About 51.8% say that student stories or people they know who have experience with teachers at a school would be their top indicator of quality, with the percentage even higher in the United States alone (59.5%). For 51.6% of Canadians, however, program ranking is valued the most, with online student ratings of professors as well as their professors' previous work and general school reputation seen as better measurements of quality than student stories.

Top Motivations: School or program rankings are only half as likely to motivate students from the United States to study abroad

So, what sets North Americans apart when it comes to their motivations to study abroad? Passion for experiencing a new culture or lifestyle is certainly present here - this option is 20% more popular in North America than the global average. North Americans also want to make friends or widen their professional network more than other parts of the world, with the exception of Europe. Learning a new language is a big reason to study abroad here too,

and is an option chosen the most by North Americans. About a quarter aim to expand their linguistic capabilities overseas (24.9%).

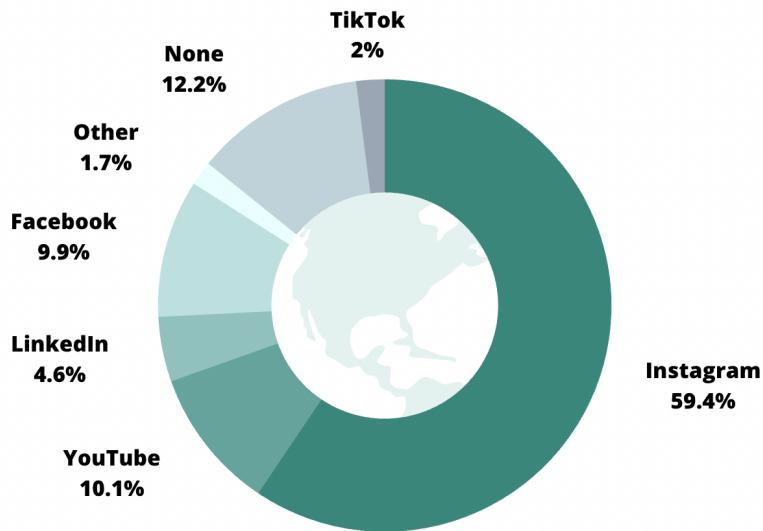
With the intercultural experience of studying abroad at the front of these students' minds, career-related aspects of study abroad are prioritized much less than for other students (besides those from Australia and New Zealand). Is your school not as highly-ranked as hoped? You're in luck, because rankings also don't seem to inspire Americans so much either. School and program rankings are less than half as motivational to this group (6.6%) than for the average international student (15.3%).

Does your school give extra language support to international students? This could ease some fears. There's been a 24.1% decrease in the percentage of students in North America that say that they are worried about not speaking the local language in their study abroad country since last year. Even with this drop from 2020, Canada and the United States still host the highest number of students nervous about their language skills in the world in 2021. Distance from home also reaches their top concerns, as the second-largest proportion of students anticipating homesickness are from North America (after Oceania).

Top Influences: North Americans find photos and videos of destinations to be twice as helpful than average in the decision-making process

After their family, North Americans along with students from Europe, the Middle East, Caucasasia, and Central Asia are more likely than students from other areas to listen to their friends when making a study abroad decision (36.6%).

Which social media platforms do North Americans find most helpful to get more information about a university?



Where does your school have a social media presence? In 2019, we asked prospective students in North America how important different social media platforms were when researching study abroad options. Two years ago, YouTube was the top answer, followed by Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook. What about in 2021? When we asked what students found to be the most useful to get more information about a university, almost 60% answered Instagram.

What else might influence North Americans to try out life as international students? Over half of all students from this area say that they are influenced by other students' stories of study abroad (52.1%). This is more than most other regions besides Australia and New Zealand. North Americans and Oceanic students also share a love for photos and videos of study abroad destinations. About 20% of North American and Oceanic students say that these forms of media are helpful when deciding where to study abroad, which is double the international average.

Student Voices from North America

Common Challenges

To understand the student perspective in this region more deeply, we asked: What are some common challenges for you and other students from your country who want to study abroad? Each response indicates the student's nationality, age, and top study abroad destination underneath.

- *"It is still expensive to study abroad. I also worry that I will be perceived negatively as a United States citizen and not taken seriously as a woman in my field."*
 - American; 26-35; Top Destination: United Kingdom
- *"I'm black, so fitting in without being discriminated against. The living expenses are rather low in Canada than in Asian countries"*
 - Canadian; 22-25, Top Destination: South Korea
- *"If it were more affordable, more people would study abroad. Another major issue is credits transferring from the US. Many classes we take in the US, such as general education classes do not transfer because Europe does not require such classes in their programs or study."*
 - American; 22-25; Top Destination: Ireland

Encouraging Students from North America

We also asked: What might encourage you to study abroad?

- *"Being shown a welcoming experience and being connected with a student already going to school that you can converse with."*
 - Canadian; 18-21; Top Destination: Australia
- *"Inclusivity and job advantages post-university."*
 - Canadian; Under 18; Top Destination: South Korea
- *"Seeing how committed the university truly is to creating a multicultural community (normally through social media)."*
 - American; 22-25; Top Destination: United Kingdom

The information analyzed and statements made in this report are interpretations of data collected from users at [educations.com](https://www.educations.com). The use of this information is at your own discretion.

Written by Summer Bennett