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MONDAY, JANUARY 14, 2013

UC steps up international recruiting initiatives

Iraqis join campus for the first time

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American students don't have his problems, Zagros Mustafa said. "They just have to study."

Mustafa, 29, came from Iraq's Kurdistan region and started last week as a full-time student at the University of Cincinnati, working toward a master's degree in political science. He's among the first Iraqis at UC on a student visa, a product of UC's participation in an Iraqi college fair.

"Everything is different," he said. "The banking system is different, transportation is different. Here, they use technology in everything. We missed that in our country. Some professors still don't have email."

International students such as Mustafa, whose family name in Iraq is Rebaz, do more than broaden the educational diversity of

STUDENTS FROM MANY LANDS

Here are the top 10 home countries for international students at UC in fall 2012.

- » China: 962
- » India: 604
- » South Korea: 191
- » Canada: 72
- » Taiwan: 61
- » Saudi Arabia: 46
- » Sri Lanka: 45
- » Japan: 43
- » Turkey: 34
- » Iran: 32

Source: UC international admissions

the UC campus. They also are a revenue stream, to the tune of more than \$10 million a year.

Desperate for more tuition dollars, every big university covets not just the diversity those students bring, but also the tuition revenue.

But UC was the only university from Greater Cin-

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Zagros Mustafa is from Iraq's Kurdistan region. He started last week as a full-time student at UC, working toward a master's degree in political science. The university began recruiting in Iraq over the last two years. THE ENQUIRER/JOSEPH FUQUA II

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Students

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cincinnati or Northern Kentucky to attend the college fair in Iraq.

The Iraqi program is the latest expansion of international student recruiting at UC, the region's biggest university with about 42,000 students overall.

Led by 962 students from China, the number of international students has swelled.

The total number of international students has jumped 41 percent since 2008 to 2,646 in fall 2012. But most of that growth has come in undergraduates, who have more than doubled their numbers to 851, with more coming every term.

The international students generally pay full tuition. But for public universities with limited capacity to build classrooms, labs and dorms, they also can strain the capacity to take more students.

"We try to be very conscious of an Ohio student losing a seat to an Iraqi student or another international student," said Jon Weller, UC's director of international admissions.

"The university's and I think

the State Department's interest is unusual. We have a unique opportunity to craft the future of Iraq."

Getting those students to UC and other university campuses around the country has become a cottage industry, with a network of dozens of global recruiters paid to find qualified students.

UC's network includes:

» Four employees in other countries, two in China and one each in India and Vietnam.

» About 40 agencies in 45 countries. UC pays them a commission of 9 percent of net tuition once a student enrolls. That's paid in installments through the first year, so UC doesn't pay if the student drops out.

Weller said UC paid less than \$100,000 to agents last year.

» Recruiting at college fairs all over the world.

Those include trips to the EducationUSA University Fair in Erbil, Iraq, the last two years, where UC was one of 22 U.S. universities.

» Services provided on campus once the student arrives at UC, including an ELS Language Center.

The practice of paying

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT OTHER LOCAL COLLEGES

Xavier University

» 66 full-time, 60 part-time undergraduates
» 48 full-time, 16 part-time graduate students
» 190 total

Northern Kentucky University

» 512 undergraduates
» 25 graduate students
» 537 total

Miami University – Oxford

» 837 undergraduates
» 262 graduate students
» 1,099 total

recruiting agencies has stirred controversy because universities can't legally pay commissions for American students.

But the practice is allowed overseas, raising accusations that colleges are buying students simply to collect their tuition dollars.

Weller acknowledged the controversy but said UC was trying to build up reputable agents.

"We know the students use

agents," he said. "We'd rather have a list that we can show a student that says, 'Here's five we work with and we think they're good.'"

Doubts remain about whether the agencies produce qualified students. A report by World Education Service, which researches international academic credentials, shows that 62 percent of students who use agents will require additional academic support, often help with English.

UC lists all of the agencies on its website, and Weller said it is "probably the most transparent university in the country when it comes to agents."

"We feel a university should only be doing that if they're doing it the right way," he said.

Iraqi university fairs bring applications to UC

For the last two years, UC admissions officers have traveled to Erbil, in Iraq's Kurdish region, to a college fair.

The October 2011 event produced nearly 200 applicants, and UC conditionally admitted about 30, including Mustafa.

The Iraqi government pays for travel, some training in English, the degree program and a

living stipend.

"It's probably the best way to build bridges," said Nazanin Turk, a former senior admissions officer at UC who attended both college fairs in Iraq. "That's why this is so important."

Weller said he doesn't think the program will bring huge numbers of Iraqis to UC.

Mustafa, who speaks Kurdish, Arabic, Farsi and English, grew up in a political family and is here with his wife and small child.

After getting the Iraqi government scholarship, he emailed some international admissions offices and heard back first from UC.

After taking two years to finish his degree, he will return home.

He's finding it difficult integrating with other students and with Cincinnati in general.

"Maybe I expected something different," he said. "It's a nice place to live. I have learned a lot. But for me, it's a place to study."

He also has spent a lot of his money on English classes and other non-tuition costs.

"These problems take a lot of energy for us," he said.