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## Could I get into my alma mater today?!

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## Quad 136

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### Could I get into my Alma Mater Today?!



Alumni from selective colleges occasionally joke that it's a good thing they went to their alma mater when they did, because they would never get in today.

As a recent *New York Times* [article](#) notes, these alumni are probably right but not for the reasons they might think. Admissions standards have not risen at most schools, but what has happened is that the number of applicants has. Some of this is from an increase in domestic population and the parallel increase in the percentage of students going to college. But at many of the most selective schools, the increasing difficulty in gaining admission is a function of what might be described as the globalization of the education market.

Over the last couple of decades an increasing percentage of great international students are looking to the US and other English-speaking countries for their higher education. This has been a boon to many institutions, even as it has made admission more of a challenge for domestic students. As the *New York Times* article notes:

*One overlooked factor is that top colleges are admitting fewer American students than they did a generation ago. Colleges have globalized over that time, deliberately increasing the share of their student bodies that come from overseas and leaving fewer slots for applicants from the United States. For American teenagers, it really is harder to get into Harvard — or Yale, Stanford, Brown, Boston College or many other elite colleges — than it was when today's 40-year-olds or 50-year-olds were applying.*

With classic *New York Times* provincialism, the story focuses primarily on the most competitive schools, especially those on the East Coast. But the article provides an important reminder that for less selective schools, especially in the demographically challenged Northeast and Midwest, there is a pool of great students interested in attending US institutions.

Students are often very brand name oriented hence the significant growth in attendance at the most selective and most well-known US institutions, but there are plenty of strong international students who would benefit from going to less well-known US institutions. At the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University we have seen our international population grow to about 5% in recent years. I expect it to grow more in the future.

Small residential liberal arts schools can be a particularly good fit for international students who are looking for a community and the kind of personal attention and acculturation that is harder to provide at big research universities.

Overall, higher education will continue to benefit from the growing numbers of talented foreign students, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, even as those same students provide healthy competition for domestic students.

An interesting economic aside related to this phenomenon: much of the cost of globalization in the developed world has fallen on unskilled workers who find themselves having to compete with lower paid workers abroad. It is at America's colleges and universities that the middle and upper middle-class are finding themselves exposed to the competition from globalization, though this competition is occurring in a product market (higher education) rather than in the labor market. On the other hand, of course, the developed economies also **benefit from the influx of human capital** in the form of talented foreigners, who make our economy stronger and bring skills, ambition and entrepreneurial skills.

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).