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# Global Pathways: The Internationalization of UNH

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## **Global Pathways: The Internationalization of UNH**

By Nicholas Davini

### **Introduction**

The notably increased enrollment of international students at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) is not simply the result of global market forces, but is due in large part to strategic decisions made by the university. The expansion of international education over the past decade has demonstrated the demand for American education, and universities have striven to embrace this demand while simultaneously building campus diversity, global reach, and financial stability. But most public institutions lack the resources and expertise to significantly increase international enrollment on their own, and subsequently turn to partnerships with a number of educational pathway programs. These pathway programs use extensive recruitment networks to connect with students who seek a post-secondary education but lack the English proficiency to apply directly to a university in the US. After completing English language and academic requirements designed by the program and set forth by a partner institution, pathway students matriculate into full-time university coursework and graduate alongside their domestic peers. Navitas is one such pathway program, and has been partnered with UNH since 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Partnerships between public research institutions and private pathway programs have become increasingly common over the past few years, bringing about many of the demographic and educational changes sought by universities. UNH has certainly seen a substantial increase in international student enrollment since contracting Navitas; surveys suggest that pathway students

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhgssp.com/>

are doing well, both in the program and the university. The international students' tuition - they typically pay the full out-of-state sum - has also helped UNH to face a crisis of decreased state funding. Hence, UNH was able to delve into a vast pool of available international students, while sustaining a larger institutional mission.<sup>2</sup>

These partnerships also have challenges. Admissions fraud and pedagogical difficulties are among the problems that can make pathway programs seem more detrimental than beneficial to the operations of a university. Skeptics also question the for-profit motivations of pathway programs and their recruiters, claiming the programs are at odds with the educational priorities of public institutions, while others worry that they dilute the quality of an American education. The Navitas program at UNH has been scrutinized for many of the same issues, leaving many wondering whether they are ethically and logistically sound.

After five years of partnership with UNH, an external review of Navitas in 2016 acknowledged the accomplishments and shortcomings of the program. For three days, the reviewers listened to faculty, administrators, students, and staff from UNH and Navitas. The process was then used to create a document highlighting the most prominent challenges facing the pathway program, followed by proposals to solve each problem. Although it remains unclear just how much has been done to address the challenges, recognizing them in writing holds Navitas and UNH symbolically accountable to improve the partnership.

In the end, pathway programs appear to be the most suitable option for UNH and many other public institutions attempting to rapidly internationalize their campus. Universities have

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<sup>2</sup> "The University of New Hampshire is the state's public research university, providing comprehensive, high-quality undergraduate programs and graduate programs of distinction. Its primary purpose is learning: students collaborating with faculty in teaching, research, creative expression and service." UNH 2019, Office of the President, Mission of the University of New Hampshire <https://www.unh.edu/president>, accessed Jan. 30, 2019

every incentive to engage with the demands of a rapidly changing world, and the recruitment capabilities and experience of Navitas accomplishes what most universities cannot. The results appear to be largely positive so far, and the parties involved seem to understand the challenges they need to address in order to succeed. If these challenges are taken in stride, pathway programs and universities can sustain a mutually beneficial collaboration. At the same time, while driving the movement of international education forward, both parties must prioritize the wellbeing and success of students who enroll through pathway programs.

This study examines the recent internationalization of UNH, tracing the steps taken to join the cohort of public universities striving for increased global reach. By contracting the recruitment and orientation services of the Navitas pathway program, UNH has taken measures to capitalize on the surging demand of international students pursuing higher education. Such aspirations are expressed by the university in the 2010-2020 Strategic Plan<sup>3</sup> and the Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan<sup>4</sup>, demonstrating how and why the university came to its partnership with Navitas. Writings on Navitas and other similar programs reveal some of the benefits and challenges of such a partnership, and inform my conclusions about their role at universities.

## **International Education**

The current relationship between universities and pathway programs was preceded by the rising international demand for an American education, increasing especially over the past couple decades. Although the US has a long history of hosting international students, the number of international students applying to study here has more recently multiplied. According to a

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<sup>3</sup> UNH 2010, “The University of New Hampshire in 2020: Breaking Silos, Transforming Lives, Reimagining the University.”

<sup>4</sup> UNH 2012, “2010-2020 Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan.”

2015 article by Laura McKenna titled “The Globalization of America’s Colleges,” the rate of international students studying in the U.S. increased annually for 11 consecutive years, from roughly 583,000 in 2006-2007 to over 1 million students in 2015-2016.<sup>5</sup> The 2016-2017 school year was the first time the trend slowed, decreasing by 3.3%.<sup>6</sup> Educational demand is concentrated in a couple areas, the most popular majors including business management and the fields in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.<sup>7</sup> Around half of the students are from China and India, while other half of the international student population comes from over 200 other countries.<sup>8</sup> Chinese students alone make up one third of all international students in America.<sup>9</sup>

The expansion of international education is attributed to a number of push and pull factors. One reason the U.S. is seeing more international students is because it has over 4,000 colleges and universities, and many of these American institutions have a reputation “associated with quality and merit-based admissions,” making a diploma from one of these schools attractive to foreign employers.<sup>10</sup> Top universities in countries like China and India are also highly selective and cannot meet the needs of tens of thousands of qualified students who would like to pursue a post-secondary education.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the growing economies of China and India have created a rising middle class that can afford tuition at American schools, which is the most

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<sup>5</sup> Ross, Kelly Mae. “6 Things to Know About International Students in the U.S.” *U.S. News and World Report*, U.S News and World Report, 13 Nov. 2017, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2017-11-13/6-things-to-know-about-international-students-in-the-us>

<sup>6</sup> Ross 2017

<sup>7</sup> McKenna, Laura. “The Globalization of America’s Colleges” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 18 Nov, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/11/globalization-american-higher-ed/416502/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> McKenna 2015

<sup>10</sup> McKenna 2015

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

expensive in the world; most international students pay full tuition for an American education and in 2015 contributed \$30 billion to the U.S. economy.<sup>12</sup> Only about 20 percent of international students receive funding from their respective American institution, while an even smaller percentage receives funding from colleges or governments in their home countries.<sup>13</sup> Wealthy students from countries like China and India are often in a position to choose from a number of options for college. Their local educational systems are notoriously competitive and have pushed students to look outside their countries for a quality education, making universities in the US attractive options. With this trend in mind, pathway programs have helped many Western universities reduce the barriers of entry for international students.

### **Pathway Programs**

Partnerships with pathway programs have become an increasingly common option for universities looking to increase their international student population “for reasons both noble and financial.”<sup>14</sup> Utilizing recruitment agencies, these programs bring in degree-seeking students whose English proficiency is below the standard for direct entry into a US university. The general structure of a pathway program includes students taking English classes until they matriculate into mainstream courses and taking academic courses to accumulate credits toward a prospective major.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Redden, Elizabeth. “A Look at the Landscape of Pathway Programs for International Students Run in Cooperation with for-Profit Partners.” *Inside Higher Ed*, 30 Apr. 2014, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/04/30/look-landscape-pathway-programs-international-students-run-cooperation-profit>

To analyze their operations and compare the relative success of different pathway programs, Elizabeth Redden, journalist for *Inside Higher Ed*, conducted a survey of the major companies operating in the US, including UK-based INTO University Partnerships, Australian-based Navitas, and Kaplan, a US for-profit university and testing center (Redden 2015).<sup>15</sup>

According to this study,

partnerships range from short-term, typically five- to 10-year contractual arrangements in which universities outsource certain recruitment and pathway program management and/or instructional responsibilities to an outside company ...to more elaborate joint ventures, in which the university and company form a separate for-profit entity and make mutual investments and share in returns.<sup>16</sup>

Navitas and Kaplan tend to work with the first model, as is the case with UNH's 2010-2020 contract with Navitas. The second model is used by INTO and has been well established at USF, with integrated classrooms and curriculum under university jurisdiction.

Academically, such programs operate on a "spectrum from isolation to integration, with some institutions opting for sheltered classes exclusively for pathway students while others mix students into mainstream university classrooms for at least some of their courses."<sup>17</sup> Navitas at UNH exemplifies a sheltered class model in which pathway students have their own class sections without domestic students. The program at USF is integrated, which means that it pairs pathway students with domestic students for introductory classes. An integrated class model may deepen the immersion of international students, but can also impede the learning of domestic students, who tend to move at a faster pace while learning in their first language.

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<sup>15</sup> The primary example in the study was the partnership between INTO and the University of Southern Florida, while using data on the other programs to contextualize the landscape of pathway programs.

<sup>16</sup> Redden 2014

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Mechanisms for academic oversight also vary. In some programs, the corporate partner hires the instructors who teach introductory courses subject to the approval of the corresponding university departments. At other institutions, all pathway classes are delivered by the university's own faculty.<sup>18</sup> At UNH, Navitas hires staff to teach their introductory classes, but all English classes are taught through the English as a Second Language Institute (ESLI) under the UNH English department.<sup>19</sup>

One common feature of pathway programs is their use of recruitment agents. According to Redden, "The growth in pathway programs is very much tied to the increasing acceptance of agency-based recruitment, in which colleges pay agents a commission for every international student sent their way."<sup>20</sup> Critics worry that the for-profit motivations of the agents are at odds with the educational priorities of universities and "increase the risk of misrepresentation or outright fraud in the application process."<sup>21</sup> The use of commission-based recruiters has been outlawed for domestic students for just this reason, but has been recently accepted through pathway programs.<sup>22</sup> Redden also notes that "the National Association for College Admission Counseling cleared the way for further agent-based recruiting, revising its rules to explicitly permit colleges to engage in commission-based recruiting overseas, provided they do so with accountability, integrity and transparency."<sup>23</sup> That condition is more difficult to uphold than it seems, since university admissions are sometimes unable to detect suspicious applications.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Redden 2014

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



Considering this problem, there are additional defenses against abuse that help maintain high educational and ethical standards. In the case of INTO at USF, there was an intensive vetting of the program before they signed a contract, including a site visit and references from other universities that were already partnered.<sup>24</sup> They also use a fraud prevention unit in China, “which tends to be ground zero when it comes to discussions of application fraud;” this unit checks transcripts and requires that agents sign for authenticity of each transcript.<sup>25</sup> These procedures are meant to keep fraud down and facilitate a healthy relationship between pathway program and university. Perhaps third-party fraud prevention units should be the benchmark when it comes to maintaining educational integrity in a pathway partnership.

### **The UNH Strategic Plan**

Since taking on the Navitas program in 2010, the number of international students at UNH has vastly increased. As a public research university, UNH primarily serves students from NH and surrounding states including Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Maine. The university has faced new challenges in the last decade, including heavily decreased state funding and the call to become environmentally, financially, and culturally sustainable. Actively engaging with the boom of international education, reinforcing diversity, and ensuring financial growth and global reach in its institutional mission became important in finding a solution. A part of a much larger vision for the institution, the contract with Navitas has played a large role in the global reach of UNH. The effort to internationalize UNH can be directly traced to two documents: the 2010 Strategic Plan<sup>26</sup> and the *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan*.<sup>27</sup> The 2010

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Redden 2014

<sup>26</sup> UNH 2010

<sup>27</sup> UNH 2012

Strategic Plan detailed a set of changes to reinforce the social, financial, and academic mission of the university. To recruit international students at scale, UNH made a concerted effort to attract students through the Navitas pathway program. The *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan* outlined the social goals of UNH and its specific motivations to embrace ethnic and international diversity among many other identities.

The 2010 Strategic Plan was originally titled “*The University of New Hampshire in 2020: Breaking Silos, Transforming Lives, Reimagining the University*,” and built on the ideals of previous strategic plans set forth by UNH. The plan is self-described as a “blueprint created by hundreds of faculty, staff, students, and community members that is guiding the university’s success amid the rapidly-growing challenges facing higher education.”<sup>28</sup> Guiding the plan were *Five Requisites for Change* and *Ten Strategic Academic Initiatives*, which laid out the priorities to strengthen and grow UNH over the next ten years. Combining social, financial and educational goals, the plan aimed to strengthen the university as a public research institution. Since its initiation, the *2010 Strategic Plan* has inspired a number of accomplishments including “the opening of Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics, the creation of UNH School of Law, the launch of UNH School of Marine Science and Ocean Engineering, and the launch of the Carsey School of Public Policy,” as well as the expansion of the UNH Manchester campus, the creation of UNHInnovation “for research and commercialization resources,” and “expanded global reach through foreign student enrollments, study-away programs, faculty exchanges, visiting scholars, and arts and cultural programs.”<sup>29</sup> The last accomplishment is a milestone for the *Academic Strategic Initiative* to “Internationalize UNH,” and is developed even further in the more recently updated version of the 2010 Strategic Plan.

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<sup>28</sup> UNH 2015, “UNH Strategic Plan”

<sup>29</sup> UNH 2015

In a February 2014 State of the University address, President Huddleston requested that the original 2010 Strategic Plan be updated to “affirm the university’s direction and secure its long-term vitality in the face of continued rapid changes confronting higher education and global, national, and local and regional economies and societies.”<sup>30</sup> The president provided *Five Areas of Focus* to guide the updated Plan, including “innovation and a well-trained workforce through STEM education, completing a successful fundraising campaign through advancement, strengthening the UNH brand, strengthening and diversifying enrollment, and deepening research and commercialization.”<sup>31</sup> In 2014, following the call for the renewal of the university’s goals, a Strategic Plan Steering Committee proposed a new set of guiding principles. In place of the *Five Requisites for Change* were *Six Visions and Values*, and the *Ten Strategic Academic Initiatives* were reduced to Five. Respondents justified the changes, claiming “what was designated as an initiative (e.g. *Inclusive Excellence*) was really a value and guiding principle for UNH.”<sup>32</sup> The meaning of this change is vague, but the intention to embrace various identities appears to remain important to the mission of the university even after the alterations.

The original intent to diversify UNH was stated in the *Ten Strategic Academic Initiatives*, the third of which is “*Internationalizing UNH*,” and the seventh is “*Inclusive Excellence*.”<sup>33</sup> Although these explicitly listed values were removed from the 2015 update, the sentiment is more or less continued in the *Six Visions and Values*, as well as the *Strategic Academic Initiative* titled “*A Learning Centered Environment for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.” One of the *Six Visions and Values* is “a culture of diversity and inclusion,” and is further explained as such:

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<sup>30</sup> UNH 2015

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

UNH values, and is deeply committed to, enhancing and supporting an inclusive and diverse community of faculty, staff and students. We recognize the need to be open to innovative, nontraditional and highly proactive strategies that can contribute to the results we seek in our initiative of “*Making UNH More Inclusive*.”<sup>34</sup>

A later subsection of “*A Learning Centered Environment for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*” expresses the intention to “provide increased financial and educational supports for international, first generation, and minority students,” and to “increase international student access and international institutional partnerships.”<sup>35</sup>

While the university shows that it values diversity and inclusion as part of its mission through these statements, the brief explanations do not provide extensive details about how these efforts will support target populations. Supporting diversity initiatives in writing is standard practice for universities, but putting such statements into action is a more abstract challenge. Additionally, these statements beg the question of *why* the institution values diversity and inclusion in the first place. The answers are not in the 2010 Strategic Plan, but can instead be found in the *the Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan*, which provides a deeper exploration into the university’s motivations and steps proposed to increase diversity.

### **The Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan**

The 2010-2020 *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan* at UNH is an “outgrowth of the University’s planning process and an extension of the 2004-2009 Diversity Strategic Plan,” “intended to guide the University of New Hampshire toward its goals of advancing access,

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<sup>34</sup> UNH 2015

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

diversity, and excellence.”<sup>36</sup> “*Inclusive Excellence*” is defined as “a principle that was introduced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in 2003,” as “a comprehensive and well-coordinated set of systemic actions that focus specifically on fostering greater diversity, equity, inclusion, and accountability at every level of University life.”<sup>37</sup> This Plan (1) demonstrates how UNH has positioned diversity within its multifaceted plan for progress, justifying it as an essential value for institutional and cultural wellbeing; (2) establishes a working definition of, and distinctions between, diversity and inclusion; and (3) argues for the importance of diversity in a learning environment. Since the *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan* proposes strategic steps to increase diversity and inclusion of students, faculty, staff, and administrators, specifically naming the partnership with Navitas as part of the process, it becomes the most comprehensive explanation for the role of diversity in the *UNH Strategic Plan* and the university’s broader mission.

The *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan* defines a diverse and inclusive university as “a learning community that is enriched by persons of different races, genders, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, ages, abilities, sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, marital status, languages, veteran status and religious beliefs.”<sup>38</sup> The Plan explains UNH motivation to seek greater diversity because “participation in a diverse educational community will enrich students’ education and enhance their ability to participate in a rapidly evolving, multicultural nation.”<sup>39</sup> The Plan also differentiates between diversity and inclusion, by pointing out that “a truly diverse community entails more than drawing together people of different backgrounds and

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<sup>36</sup> UNH 2012

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> UNH 2012

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

circumstances; the fact of inhabiting a common learning community must become a basis for genuine interaction, leading to an increased understanding and respect.”<sup>40</sup> Finally, the Plan elaborates on the benefits of diversity and inclusion, and outlines the plan to pursue the goal of inclusive excellence.

There are multiple reasons the university seeks to increase diversity and inclusion, especially in underrepresented racial and ethnic identities. First, UNH recognizes the fact that racial and ethnic demographics are changing nationally and statewide, and seeks to reflect that “inclusiveness in higher education has become a national priority.”<sup>41</sup> The effort to meet population changes is not only a matter of fairness, it is also justified in a later statement:

In a 2004 report by the Study Circles on the Compelling Interest of Diversity, participants wrote: “Issues of diversity not only raise questions of morality, politics, and economics related to inclusion and equal opportunity, but they are also critical to determining the quality of education offered at colleges and universities across the country. In pursuit of academic excellence, UNH has a responsibility to establish a diverse workforce and cadre of leaders.”<sup>42</sup>

The above statement clarifies that it is not only the responsibility of a public university to engage with demographic change; it also echoes the idea from the introduction of the *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan* that diversity bolsters UNH educational mission. To support this claim, the *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan* references studies that suggest diversity improves educational quality and rigor:

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> UNH 2012

Research by King and Shuford (1996) indicates that a multicultural perspective is a more cognitively complex developmental level than is a mono-cultural perspective. More recently, Niemann and Maruyama (2005, as cited by Kortz & Tolbert, 2011) reported that diversity initiatives have resulted in improved outcomes in critical thinking and civic engagement.” As a result, “diversity and inclusive excellence helps UNH meet other goals such as developing critical thinking, promoting students’ cognitive and ethical development, addressing the university’s responsibility to prepare students for a global society, and developing effective leaders for tomorrow’s diverse society (Hurtado, 2005, as cited by Kortz & Tolbert, 2011).”<sup>43</sup>

In the remainder of the document, the Plan lists its strategic goals by focusing on five themes: *Organizational Structure, Curriculum, Campus Climate, Recruitment and Retention, and Campus Engagement*. Each theme describes how inclusive excellence will be carried out at every level of University life. The Plan presents thorough processual details, including Navitas, a reference to which appears in the section titled “*Recruitment and Retention*.” Embedded not only in the UNH Strategic Plan but also the *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan*, the incorporation of a pathway program into the university has been a priority since 2010.

The current role of the comprehensive *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan* is unclear. The *Strategic Academic Initiative for Inclusive Excellence* was removed from the *2010 Strategic Plan* when it was updated in 2015, reframing this initiative as more of a guiding value for the university than an explicit initiative.<sup>44</sup> This raises the question of what exactly happened to the Plan after the update, and how closely the university has followed the proposals set forth in the *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan*. While the partnership between UNH and Navitas indicates

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> This decision was based on survey responses.

that some of the proposals were taken in stride, the updated Plan's reference to diversity and inclusion as a guiding principle and not an explicit initiative signals that the document could be understood not as commitment but lagging accountability. Nevertheless, a contract with Navitas to aid in recruitment and retention of international students demonstrates that UNH takes the goal of enriching the education of all students at UNH seriously, even if we do not know how closely the University followed the *Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan*. Below, we will explore the UNH and Navitas collaboration which has operated for almost a decade now.

### **Navitas/UNH GSSP at UNH**

Navitas is a publicly traded Australian company accelerating the recruitment and admission of international students with partner universities in Australia, the U.K., Canada, and the United States.<sup>45</sup> The company offers a pathway for students whose English proficiency is lower than the standard necessary to apply directly to a university and allows universities to draw from a much larger pool of prospective students. Navitas currently manages pathway programs in partnership with the Universities of Massachusetts at Boston, Dartmouth, and Lowell, the University of New Hampshire, and Western Kentucky University.<sup>46</sup> The UNH/Navitas partnership was part of the *2010 Strategic Plan*, and the two signed an initial 10-year contract.

Navitas at UNH, since renamed the UNH Global Student Success Program (UNH GSSP), offers two pathway programs that together form the International University Transfer Program (IUTP). The IUTP Academic program is equivalent to the first year of a bachelor's degree and consists of three program streams in Business & Economics, Engineering & Physical Sciences,

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<sup>45</sup> Redden 2014

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



and Liberal Arts.<sup>47</sup> While the academic classes are taught by Navitas employees, they meet the requirements of the host university. The IUTP English program provides students the opportunity to improve their English proficiency while earning up to 16 academic credits for English as a Second Language (ESL) coursework. The ESL curriculum of the Department of English at UNH is administered by the English as a Second Language Institute (ESLI). The program focuses on English reading, writing and comprehension. After completing at least “28 credit hours of successful study, meeting minimum GPA requirements of the major department, and successfully passing ESL 450 or ENGL 401A, [GSSP students] are then matriculated as mainstream, degree-seeking students.”<sup>48</sup>

Since the offset of the partnership with UNH in 2010, GSSP has largely succeeded in its goals. The program has helped UNH enroll growing numbers of international students: from 6 students in May 2011 to 394 in fall 2015, with students hailing from 27 different countries.<sup>49</sup> As of 2015, 78% of the students were from China, while the remaining percentage came mostly from other Asian countries and Russia. Of those who matriculated into UNH full-time, the average GPA was 3.20 and 49% entered Paul College of Business and Economics, 27% into the College of Engineering and Physical Science, and 21% into the College of Liberal Arts.<sup>50</sup> As of 2015, 92% of students who completed the pathway program were listed as active students or had graduated from UNH.<sup>51</sup> As is the case with many other universities, the partnership with GSSP is an additional source of revenue for UNH. In a 2015 self-study, GSSP listed royalties remitted to UNH totaling \$8 million, with \$4.4 million to ESLI, \$16.5 million in housing, dining, and

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<sup>47</sup> Navitas 2015, “UNH Self-Study Report”

<sup>48</sup> Navitas 2015

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> It is unclear if the GPA was calculated before or after matriculation.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

student fees, and an additional \$22.8 million in downstream revenue after students matriculated into UNH, for a total contribution of \$51.7 million.<sup>52</sup> The study does not list the profit margin for GSSP or how the funds were distributed to faculty, employees, administrators, or shareholders. Given the statistics provided by Navitas, the partnership appears to have found success by several measures. Although the UNH-Navitas partnership appears to have delivered on many of its goals, other issues have risen over the years.

### **Challenges, Navitas Self-Study and External Review**

In September 2016 an external review board heard testimonies from ESLI Faculty, Navitas students, faculty, and administrators, and UNH faculty to assess any challenges facing the partnership between UNH and Navitas. The Review Panel “evaluated the enrollment marketing and recruitment, admission to UNH through Navitas, English as a Second Language Institute overviewed the ESLI, interaction between ESLI and Navitas, Navitas courses, matriculating into UNH from Navitas and faculty concerns.”<sup>53</sup> After the review process was completed, the panel “highlighted concerns and provided recommendations for Navitas and UNH to consider” for the remaining years of the initial contract period.”<sup>54</sup>

Many of the concerns raised in the Review were directly tied to student experience, and initially appeared to be the result of individual actors in the partnership. In the Enrollment Marketing and Recruitment section, students and teachers agreed that the length of time necessary for IUTP English students to complete the program was often longer than advertised. The average duration of the IUTP Academic pathway was said to be two to three semesters, and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Navitas and UNH 2017, “Review of Navitas Self-Study UNH Self Study Report Review”

<sup>54</sup> Navitas and UNH 2017

four to six semesters for the IUTP English track. Each additional semester still cost the full out-of-state tuition that most international students pay for, and their stagnation felt exploitative to both internal and external observers. Furthermore, the gap between expectations and reality for many students did not end with the completion of the program. In the transition from the pathway to mainstream courses, many students were not accepted into the college they had originally anticipated entering. Following the trend with international students across the US, most GSSP students came to UNH thinking they would study business or science. Yet, after they finished the required credits, many students were ultimately barred from the respective programs. The high denial rate has resulted in what one advisor called “a pipeline of disgruntled students flowing into other colleges,” which is less than ideal for the schools that receive them.<sup>55</sup> The pattern appeared to be due not only to the competitive nature of an individual school, but also the caliber of the students’ preparation and qualifications.

Other concerns about the pathway program were tied to issues of English proficiency standards. First, the scores from two different test formats were taken into account for admissions, including the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Although both types of test scores were accepted, different authorities disagree on their equivalency. The Navitas International Student Guide set the minimum score for entry at 4.5 IELTS, which supposedly corresponded to a score of 50 on the TOEFL. But the Educational Testing Service, the organization that administers the TOEFL, claims 4.5 IELTS actually equates more to 32-34 on the TOEFL, well below the minimum for academic study at a US institute of higher education.<sup>56</sup> Problems with English proficiency testing then fall largely in the laps of ESLI, which is separate of Navitas but still held accountable for

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<sup>55</sup> Navitas and UNH 2017

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

teaching English to the pathway students. Since the introduction of GSSP students at the University, many of them have struggled to complete their time in the IUTP English pathway and matriculate into UNH. In 2016, the passing rate for IUTP English was around 65%, and since GSSP students made up the vast majority of students in the ESL program, the problems they faced reflected poorly on ESLI.<sup>57</sup> Naturally, ESLI faculty felt that the blame for the failing students fell upon them unfairly and claimed that about 50% of the students from Navitas arrived below minimum English proficiency.<sup>58</sup> The shortcomings of IUTP English raised questions about Navitas' commitment, and if the company allowed any questionable practices to take place around admissions. Much like ESLI, the students' performance was tied to the admissions department, but also suggested outside influence. At the time of the review, UNH Admissions was technically responsible for evaluating the qualifications of GSSP students but was only receiving copies of transcripts. The original test scores and essays were sent by agents, making them difficult to verify and thus leaving room for fraud. As mentioned in the introduction, fraud is a known problem with international admissions, especially with Chinese students. This is no small problem, again because Chinese students account for the majority of all international students in the US. The ESLI faculty who spoke in the 2016 Review also felt that the 78% Chinese majority in GSSP made instruction and integration difficult.<sup>59</sup> In response to this issue, the teachers believed that diversifying the student body at GSSP would enrich the experience and reduce nationality-based cliques. This proposal could yield positive results but also faces the reality that a third of all international students in the US are Chinese.<sup>60</sup> Can Navitas really be

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<sup>57</sup> Navitas and UNH 2017

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> McKenna 2015

held responsible for that sort of change when the larger trend seemingly dictates international student demographics on campus?

Many problems highlighted in the 2016 Review are tied to individual entities at the university, but appear to be beyond their control. The problems facing the partnership are often tied to ESLI and Admissions, but they suggest more about the Navitas recruitment practices and network. The agents they work with are paid on commission, a method which raises eyebrows when so many students appear to be entering the program below minimum standards. When students are accepted into pathway programs without meeting the required level of English proficiency, it only sets them up to later be denied from matriculating into their intended field. The possibility for fraudulent admissions leaves one asking why such a partnership would carry on if it might dilute a university's standards. The cynical answer appears to be financial compensation, with students paying tuition to the university whether or not they move on from the pathway. This furthermore undermines the UNH policy on diversity and inclusion, which claims that educational integrity is its ultimate goal. Speaking to diversity initiatives, it is unclear to what degree increased international enrollment can be considered a success if the majority of the students are from a relatively homogeneous group. In spite of these questions, the review process is evidence of both parties engaging with criticism to improve the pathway experience. The partnership was still young at the time, and growing pains were to be expected in the first years. With this in mind, the partnership has the potential to be much better for the students, faculty, and administrators involved, and align closer to UNH educational values. The UNH/GSSP contract will be up for review in 2020, and should provide an opportunity to see whether or not the problems outlined in the 2016 Review were taken in stride.

## **Conclusion**

Striving to remain competitive in the changing landscape of higher education, UNH has joined the cohort of universities expanding global reach through private contracts. The University has found some of the success it hoped for with UNH GSSP, increasing diversity and balancing enrollment among other achievements. Yet, while the risk for exploiting international students and undermining UNH's integrity remains, the value of pathway programs will continue to be questioned. The network of commission-based recruitment agents allows universities to access the masses of prospective international students, but such recruitment is also suspect to corruption. Safeguards have to be in place to ensure fair marketing and recruitment of pathway students, such as a third-party fraud detection unit used by INTO. If security for and fairness in admissions process cannot be guaranteed, UNH may seek a contract with another pathway program or design its own in-house recruitment. If, however, the problems outlined in the 2016 Review were jointly addressed by GSSP and UNH, the existing partnership may continue to align with the university's educational mission and make for a sustainable pathway.

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