

# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE USE OF COMMERCIAL AGENTS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurialism, globalism, and neoliberalism have influenced higher education to adopt a business model. Some critics view the university as having strayed from its public service role; others see this adaptation as relevant to a modern global society. Response to these influences is seen in current efforts to internationalize campuses and increase revenues by recruiting international students. As competition for international students increases, many institutions have begun using agents, yet this practice is often considered unethical. Because administrators need to make informed decisions in the best interests of students, this study explored the ethical dimensions of this growing phenomenon.

This multi-case qualitative study examined the experiences of international students recruited through agents and of institutional personnel who recruit through agents. Data were collected from interviews with recruiting officers and international students, a survey of recruiting officers, and documents from the institutions, agents, and professional organizations.

As data were analyzed through a framework defining ethical as “other-regarding,” four distinct themes emerged—power and control, information flow and accuracy, financial and recruiting benefits, and accountability and trust. A new model evolved to equitably serve each stakeholder. Implications for practice specify guidelines to protect the student’s best interests and the institution’s reputation during all stages of the recruitment process. Future research would explore the ethicality issue from the agent’s perspective or examine the impact of culture on the perception of ethicality in the process of recruitment.