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**Ben:** Hello there IELTS students. In this episode, we're going to be talking-- not stalking-- we're going to be talking to Dane Brinkmeyer and he's from Bradley University in the US and he's going to be telling us all about the facilities and everything that international students are able to do at Bradley University. So, we're in for a treat today. Bradley, could you just introduce yourself? Tell us a bit about yourself and of course, Bradley University if that's all right.

**Dane:** Absolutely. My name is Dane Brinkmeyer. I am the assistant director of graduate and international admissions at Bradley University. Bradley University is what we call a mid-sized institution. So, right now we have about a total population of about 6,000 students and we have both undergraduate and graduate programs. And I think the important thing for everyone to know



about Bradley is we believe that our mid-sized institution makes a big difference. Our school is not too small and it's not too large either and what that means for students is that students get a lot more interaction with faculty. The faculty know their names, the classes are relatively a good size. So, that's one positive thing. And another positive thing is that we are focused on really experiential learning; hands-on learning. So, for example, at bigger institutions, you might be sitting in a lecture hall for like the first two years before you actually start learning things hands-on, but for Bradley University, we focus on hands-on learning right away. So, that is a huge plus I think especially for those students who are better at more like working with their hands. Bradley is a good institution for them.

**Ben:** Absolutely. And I think as well for international students that may not have the same language abilities as the native counterparts-- the native English-speaking counterparts, doing hands-on classes could be quite an effective way of like leveling the playing field.



**Dane:** Absolutely. I'm a hands-on learner myself and especially if you're having difficulty understanding concepts verbally, I think hands-on learning is a very effective way.

**Ben:** Absolutely. Yeah. I totally agree with you there. I used to love doing the hands-on classes at college. That was just my most favorite part. For me, I'm also like a very hands-on guy and this is how I learn as well. So, I could totally see the value there. Now, with regards to international students, what's the situation in Bradley? Are you open for international students at the moment?

**Dane:** Yes. We are open to international students for sure. This fall semester, we actually had a surprisingly higher number of intake than what we were expecting, but we also had a lot of deferrals as well and that was mostly because of students not being able to get embassy appointments or some embassies still being closed. A lot of our students for those that couldn't attend, our students asked to defer to the spring semester which of course we happily obliged.



**Ben:** Interesting, interesting. Yeah. I guess I hadn't thought about that that maybe a student in Nepal or India can only get to the US or get abroad with the help of the embassy and if their embassy is shut because of COVID and what not, it can make it incredibly more challenging. And how did Bradley handle like the pandemic situation with the lockdowns and travel bans and all of this? Did you move classes online?

**Dane:** We did. I don't think-- well, I should say I joined Bradley in April of this year, so I'm not entirely sure on what they did when COVID started, but for the most part, we offered a mix of in-person and online. We definitely had hybrid learning options available. Starting this fall though, we've been mostly moving to in-person or hybrid model.

**Ben:** I see. Excellent. And what facilities are there for international students?

**Dane:** When you say facilities, could you clarify?



**Ben:** Yes. Sorry. Like I mean I've spoken with other universities and they like have a center for international students or they have like community building programs and things like that.

**Dane:** Yes. So, for our international students, I would say especially for an institution of our size, we have some pretty good support systems in place. First of all, we have a team of staff members in student affairs although they are not specifically for international students. They help support our overall student populations and international students know to go to those staff members whenever they need assistance with something. So, whether it be as simple as just asking a question about the health center on campus or wanting to know how to open a bank account, we have staff on hand who are able to answer to those questions. We also have a good number of student organizations for students from certain countries or certain belief systems so that students can feel a sense of community here on campus. So, we have that as well. And we also actually do have a-- not affiliated with the university exactly, but we do have a community group in our town



where Bradley University is located; Peoria, Illinois. We do have a community group that's focused on assisting international students or arranging events for them so that international students have something to do or if they want to explore Illinois. They also offer homestay options for those international students who want to experience say what it would be like to live with an American family and learn more about the American culture. They have the opportunity to do that.

**Ben:** I think that's an option I would definitely love to do to live with an American family and have-- what is it-- peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and all the rest and all this stuff we see on the movies. This is like oh wow! Is this actually-- yeah, this is actually happening. Yeah. I think it'd be an awesome experience. And before you mentioned Peoria in Illinois, can you tell us about Peoria because I've got no idea.



**Dane:** That's okay. So, Peoria is what I call-- I call it like a mini Chicago. So, in Illinois, Chicago is our biggest city and it's the third largest city in the United States and Peoria is about two, two and a half hour drive from Chicago. And I would say Peoria is not countryside, but it's not a big city either. It's somewhere in the middle and it kind of fits into Bradley because Bradley is a mid-sized institution, so Peoria is like a mid-sized city. It's definitely like a working-class blue-collar city and it's a nice area. There's like lots of restaurants. It's scenic in the sense that the Illinois River runs right through the town and there's just a lot of opportunity here in terms of work opportunities and internship opportunities. And that kind of plays into how Bradley serves its students. We have a fabulous career center here that connects our students both domestic and international with opportunities with the companies that are predominant here in Peoria. So, for example for healthcare, we have this big hospital OSF and we also have companies like



Caterpillar and Komatsu that-- yeah and a lot of our students get internships at these companies and they also get-- because of those internships they actually get good job opportunities as well.

**Ben:** Oh, wow! That's interesting. And I guess does Bradley have like a kind of specialization or is there some sectors that Bradley is stronger in than other sectors like healthcare or engineering?

**Dane:** Yeah and I think overall, I would say because as I mentioned we have both undergraduate and graduate programs, I would say overall, that our specialties include engineering. We have a wide variety of engineering program specialties especially at the graduate level. Same thing with computer science. We also have a very strong business and MBA program, but we also have a few kind of like niche areas of focus which I think are interesting. To note is that we offer some special undergraduate majors. We have our animation in gaming as well as sports communication.

**Ben:** Oh, wow! That sounds--



**Dane:** So, those are some of-- yeah. So, along with the big fields of engineering, business, and computer science, we also offer those little niche markets as well.

**Ben:** All right. Super. Super. And now I'm just moving on to-- going back to a more broader sense of international students and what the visa situation is like at the moment. Is it quite straightforward for an international student to come and start studying in the US?

**Dane:** I would say it's been difficult especially for this fall. It's been very challenging in the sense that we have a lot of students who they want to come here, they want to study here, but the issue is that either the embassy is closed or the embassy has a bunch of appointments all booked up and the students can't get appointments for maybe a month or even a few months at a time. And so they're really trying hard to book those appointments and I think it shows their persistence. It shows that they are willing and wanting to learn and they're willing to do anything to try to get an appointment to try to get a visa and to try to come here.



**Ben:** Absolutely. And when you say there's a bit of a backlog and the embassies are full up, we're talking about the local embassies in their country, not in the US or anything.

**Dane:** Yes. Yes. Yes, I should be clear that every embassy in each country has been different. So, it just really depends on where their nearest embassy is located.

**Ben:** Got you. Got you. Okay. Okay. And this question might be a little bit difficult because you said you joined in May, but I was just wondering if there is another outbreak of COVID or some another lockdown, what would happen for international students in Bradley?

**Dane:** Unfortunately, I can't really comment on that.

**Ben:** OK.

**Dane:** Yeah. Unfortunately just because that's really up to the university.



**Ben:** Okay. No worries. No worries. It's a difficult question and yeah, no worries there. Now, which nationality is the most common would you say amongst your international students? Just out of curiosity.

**Dane:** Among our international students, I would say we have a lot of students from India, from Bangladesh, and from Nepal. Most of these students are graduate international students. In terms of undergraduate, we have a little bit more diversity in terms of the undergraduate. So, we have students from Sudan. We have a few students from Vietnam. So basically, like some of the west and east African countries, but in terms of just total international student population, we mostly have a lot from India and Bangladesh and Nepal.

**Ben:** Interesting. And for the graduate students, what are the English requirements? Do they have to take IELTS? TOEFL? And I guess it's course specific.



**Dane:** So, for us, we have a little bit of what I would call higher English-- more strict requirements when it comes to English requirements and that's mostly because currently at Bradley, unfortunately we do not offer any academic English or pathway type of programs. So, our requirements are a little bit more strict. As of right now, we currently accept TOEFL scores. We also accept IELTS and we accept PTE and E3PT. We've encouraged some students for E3PT just because it's online and you can take it from home. That's mostly been an issue with some of our students is not being able to take some of these exams in person due to COVID. So, we try to encourage the test-from-home options. And we also just recently started accepting Cambridge English and that's mostly because a lot of our students have-- some of our applicants have been coming from like the Cambridge international schools that are in their countries.

**Ben:** Right. Very interesting. Very interesting. Yeah, I know what you mean about the online testing facilities. I think it's quite crazy that just talking about IELTS that they didn't have an



online test before COVID. I think it was on the agenda and now with COVID, it's just brought that agenda forward significantly and they are in the-- I've heard a good account that they will be rolling out an IELTS online version sooner. They've got the IELTS indicator and the IELTS on computer, but I don't think it's 100% online just yet universally. So yeah, I think it's on the horizon.

**Dane:** And I think that's a really good thing that IELTS is doing that because I think that would create more student access. Students would have more access to the IELTS test and I really think that's something that needs to be done. I think COVID has definitely taught companies and higher education institutions a lot of lessons whenever it comes to student access and mobility.

**Ben:** Absolutely. I totally agree with you and I think as well-- yeah, you hit the nail on the head when you said open access. Now, a student in the village he or she does not have to go and commute into the city center to find the British Council testing center. Ideally, they would be



able to do it from home and just need the internet connection. And the same with education; overall, I think it will definitely move things forward. All right, Dane. It's been super. Is there anything that you would like to add before we finish up?

**Dane:** I'd really-- I don't think so. I think I pretty much said everything about the students and about Bradley. I think that-- I don't think there's really anything else I have to add.

**Ben:** All right. Well, yes you do. How can the students get in contact with Bradley University?

**Dane:** It's actually a very good question. You're absolutely right about that. So, for us, for international students who are interested in attending Bradley or who are looking to know more about Bradley, you can always go to our website at [bradley.edu](http://bradley.edu). That's B-R-A-D-L-E-Y dot E-D-U. And of course, international students can always contact me. As I said, I am the assistant director of international and graduate admission here at Bradley. So, anyone who's interested in



learning about our programs or wanting to know about Bradley's admission requirements can always send an email at [intladmission@bradley.edu](mailto:intladmission@bradley.edu)

**Ben:** Super. Super. That is fantastic. Thank you very much, Dane. And just for the listeners, that's [bradley.edu](http://bradley.edu) so that's B-R-A-D-L-E-Y dot E-D-U and also, I think if you do a Google search on like international students [bradley.edu](http://bradley.edu) you'll probably find more information there as well. So that's been absolutely fantastic, Dane. Thank you very much for your time and I wish you a fantastic day.

**Dane:** All right. Thank you, Ben. You too.

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