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Vol. 8 | No. 3 | July 2018

JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
A Quarterly Publication on International Education

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Printing: 2018
Print ISSN 2162-3104
Online ISSN 2166-3750

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ISSN: 2162-3104 Print/ ISSN: 2166-3750 Online
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Fostering Successful Integration and Engagement Between Domestic and International Students on College and University Campuses

CindyAnn Rose-Redwood  
*University of Victoria, Canada*

Reuben Rose-Redwood  
*University of Victoria, Canada*

As the number of international students pursuing higher education abroad continues to increase globally (OECD, 2017), college and university campuses have the potential to serve as key spaces of cross-cultural learning and the cultivation of international friendships. Yet spatial proximity and intercultural contact do not always result in meaningful interactions between different social groups (Wessel, 2009). Various studies have shown that interactions between domestic and international students rarely result in cross-cultural friendships within higher educational settings (Trice, 2004; Gareis, 2012; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). This disconnect between international students and host communities is often attributed to the failure of the former to “adjust” to the latter. However, as Ryan (2011) argues, international students are not simply “problems” in need of a solution by university administrators but rather “provide an opportunity for the co-construction of new knowledge and more collaborative ways of working and thinking” (p. 631 and 642). While much attention has been devoted to the challenges that international students face, there is also a need for scholars to consider innovative pathways toward building meaningful relationships between domestic and international students.

This special issue brings together a range of theoretical and empirical studies, as well as practitioner and personal narrative reflections, that advance our understanding of how best to foster successful integration and engagement between domestic and international students on college and university campuses. By shifting the focus from the problems of...
“adjustment” to the possibilities of “mutual engagement,” the contributions included in this special issue build upon the emerging body of literature on international student engagement (Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Kettle, 2017). In her recent book, *International Student Engagement in Higher Education*, Kettle (2017) calls for a student-centered approach to international student engagement that moves beyond the deficit model, which defines international students in terms of what they lack. While acknowledging the power imbalances within higher education settings, Kettle maintains that we must also consider the productive practices that enable international students to engage in meaningful and rewarding academic and social experiences when studying abroad. Glass, Wongtrirat, and Buus (2015) similarly call attention to the need for educational scholars to document “concrete examples of strategies to enhance the international student experience” (p. 3). Indeed, there is much to learn from such examples of successful strategies, programs, and practices that can help foster international student engagement, as the articles in the present issue of this journal illustrate.

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In their contribution to this special issue, Glass and Gesing (this issue) present data indicating that participation in campus cultural organizations is correlated with the development of social networks that include students not only from one’s own cultural background but also from a diverse range of cultures and nationalities. This leads them to suggest that campus organizations play an important role in fostering intercultural friendships that enhance international students’ social capital and sense of belonging on campus. International student services (ISS) offices also help promote international student engagement through various outreach activities and programs, yet these services require effective communication strategies to inform international students of the opportunities for cross-cultural interaction. Ammigan and Laws’ (this issue) study of international students’ communication preferences demonstrates the usefulness of an “analytics-driven communications strategy.” Their results show that, despite the prevalence of social media, email and face-to-face interactions were the most preferred forms of communication among the international students who were surveyed. Moreover, international students from different countries may use a variety of social media channels, so it should not be assumed at the outset that Facebook is the most popular social media platform to communicate with international students. For instance, Ammigan and Laws (this issue) observe that We-Chat was the most widely
used social media site among Chinese international students in their study; thus, a more targeted and holistic communications strategy will likely be more effective in reaching different segments of the international student body.

One strategy that ISS offices often adopt to encourage interactions between domestic and international students is the development of conversation partner programs. Aaron et al. (this issue) reflect upon their experiences as a team of faculty advisors and student leaders who designed and implemented a conversation partner program with minimal funding. Although challenges with such programs commonly arise, they argue that conversation partner programs can serve as “catalysts for the kind of interaction between domestic and international students that is at the basis for long-term friendship formation and networking” (Aaron et al., this issue). We agree that both domestic and international students have much to gain from developing such intercultural friendships. In our own contribution to this special issue (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, this issue), we adopt a narrative-based approach to provide an in-depth discussion of two of our own long-lasting friendships with international students, one that developed from a conversation partner program and another that arose from a chance encounter in a campus cafeteria. In both cases, the development of meaningful intercultural friendships required “an active commitment on the part of both domestic and international students to engage in social interactions across the international divide” (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, this issue).

Institutional and individual efforts to build bridges across international divides on college and university campuses are central to the pursuit of mutual engagement between domestic and international students. However, Spitzman and Waugh (this issue) remind us that intercultural relations are “power-laden” interactions that are shaped not only by citizenship status but also by the politics of race, gender, and class, among other social differences. In response to a conversation partner program in which “students did not engage with one another on a deep level,” Spitzman and Waugh (this issue) describe the development of a new workshop-based program called “Identity Dialogues” that challenges domestic and international student participants to confront their own stereotypes and prejudices over the course of seven weekly group conversation sessions. By addressing the politics of identity directly, programs such as Identity Dialogues provide students with the opportunity to openly discuss the power dynamics of intercultural engagement with the aim of working toward a more “empathetic understanding” of other cultures and perspectives.
In addition to conversation partner programs and intercultural workshops, some academic units have gone a step further to incorporate international student engagement into the academic curriculum itself. Ranson’s (this issue) account of an annual event known as “Mission Impossible,” organized by the Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria, is a prime example. Recognizing that domestic students often avoid working with international students on group projects due to fear that this will negatively affect their class grades, Mission Impossible was designed to highlight the important contributions that international students can make to the co-production of knowledge. At the start of each academic year, incoming students compete in the Mission Impossible event with the goal of creating an environmentally sustainable business proposal. Students are divided into teams, each of which includes an international student together with domestic students, and the teams must develop a business plan for a company that could operate effectively within the international student’s home country. This latter requirement positions the international student as the “expert” who has valuable knowledge to contribute to the group project, which changes “the power dynamic in the group [and] allows barriers to come down and students to get to know each other in a more respectful environment” (Ranson, this issue).

Another arena in which international student engagement can occur is the campus workplace. Su’s (this issue) phenomenological study of Chinese undergraduate students supports the claim that on-campus employment offers important opportunities for interactions between international and domestic students as well as host national supervisors and staff. Interestingly, Su’s (this issue) research finds that “financial reward was not the main motivation for the new generation of Chinese undergraduate students to engage in on-campus employment.” Other motivations included improving English language skills, obtaining a social security number, gaining work experience, developing friendships with domestic students, and learning more about the culture of the host community. Su’s (this issue) study highlights how the campus workplace environment can serve as a “supplementary educational space” for intercultural engagement.

Once educational scholars and practitioners move beyond deficit-based models of international students and develop initiatives and programs based upon the principles of mutual engagement, the possibilities for meaningful, intercultural interactions seem to multiply. Thomas et al. (this issue) discuss four “common grounds” that can serve as the basis for mutual engagement between domestic and international students, which include “common experience, cultural celebrations, faith, and common challenges.”
Drawing upon their own experiences at Simon Fraser University, Thomas et al. (this issue) illustrate how these principles have been put into practice through everything from community cooking workshops and holiday dinners to interfaith services and public demonstrations of solidarity with immigrants. Their reflections underscore how the university experience is about far more than academic studies alone since campus life also involves developing a sense of community.

Mitrayani and Peel (this issue) likewise call attention to the importance of intercultural community-building in their discussion of the East-West Center in Hawai‘i. As they explain, the East-West Center was established by the U.S. Congress in 1960 in order to “foster better relations and understanding” between the United States and Asia-Pacific countries. Students live in common dormitories and are expected to participate in extracurricular activities together in order to achieve the center’s “mission of stimulating relationship building.” As former students at the center, Mitrayani and Peel (this issue) consider the positive impact that it had on their shared experiences of collaborative, cross-cultural learning and how the program fosters a sense of “community where differences become an asset.”

The general aims of the East-West Center are also reflected in the U.S. Fulbright program, which supports American students studying abroad as well as international students pursuing higher education in the United States. Metro-Roland (this issue) describes the strategies she has employed to facilitate international student engagement in her role as the Fulbright Foreign Student Advisor at Western Michigan University, an institution with one of the highest Fulbright enrollments nationally. She argues that a “rooted cosmopolitanism” can help create “communities organized around shared markers beyond national identity alone.” In other words, a sense of belonging among both international and domestic students need not be defined solely through a nationalist frame but should rather be based upon “the multiplicity and fluidity of identity that these students bring into play” (Metro-Roland, this issue).

As university administrators laud the virtues of internationalization, Killick (this issue) contends that higher education institutions continue to understand international students largely through the lens of deficit modelling while few prioritize “the value of diverse student identities and perspectives.” To address this issue, he proposes a series of guiding principles, goals, and outcomes of “critical intercultural practice.” These include achieving academic success, developing intercultural competence, and cultivating a critical consciousness that questions the status quo of both local and global power relations. At a time when xenophobic ethno-
nationalism is on the rise, however, critical pedagogies in the classroom and university-sponsored intercultural programs on campus may not be enough to ease the tensions between international students and the host community more generally. Consequently, Marangell, Arkoudis, and Baik (this issue) call for a community-based approach to international student integration that goes “beyond campus-specific policies” by engaging with the local community directly. Specifically, they recommend that colleges and universities develop community-based projects that connect international students with local community organizations, establish safeguards to prevent exploitation of international students by off-campus landlords and employers, and streamline information so that international students can make more informed decisions regarding their engagement with the host community.

If higher education institutions are serious about promoting internationalization, they have a responsibility to ensure that international students are treated fairly and are not exploited during their educational experiences. Waters (this issue) argues that scholars have not paid sufficient attention to the politics of international student mobilities, and she takes UK transnational education programs in Hong Kong as a case in point to underscore the political dimensions of exporting higher educational models abroad. As Waters (this issue) observes, those enrolled in transnational programs are transformed into “international students” within their very own countries, which results in them being perceived as internal “others” in comparison to domestic students in more traditional degree programs in Hong Kong. Moreover, such programs are often based upon a neocolonial model of knowledge transfer, yet at the same time students are not provided with the same benefits that domestic students receive at other local universities, and their “international” degrees are not afforded the same level of recognition within the social context of Hong Kong. Waters (this issue) suggests that, despite these problems, there is nevertheless potential for decolonizing the mandate of transnational education programs. However, this will require a commitment to rethink how the “global webs of responsibility” can be reconfigured in such a way that longstanding colonial hierarchies are challenged rather than reinforced.

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Taken together, the contributions to this special issue examine the challenges and opportunities for international student engagement on college and university campuses in the twenty-first century. The strategies, programs, and practices that the various contributors discuss offer reason for
hope that the goal of encouraging domestic and international students to meaningfully engage with each other in a spirit of mutuality is not some far-fetched, utopian dream but is rather being put into practice through a series of concrete actions. Many of the challenges associated with intercultural engagement still remain, but there is clearly a lot of exciting work already being done, which will hopefully serve as inspiration for future educational scholars and practitioners to develop new innovative strategies that foster successful intercultural engagement between domestic and international students in the years ahead.

REFERENCES


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The Development of Social Capital Through International Students’ Involvement in Campus Organizations

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ABSTRACT

This study examines campus organization involvement as a mechanism for social capital development. Researchers used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine variations in network size, strength, and composition for international students involved in different types of campus organizations. The researchers also examined the relationship of campus organization involvement to international students’ sense of attachment to the university. Students who participated in major-based organizations or leadership programs had larger, less dense, more diverse networks that lead to social networks which are particularly advantageous to social mobility. Students who participated in campus organizations related to their own cultural heritage had networks built of friends from all cultures, creating a greater sense of belonging and attachment to the university. Implications of social capital for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: attachment, belonging, co-curricular engagement, social capital, social networks

International students gain a sense of community through social interactions with host country students, other international students, and co-national students (Rienties & Nolan, 2014). Relationships with faculty and peers not only assist with adaptation to college, they are the source of resources that facilitate that adaptation (Glass, Gesing, Hales, & Cong, 2017). In recent
years, researchers have urged for scholarship that unpacks how groups facilitate the social and academic adaptation of international students. Previous studies of international student networks have found that social involvement is significantly associated with the development of social capital—that is, practical and socioemotional resources embedded in social networks (Beech, 2015; Lin, Peng, M. Kim, S. Kim, & LaRose, 2011; Trice, 2004).

Building upon recent work on international student networks, this article examines how the size, density, composition, and strength of social networks in academic programs, co-curricular organizations, families, and residential communities are determinants for the nature of the social capital developed during academic study (Yao, 2016). Social capital, in this sense, does not merely represent resources which may assist international students in their adaptation to college; access to social capital is itself also a major outcome of college, and perhaps the most significant outcome of college (Adler & Kwon, 2002). When a university degree is conferred, it not only certifies the completion of an academic program, it also identifies the student’s membership as a graduate of the university. The university is an organization with a complex set of relationships in which social capital is embedded. Both students and graduates have degrees of access to the resources such membership in a university provides (e.g., job references).

Increasing numbers of international students are coming to the U.S. and other countries around the world. While a growing body of scholarship has focused on academic outcomes and retention, the nature and scope of the international students’ development of social capital has remained largely unexplored. Research that exists has focused on social capital developed through engagement with conationals, other international students, and host country peers (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013; Trice, 2004), but little research exists exploring the differences in these networks by specific organization type.

The current study examines campus organization involvement as a mechanism for social capital development. The concept of social capital was employed to answer the questions: (1) Is there a significant difference in the size, composition, strength, and density of networks for international students who participate in campus organizations? and (2) What are the significant differences in the size, composition, strength, and density of networks for international students who participate in specific types of campus organizations?
LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purposes of this study, social capital refers to resources available to people via social interaction (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000). In other words, social capital involves sets of relationships which produce activity as people utilize the resources embedded in social networks to achieve their individual and collective goals (Lin, 2001). Social capital is created when shared experiences produce relationships of mutual concern (Robison & Siles, 2000).

As the name suggests, social capital involves “capital-like” properties where the mutual concern benefits a person or group beyond what might be exchanged among strangers (i.e., persons or groups who have no shared experience). Social capital operates in the same way as financial capital, with the exchange of socioemotional goods among persons substituting for the exchange of physical goods and services. Socioemotional goods take many forms but include such things as favors, advice, care, empathy, support, celebration, and information. Socioemotional goods might also be embedded in the exchange of objects among persons, such as when people exchange gifts, borrow lawn tools from a neighbor, etc.

Robison and Siles (2000) distinguish between earned and inherited “kernels of commonality” that lead to social capital (p. 2). Earned kernels are acquired through effort and involvement (e.g., membership in organizations, level of education, place of residence, etc.); whereas inherited kernels (e.g., gender, ethnicity, cultural heritage, nationality, etc.) are based on inherited characteristics. Social capital acquired through earned kernels has been associated with bridging capital that involves the exchange of ideas and information among networks of diverse persons but may not provide emotional support (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000). Social capital acquired through inherited kernels has been associated with bonding social capital that provides emotional support (e.g., from close friends and family members) but is generally less diverse (Phua & Jin, 2011; Putnam, 2000).

Social capital exists in networks of relationships (Robison & Ritchie, 2016). The social capital that an individual has access to resides in a network of social relationships. However, it is insufficient to simply map connections among individuals. The social networks from which social capital is drawn may be characterized in terms of their composition (i.e., who is in the network), density (i.e., how interconnected the members of the network are with one another), size (i.e., how big the network is), and strength (i.e., the strength of the socioemotional goods exchanged). These patterns of relationships affect the resources available to a person and the
distribution of the benefits those resources provide. When international students participate in study abroad, their access to social capital is affected. To understand the international student experience, researchers must be aware of the network size, density, and composition of the social networks that provide access to resources for international students.

Although international students, by definition, are individuals who have crossed a national border for the purposes of formal study (UNESCO, 2012), international students are members of four types of networks: academic programs, campus organizations, family, and residential communities. The shared kernels of commonality among members of these four types of networks develop social capital that serves as the basis for the exchange of socioemotional goods (e.g., support, advice, care, favors, etc.). In fact, such networks exist for the purposes of members to meet needs for support, celebration, validation, information, economic interests, etc. The combination of these four primary networks contributes to a “sense of place” for which an international student has an attachment. Attachment is evidenced by a sense of pride, allegiance, admiration, respect, commitment, and obligation to the organization for which one is a member.

The international student experience may be examined as the exchange of socioemotional goods among members in the four primary networks that most students rely on to achieve their goals. Social capital is associated with increased satisfaction, enhanced self-esteem, greater involvement in campus life, and campus engagement (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Trice, 2004). Students with access to social capital have advantages that result in favorable exchanges that assist them in achieving their goals. The exchange of socioemotional goods, over time, validates a person’s sense of attachment to the community. In other words, as members of these networks, students view themselves as being connected to one another, and the exchange of socioemotional goods among members increases, creating an attachment to the community.

Campus organizations might reflect both inherited kernels of commonality (e.g., ethnic organizations of the student’s own cultural heritage), as well as earned kernels of commonality (e.g., professional organizations, service organizations, etc.). Students also develop a sense of membership in an academic program based on earned kernels (e.g., earning a particular degree) but also rely on inherited kernels (e.g., studying with students with similar ethnic backgrounds). International students may live on-campus in residence halls made up of diverse individuals that share a common identity (e.g., Scotland Hall); or international students may live off-campus in apartments comprised primarily of students who share their national or ethnic background. Finally, international students might rely on
advice from an older sibling about adjustment to life in the host country, or international students might form emotional support in regular phone calls with their parents.

As a result of targeted recruitment efforts, the number of international students on U.S. campuses has grown to over 1 million students (IIE, 2017). Researchers have argued that increased compositional diversity alone is insufficient to realize the full benefits of increased international student enrollment (Glass, Gomez, & Uzura 2014). Although the advantages of a college credential are a primary factor in an international student’s motivation to study in the U.S. (Choudaha, 2017; Glass et al., 2015), a significant outcome of college is also the social networks that students build during their studies. In other words, a degree from a U.S. university does more than provide a credential that certifies knowledge. Universities are institutions that confer earned kernels of commonality among graduates. Those earned kernels result from the prestige of graduation from an academic program as well as through social interaction that occurs in co-curricular organizations. However, research highlights that international students do not always engage as actively in co-curricular activities as their host country counterparts (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005).

Numerous studies highlight the importance of forming intercultural friendships in adapting to college life (Gaeris, 2012), however little research has been conducted that accounts for the potential benefits those friendships provide in offering resources that help international students achieve their goals. Studies have documented that international students perceive greater constraints to engaging in out-of-class activities and develop fewer friendships with host national and international peers (Glass et al., 2014), and, consequently, feel less attached to their host institution (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). More research is needed to better understand the mechanisms through which international students tap into the informal social life of college and university campuses to gain access to resources that help them reach their goals, whether those goals be short-term (e.g., finding a ride to the grocery store, passing an exam, etc.) or long-term (e.g., building a network of future business partners, findings a job post-graduation, etc.) and the critical role of social support (Brannan et al., 2013).

Social capital provides a theoretical framework to understand how international students draw on resources available through campus organizations, academic programs, residential community, and family. Research demonstrates that international students who develop friendships with co-national and international peers have access to resources that facilitate their adaptation to college (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). It also provides a framework to understand specifically which types of
organizations might serve as a gateway to cross-cultural friendships with host national and international peers (Baba & Hosoda, 2014). In other words, it provides actionable information that institutions and policymakers might use to invest in organizations associated with international students who develop social networks that are less dense, which provide valuable “bridging capital” that facilitates social mobility (Granovetter, 1973). Furthermore, it provides actionable information on the types of organizations that build “bonding capital” associated with attachment to a university. Numerous studies have demonstrated that belonging is a core aspect of an institution that fosters international students’ resilience (Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013; Yao, 2016). Finally, social capital provides a framework that is not university-centric. In other words, it allows an examination of the naturally occurring networks that exist within, but also beyond, the university’s borders (McFaul, 2016; Rienties & Nolan, 2014; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013).

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This study posed two research questions tested with an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with campus organization involvement as the independent variable and network size, composition, strength, and attachment as the dependent variables. This study examined campus organization involvement as a mechanism for social capital development. Accordingly, the researchers examined two questions:

- RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the size, composition, strength, and density of networks for international students who participate in campus organizations?
- RQ2: What are the significant differences in the size, composition, strength, and density of networks for international students who participate in specific types of campus organizations?

**Participants**

Seven hundred and sixty-one international students from a major U.S. research university were contacted through the Office of International Programs to complete a survey. Procedures associated with the study were reviewed and approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board. Eligible participants received an e-mail which explained the purpose of the questionnaire, as well as issues related to confidentiality, anonymity, and consent. It included a link to the anonymous online survey instrument.
Students did not receive incentives for participation. To protect participants’ privacy, all individual identifiers were encrypted.

In all, 35% (n = 266) of eligible participants contacted agreed to participate in the study. Chi-square and ANOVA analysis indicated no significant differences between participants who were involved in campus organizations and those who were not by region of origin, gender, level of study, residential location, years in the U.S., grade point average, English proficiency, and academic performance. Therefore, the groups are comparable in terms of demographic factors. Table 1 includes descriptive statistics of participant demographics.

Table 1. Demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No campus organization involvement</th>
<th>Involved in at least one campus organization</th>
<th>Chi Square (df)</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>20 (23%)</td>
<td>14 (15%)</td>
<td>7.714(7)</td>
<td>.358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa and Middle East</td>
<td>15 (18%)</td>
<td>16 (17%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>5 (6%)</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
<td>2.733(2)</td>
<td>.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>10 (12%)</td>
<td>11 (12%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asia</td>
<td>21 (25%)</td>
<td>27 (29%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>6 (7%)</td>
<td>13 (14%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39 (48%)</td>
<td>50 (53%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42 (52%)</td>
<td>44 (47%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.105(6)</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>9 (11%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>5 (6%)</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>27 (32%)</td>
<td>34 (35%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>33 (38%)</td>
<td>36 (38%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.983(1)</td>
<td>.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Campus</td>
<td>13 (15%)</td>
<td>8 (9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Campus</td>
<td>72 (85%)</td>
<td>86 (91%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Measures

**Independent Variable**

The independent variable was participation in campus organizations. Participants indicated if they participated in campus organizations by responding to the question, “Are you involved in any campus organizations?” (1 = Yes; 0 = No). If they indicated they were involved in campus organization, they were asked the question, “What types of campus organizations have you been involved in during your studies in the U.S.? (select all that apply)” with checkbox options including service, volunteer, or community organizations; professional or major-based organizations; leadership building programs and events; student government or advisory board meetings; ethnic organizations of one’s own cultural heritage; ethnic organizations of another/mixed cultural heritage; club sports, intramural leagues, or recreation organizations; and student religious organizations.

**Dependent Variables**

There were three dependent measures of campus organization, academic program, and neighborhood networks, respectively: network size, composition, and strength. There were also two overall dependent measures: network density and attachment to the university. Table 2 contains all item wordings with their loadings and scale reliabilities. All alphas far exceeded the minimum required alpha of .70 (DeVellis, 2003).

### Table 2. Factor loadings and reliabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Scales and Item Wording</th>
<th>(α) Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network Strength – Residence</td>
<td>(.933)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share meals together</td>
<td>.930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate special occasions</td>
<td>.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialize together</td>
<td>.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go places together</td>
<td>.922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do favors for each other</td>
<td>.924</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Factor Scales and Item Wording

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Scales and Item Wording</th>
<th>(α) Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borrow things from each other</td>
<td>.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist each other if someone is sick</td>
<td>.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give useful advice</td>
<td>.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss struggles</td>
<td>.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network Strength – Academic Program</strong></td>
<td>(.921)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share meals together</td>
<td>.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate special occasions</td>
<td>.913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialize together</td>
<td>.906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go places together</td>
<td>.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do favors for each other</td>
<td>.912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrow things from each other</td>
<td>.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist each other if someone is sick</td>
<td>.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give useful advice</td>
<td>.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss struggles</td>
<td>.916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network Strength – Campus Organizations</strong></td>
<td>(.935)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share meals together</td>
<td>.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate special occasions</td>
<td>.929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialize together</td>
<td>.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go places together</td>
<td>.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do favors for each other</td>
<td>.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrow things from each other</td>
<td>.928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist each other if someone is sick</td>
<td>.928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give useful advice</td>
<td>.928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss struggles</td>
<td>.929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attachment to the University</strong></td>
<td>(.908)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>.887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegiance</td>
<td>.886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiration</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>.886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>.908</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three dependent measures of campus organization, academic program, and neighborhood networks were as follows.

**Network Size**

Network size was assessed using an empirically tested single-item measure that corresponds closely with detailed daily contact diary methods (Fu, 2005). Respondents were asked, “In a typical week, I stay in touch with about # people in my …” with separate prompts for campus organization,
academic program, and neighborhood or residential community respectively with options to estimate: 0-4 people, 5-9 people, 10-19 people, 20-49 people, and 50+ people; responses were coded with the average in the estimated range: 2, 7, 15, 35, and 50, respectively.

**Network Composition**

Network composition was assessed with a 5-point Likert-scale (1=Definitely not; 5=Definitely) of three single-item measures (i.e., friends from my own culture, international friends from other cultures, and friends from the U.S.) in response to the prompt, “Through …, I tend to stay in touch with …” Students responded to the three single-item measures with separate prompts for campus organizations, academic program, and neighborhood and residential community, respectively.

**Network Strength**

Network strength was assessed using a 9-item scale with social capital items developed by Robison & Siles (2008) with a 5-point Likert-scale (1=Definitely not; 5=Definitely) with separate prompts for campus organization (α = .94), academic program (α = .92), and neighborhood (α = .93), respectively.

The two overall dependent measures were network density and attachment to the university:

**Network Density**

Network density was assessed using a single-item developed by Davis, Smith, and Marsden (2007): “When you think of all of the people that you stay in touch with on a regular basis, about how many of them know one another?” (5= almost all, 4=most know one another, 3=some know one another, 2=few know one another, or 1=almost none know one another).

**Attachment**

Attachment was assessed using a 6-item scale developed based on Robison & Siles (2008) in response to the prompt, “I have a strong sense of ... towards my university” with a 5-point Likert-scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) to the items pride, allegiance, admiration, respect, commitment, and obligation (α = .91).

**RESULTS**

Sixty-two percent of respondents did not participate in any campus organization, and thirty-eight percent participated in one or more campus
organizations. The three most common types of campus organizations that respondents participated in were service, volunteer, or community organizations (23 percent), professional or major-based organizations (20 percent), and ethnic organizations of their own cultural heritage (16 percent). Table 3 reports descriptive statistics for all dependent variables.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for all dependent variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>M(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential Community – Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>7.30   (9.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition – Own Culture</td>
<td>3.77   (1.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition – International</td>
<td>3.84   (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition – U.S.</td>
<td>3.84   (0.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>3.47   (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Program – Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>7.88   (8.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition – Own Culture</td>
<td>3.64   (1.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition – International</td>
<td>4.05   (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition – U.S.</td>
<td>4.05   (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>3.61   (0.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Organizations – Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>11.58  (12.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition – Own Culture</td>
<td>3.75   (1.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition – International</td>
<td>4.16   (0.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition – U.S.</td>
<td>4.15   (0.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>3.94   (0.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family – Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>6.55   (9.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>4.25   (1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Density</td>
<td>2.57   (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment to the University</td>
<td>4.06   (0.72)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researchers conducted ANOVA analysis to answer to question, “Is there a significant difference in the size, composition, strength, and density of networks for international students who participate in campus organizations?” Table 4 reports ANOVA results for international students who participated in at least one campus organization and those who did not participate in any campus organizations.
The analysis found a significant difference in the composition and strength for students who did and did not participate in campus organizations overall, but no difference in the size and density of the networks between the two groups. International students who participated in at least one campus organization interacted with U.S. friends in their academic program on a weekly basis more often than international students who did not participate in campus organizations. Moreover, international students who participated in at least one campus organization had greater social capital among friends in their neighborhood or residential community than international students who did not participate in campus organizations.

Researchers conducted ANOVA analysis to answer the question, “What are the significant differences in the size, composition, strength, and density of networks for international students who participate in specific types of campus organizations?” Table 5 reports significant ANOVA results for international students who participated in specific types of organization and those who did not participate in that type of campus organization.

International students who participated in service, volunteer, or community organizations interacted less frequently with friends from their own culture and reported greater social capital among friends in their academic program. Those who participated in professional or major-based organizations also reported greater social capital among friends in their

Table 4. ANOVA results for students who participated in campus organizations and those who did not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Campus Organization M (SD)</th>
<th>1+ Campus Organization M (SD)</th>
<th>F(df)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>192 7.66 (7.97)</td>
<td>8.10 (8.62)</td>
<td>0.137(1)</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Culture</td>
<td>191 3.57 (1.33)</td>
<td>3.71 (1.37)</td>
<td>0.529(1)</td>
<td>0.468</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>191 3.98 (0.95)</td>
<td>4.12 (0.92)</td>
<td>1.090(1)</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>193 3.83 (1.05)</td>
<td>4.25 (0.87)</td>
<td>9.315(1)</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>190 3.46 (0.92)</td>
<td>3.76 (0.81)</td>
<td>5.377(1)</td>
<td>0.211</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighborhood/Residential Community</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>200 7.11 (9.86)</td>
<td>7.48 (9.97)</td>
<td>0.072(1)</td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Culture</td>
<td>200 3.70 (1.28)</td>
<td>3.84 (1.25)</td>
<td>0.570(1)</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>202 3.79 (0.94)</td>
<td>3.88 (0.95)</td>
<td>0.420(1)</td>
<td>0.518</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>201 3.72 (1.05)</td>
<td>3.95 (0.91)</td>
<td>2.675(1)</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>199 3.32 (0.98)</td>
<td>3.62 (0.95)</td>
<td>4.808(1)</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>197 2.62 (0.92)</td>
<td>2.52 (0.94)</td>
<td>0.618(1)</td>
<td>0.433</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>180 4.00 (0.76)</td>
<td>4.11 (0.67)</td>
<td>1.093(1)</td>
<td>0.297</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
academic program. They interacted more frequently with friends from the U.S. in their academic program and their neighborhood, and they interacted more frequently with international friends from other cultures in campus organizations.

Participation in leadership building programs and events by international students led to larger social networks on campus and in their neighborhood or residential community. These students interacted more frequently with friends from the U.S. in their campus organizations, and they had less dense social networks and a stronger attachment to the university. International students who participated in student government or advisory board meetings had larger social networks in their neighborhood or residential community.

International students who participated in ethnic organizations of another/mixed cultural heritage interacted less often with friends from their own culture in their neighborhood or residential community and friends from the U.S. in their academic program. By contrast, international students who participated in ethnic organizations of their own cultural heritage had larger campus networks and greater social capital among friends in campus organizations. Predictably, these students were more likely to interact with international students from their own cultural heritage on a weekly basis through campus organizations and their neighborhood or residential community, but they also interacted more frequently with friends from the U.S. and international friends from other cultures in their academic program.

Participation by international students in student-led religious organizations led to greater social capital among friends in their neighborhood or residential community. These students interacted more regularly with U.S. friends in that community as well. They also interacted with international friends from other cultures, and international friends from their culture in their academic program.

Table 5. ANOVA summary results of the significant differences between students who participated in specific types of campus organizations and those who did not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service, volunteer, or community organizations</th>
<th>Did not participate M (SD)</th>
<th>Did participate M (SD)</th>
<th>F(df)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus–Own</td>
<td>4.16 (1.12)</td>
<td>3.45 (1.39)</td>
<td>7.697(1)</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic–Strength</td>
<td>3.52 (0.86)</td>
<td>3.83 (0.89)</td>
<td>4.923(1)</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional or major-based organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus–</td>
<td>3.98 (0.94)</td>
<td>4.33 (0.82)</td>
<td>4.128(1)</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did not participate</td>
<td>Did participate</td>
<td>( F(\text{df}) )</td>
<td>( p )</td>
<td>( \eta^2 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic–Strength</td>
<td>3.52 (0.87)</td>
<td>3.87 (0.85)</td>
<td>6.251(1)</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic–US</td>
<td>3.95 (1.01)</td>
<td>4.31 (0.86)</td>
<td>5.258(1)</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence–US</td>
<td>3.75 (1.05)</td>
<td>4.08 (0.74)</td>
<td>4.179(1)</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership building programs and events</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus–Size</td>
<td>9.96 (10.94)</td>
<td>17.76 (16.13)</td>
<td>6.835(1)</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus–US</td>
<td>4.01 (0.97)</td>
<td>4.71 (0.64)</td>
<td>9.867(1)</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence–Size</td>
<td>6.64 (8.47)</td>
<td>12.86 (17.30)</td>
<td>7.664</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>2.63 (0.92)</td>
<td>2.10 (0.83)</td>
<td>6.294</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>4.01 (0.73)</td>
<td>4.39 (0.51)</td>
<td>5.025</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic organizations of their own cultural heritage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus-Strength</td>
<td>3.74 (0.86)</td>
<td>4.26 (0.78)</td>
<td>9.579(1)</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus-Size</td>
<td>9.60 (11.27)</td>
<td>14.74 (13.84)</td>
<td>4.177(1)</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus-Own</td>
<td>3.43 (1.36)</td>
<td>4.28 (1.08)</td>
<td>11.013(1)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic-</td>
<td>3.98 (0.97)</td>
<td>4.33 (0.76)</td>
<td>4.342(1)</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic organizations of another/mixed cultural heritage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic-University</td>
<td>3.95 (0.99)</td>
<td>4.40 (0.87)</td>
<td>6.750</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence–Own</td>
<td>3.67 (1.29)</td>
<td>4.18 (1.12)</td>
<td>5.167</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student-led religious organizations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic-Own</td>
<td>3.70 (1.29)</td>
<td>2.87 (1.73)</td>
<td>5.485(1)</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic-</td>
<td>4.01 (0.95)</td>
<td>4.53 (0.64)</td>
<td>4.348(1)</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic-University</td>
<td>4.00 (0.99)</td>
<td>4.60 (0.63)</td>
<td>5.296</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence-Strength</td>
<td>3.43 (0.97)</td>
<td>3.96 (0.96)</td>
<td>4.128(1)</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence–University</td>
<td>3.79 (0.99)</td>
<td>4.40 (0.83)</td>
<td>5.392(1)</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student government or advisory board meetings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence-Size</td>
<td>6.74 (8.52)</td>
<td>11.57 (16.81)</td>
<td>4.937</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were no significant differences in the network size, composition, strength, density, or attachment among international students who did and did not participate in club sports, intramural leagues, or recreation organizations.
DISCUSSION

This study showed that there were significant differences in the overall composition and strength of social networks between international students who participated in campus organizations and those who did not. The former interacted with U.S. friends more often, and had greater social capital in their neighborhood, than students who did not participate in campus organizations.

These results support previous studies showing that social connections can benefit international students’ sense of belonging (Glass & Westmont, 2014) and positive attitudes and attachment to institutions (Mbawuni & Nimako, 2015). The type of campus organizations in which students participated effected the size, density, and composition of their networks, with students involved in service-type organizations developing networks with friends from outside their own culture. This supports the research of Soria and Troisi (2014) indicating that the social connections built when interacting and developing friendships inside and outside the classroom can lead to greater comfort interacting with others from different cultures. These interactions not only affect student success and retention, they can result in the development of social capital.

Students who participated in campus organizations related to their own cultural heritage had networks built of friends from all cultures, creating a greater sense of belonging and attachment to the university. This attachment can affect students’ feelings about their institution and the extent to which they feel embedded in the institutions’ community (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001).

Students who participated in major-based organizations or leadership programs had larger, less dense, more diverse networks that are advantageous for accumulating resources and securing jobs. This supports Mikhaylov & Fierro’s (2015) study of international, undergraduate business students which found that participants used existing social capital to access networks in new locations. It also supports Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood’s (2013) findings that developing connections with other internationals expanded the global reach of post-graduation networks.

As institutions look for ways to maintain relationships with international alumni for purposes of recruitment and development, it is important that they understand the attachment of international alumni. The results indicate that development of social capital through student organizations increased social capital and attachment, however students’ network strength, density, and diversity varied based on organization type. Although some organizations led to a greater sense of belonging and
attachment while at the institution, others led to the development of resources for successful career outcomes. This variance in network outcomes requires higher education institutions to gain a better understanding of students’ higher education goals in order to connect students to organizations that provide the greatest personal benefit.

IMPLICATIONS

International students add value to the higher education environment academically, culturally, and financially making their presence on U.S. campuses a competitive priority (Altbach, 2004; Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2014). Higher education professionals can use the results of this study to provide resources for international students that result in greater attachment to the institution. Providing resources can lead to strong emotional, structural, and relationship bonds between the school and its students that encourage commitment and attachment to the institution (Mbawuni & Nimako, 2015).

In order to retain international students and develop long-term relationships with international alumni, institutions should consider including the development of social capital into the comprehensive internationalization plan. By identifying places and contexts like student organizations that are conducive to developing social capital and strengthening attachment, higher education institutions can increase international students’ sense of belonging and attachment. As institutions gain greater understanding of how international students manage social capital, they may see a decrease in acculturative stress, a strengthening attachment to the institution, and improvement in job-seeking behaviors. Insights into the process of attachment could result in higher education institutions becoming more competitive in attracting international students (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2014) and in maintaining strong relationships with international alumni who benefit the institution financially.

This study is limited by a small sample from one institution where only 38% of study participants were involved in campus organizations. The results of this study should be interpreted within the context of a U.S. public, research university. Increasing the sample with questionnaire distribution to a diverse set of institutions will provide greater representation, and allow for comparison of results in order to make generalizations.

Further studies should be conducted to explore development of social capital and attachment based on students’ geographic region of origin and region of study. Students who come from different cultures may have
greater or lesser reliance on each of the measures of social capital resulting in differing levels of attachment. Further studies on international student development of social capital in countries with non-western cultures should also be conducted and may provide different results.

CONCLUSION

Empirical research on international students’ experiences with social capital and attachment is limited. This study provides a framework for understanding how student organizations affect international student engagement and attachment to their institution. Using a sample of international students at a public, research institution in the United States, the results suggest that the type of student organization that international students engage in results in differences in the size, density, and strength of social networks.

As campus internationalization and globalization become priorities for institutions, maintaining long-term relationships with international alumni aides in recruitment and development initiatives. This information can aid higher education professionals in identifying areas to strengthen international student engagement and maintain alumni engagement in an effort to build long-term, post-graduation relationships.

REFERENCES


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Manuscript submitted: November 25, 2017
Manuscript revised: March 1, 2018
Accepted for publication: March 31, 2018
Communications Preferences Among International Students: Strategies for Creating Optimal Engagement in Programs and Services

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**ABSTRACT**

As U.S. institutions continue to welcome larger and more diverse populations of international students, campus support offices are also expected to adjust their programming and outreach strategies to engage a wider student audience and provide them with key information and services. This quantitative study examines the communications preferences of degree-seeking international students enrolled in a mid-size U.S. university. It specifically investigates students’ preferred methods of communication, patterns and frequency in sending and receiving messages, and the types of information they prefer to be informed of. The survey also looks across a number of communication media including email, social media, print communications, and face-to-face interactions to better understand how resources may be directed to individual channels. The authors argue that the most impactful engagement model requires an accompanying, analytics-driven communications strategy to support international students during their stay on campus.

**Keywords:** communications preferences, international students, student engagement, support services

International student enrollment at U.S. institutions of higher education has soared by over 85% in the last decade, reaching a record high of over a million in 2017 (Institute of International Education, 2017). As a larger,
more diverse population of students seek opportunities for higher education, an ever-expanding and innovative programming and support model is needed. These programs and services are generally offered by the International Student Services (ISS) office to assist international students with visa and immigration issues, support their academic, social, and cultural success, and engage them with domestic students, faculty, and staff (Choudaha & Schulmann, 2014).

While a number of universities have successfully built these comprehensive and collaborative models for programming, we contend that optimal impact is achieved through the addition of a strong communications strategy for matriculated international students. Analyzing data from a 2017 quantitative study, this article explores the communications preferences of degree-seeking international students at a mid-size U.S. university and proposes a holistic strategy for driving key audiences to engage more effectively. Specifically, the digitally-deployed survey looks across a number of communication media including email, social media, print communications, and face-to-face interactions.

We define communications strategy, based on a definition from Steyn (2002), as a thinking document that guides communications goals, values, actions, and metrics to inform further improvement. Operating in a day and age where technology and information systems are readily available, it is easy to assume that ISS offices have already developed data-driven communications strategies to serve their audiences. However, this might not necessarily be the case in practice. To get a sense of how ISS offices were equipped to support the communication needs of their international student community, we ran a preliminary survey among 42 of the university site’s comparator and partner institutions in the U.S. Of those institutions, 36 responded, representing 22 states and international student enrollments ranging from 15 to 17,326. Among those who responded, eight suggested that their office maintained a communications plan and only two reported regular collaboration with their university’s central department of communications and marketing. Further, just one institution indicated having a dedicated, full-time communications staff person. Among the respondents’ comments, many confirmed that they were sending messages out to students but were not guided by a dedicated communications strategy or had the necessary support and expertise to develop one. Others indicated the need to revise or rework what currently exists so they could be more effective in reaching out to their international student community. One participating institution enrolling over 10,000 international students defined communications strategy as an intentional effort that is “streamlined,
coordinated, and transparent” and highlighted the importance of establishing a communication plan as part of their ISS office priorities.

This article aims to contribute to the literature on the responsibility of specialized support from ISS offices, whose role it is to collaborate with partner offices as well as understand, reach, and serve international students. In addition, this study serves as an example of one institution’s efforts to align communications strategy with international students’ needs and preferences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the number of international students studying in the United States continues to grow, many have posited whether the international and domestic student experience differ from each other. While some have argued that segmenting the international student audience can be problematic and result in over-generalization (e.g., Jones, 2017), several studies have pointed to their unique experience on university and college campuses (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Sherry & Chui, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Hayes & Lin, 1994). International students face a number of distinct challenges as they transition to the U.S. and throughout their studies ranging from the administrative burden of visa compliance, language barriers, and work constraints to a reduced sense of belonging and inclusiveness (Choudaha & Schulmann, 2014; Smith & Demjanenko, 2011). While all students must adjust to a new life in college, international students tend to have greater difficulty in doing so (Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994).

In order to address these challenges and to leverage the international community as a key component in campus internationalization, International Student Services (ISS) offices have developed intentional programming. Collaborative in nature, these programs promote academic success, understanding of government regulations, intercultural understanding, and connect students, scholars, and their family members to the local community. As these strategies continue to develop, an accompanying communications plan must follow (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017). Even the most effective programming and outreach strategy may not be successful without its communications counterpart.

International Student Engagement

The recruitment and enrollment of international students to campus is one of the many aspects of campus internationalization at institutions of higher education (Vincent-Lancrin, 2007). Internationalization, defined by Knight (2015, p. 2) as “the process of integrating an international,
intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education,” translates into how universities prepare their students to acquire global perspectives and navigate the social and cultural contexts throughout their program of study (Burdett & Crossman, 2012). While student engagement has been studied extensively for American students, this has not been the case for international students, who choose to study in the U.S. for a variety of reasons including academic and research excellence, campus life, support services, and career prospects (Korobova, 2012).

About 80% of traditional-aged undergraduate students engage in one or more extra-curricular activities (Knapp, 1979). Research shows that meaningful interactions between international and domestic students can assist international students’ academic performance and sociocultural adjustment (Dunne, 2009). For instance, certain student organizations and extra-curricular activities not only promote student achievement but also increase general satisfaction with the academic experience (Astin, 1993). The more involved that college students are in the academic and social aspects of campus life, the more they may benefit in terms of learning and personal development. Campus involvement and engagement during their college years can impact students’ social, communication, and interpersonal skills in the workplace, and increase their chance of graduate program acceptance (Dunkel, Bray, & Wofford, 1989).

Understanding what international students need to be successful in their academic, social, and community settings has been a significant foundation for achieving student success at many institutions (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998). Additionally, the increased complexity in immigration regulations, international travel, and risk management has stressed the importance for ISS offices to provide key information to their international student community about visa compliance standards in the U.S. (Rosser, Hermsen, Mamiseishvili, & Wood, 2007).

While further research is needed for university administrators and support service offices to better understand the experience of international students and identify factors contributing to their involvement on campus, more programs and services that stimulate their engagement in purposeful and educational activities are crucial. Meeting the needs of all students in increasingly diverse university communities can be challenging and requires a well-articulated and collaborative programming and outreach plan.

Table 1 lists examples of programs that ISS offices generally host in collaboration with their campus stakeholders to engage and involve international students. It is adapted from Briggs and Ammigan’s (2017) collaborative model for international student programming and was
developed to address the needs of students and support the overall global engagement and campus internationalization efforts of the institution.

**Table 1. Examples of ISS programs.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To support academic success</th>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. culture series; Tutoring services; Time management and study skills; Academic honesty and plagiarism; Working with your TA; Language support programs; Resume building; Navigating the library; Coping with culture shock; Managing stress; Dealing with expectations</td>
<td>Office of Academic Enrichment; TA Office; Writing Center; Tutoring Services; University Library; Office of the Ombudsman; Career Services; Counseling Center; Student Wellness; Graduate Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To understand government regulations</th>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintaining your legal status; Employment options; Finding an internship; Travel advisories; Tax compliance issues; Healthcare and insurance; Personal safety; Title IX workshops; Social Security number and driver’s license</td>
<td>Office of General Counsel; Research Office; Student Health Services; Law and Tax Clinics Campus Police and Safety; Human Resources; Office of Equity and Inclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To promote international understanding</th>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly coffee hour; Ice cream socials; Essay contest; Welcome reception; Making friends across cultures; Residence Life programs; Intercultural communication workshops; Film series; Bowling nights; Global festivals; Karaoke night</td>
<td>Student Affairs, Residence Life and Housing; Multicultural Center; Recreational Services; Student Center; Student Organizations; Athletics; Various campus and community partner offices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To connect with the local community</th>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural excursions and field trips; Networking with community leaders; Holiday events and receptions; Tailgating party; Host family program; Speaker series</td>
<td>City Manager’s Office; Host families; Office of Community Engagement and Service Learning; Rotary Club; Kiwanis Club</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**International Student Communications**

Outside of the sphere of ISS and across the field of higher education as a whole, institutions have been tasked with creating targeted and compelling communications strategies. Gikas and Grant (2013) found that 67% of surveyed students identified that mobile devices contributed to their academic success. Later, in 2016, the Education Advisory Board (EAB) conducted a study that found just over half of their respondents, 54%, say
that they choose to filter their emails from their academic department selectively (Education Advisory Board, 2016). In an environment where all students are required to complete a myriad of tasks and meet many deadlines, university units must reach students where they are with relevant, timely, and engaging messages. As such, EAB and others have called for universities to integrate digital channels into their communications plans and to deploy clear, optimized messages.

Others within the field have also suggested a more measured approach to international student recruitment. The Hobsons Insight Series proposed that universities in the UK should adopt a “student-centered” approach to their recruitment efforts, using insights from accessible and affordable data to build a target market, to understand their mindset and deliver a personalized product (Hobsons Solutions, 2016). The i-graduate report, “A UK Guide to Enhancing the International Student Experience” (Archer, Jones, & Davison, 2010), also reiterates this need for a metrics-driven approach, recommending that universities develop a strategy for assessment of performance amongst both international and domestic audiences. In addition, the report points directly to a gap between expectations and delivery when it comes to pre-arrival communications.

Over the last decade, several studies have aimed to dig deeper into international student communications preferences and user behavior, particularly when it comes to the role of social media. In an Australian study, Khawaja and Stallman (2011) identify several coping techniques which international students employed as they transitioned to life as an international student. Technology emerged as a well-established medium and students reported the utility of email and social media to both maintain contact with friends and family at home, establish new networks in the U.S., and explore useful information during the transition. Saha and Karpinski (2016) reaffirm this finding in a U.S. survey, which found that the use of social media, specifically Skype, is positively related to international students’ satisfaction with life at their university. Lin et al. (2012), too, found that Facebook usage was positively related to international students’ online bridging capital.

In a recent study, Saw, Abbott, and Donaghey (2013) demonstrate that the social media preferences of international and domestic students “differ only marginally” and that while Facebook may be the most popular social networking sites for international students they surveyed, it did not have exclusive access to the market. YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn followed behind and some variation based on country of origin was evident. The study also indicates some disparity between personal and institutional
interests on social media, with about a third of students specifying that they would like to keep their social and academic lives separate.

In the United States, China remains the top sender of international students, consisting of 31.5% of all international students enrolled at institutions in 2016. At the university site in this study, Chinese students made up 62% of the international student population in that same year. Saw, Abbott, and Donaghey’s (2013) study showed that, while all Chinese respondents did report having a Facebook account, 62% had created it within the previous two years and 12% did not use the social networking site at all.

It must be noted that very limited literature exists on communications preferences of international students in the U.S. outside the realm of social media. A report from the Office of Student Life at Ohio State University (2017) shows that, while statistically significant differences did exist between international and domestic students, email was the preferred method of communication across the board.

In Australia, several have mapped the information seeking of international students both before their arrival to Australian institutions and after matriculation (Alzougool et al., 2013; Chang and Gomez, 2016). These studies have found that while there are many available online and offline sources, in general, students look to a single source for their information. With no one source reigning supreme amongst the sample populations, the literature argues for a holistic communications approach. In addition, these studies suggest that students who are connected to local social networks tend to consume more diverse sources of information. Offline sources like word of mouth retain their importance, more so for less connected students. While these studies do focus exclusively on the Australian context and rely on small or undisclosed sample sizes, the authors pose relevant topics for future research. These include how ISS offices may tailor their communications efforts to a diverse audience and whether institutional efforts are appropriately aligned with their audiences’ needs. This article demonstrates one U.S. institution’s metrics-driven approach to optimize their communications strategy in this way.

Strategic Communication

Steyn (2002) defines strategy as the thinking behind the operations and the positioning of values for future use. Similarly, Hallahan et al. (2007) define strategy as the development, implementation, and assessment of communications. They continue by adding that strategic communication is intentional and should be driven by research and scholarship in the field. Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005) reiterate the need for intention, defining
strategic communication as an integral communication approach that is aligned with the organization’s overall strategy and one that enhances its positioning and supports its outreach function to key constituencies. Many organizations often use short-term, reactive approaches, which is not only nonstrategic in nature but may be inconsistent with or even impede its overall institutional communication strategy.

Communications plans are communication strategy in action. According to the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas (University of Kansas, n.d.), communications plans follow the following eight step process: 1) identify the purpose of the communication; 2) identify the audience; 3) plan and design the message; 4) consider available resources; 5) plan for obstacles and emergencies; 6) strategize how to connect with the media and others who can help spread your message; 7) create an action plan; and 8) decide how to evaluate and adjust the plan, based on feedback received.

RESEARCH METHOD

This quantitative study examines the communications preferences of degree-seeking international students in an effort to foster engagement and enhance their experience on campus and in the local community. In particular, it investigates students’ preferred methods of communication, patterns, and frequency in sending and receiving messages, and the types of information of which they would like to be informed. The survey also looks across a number of communication media including email, social media, print communications, and face-to-face interactions.

Participants

The sample consisted of 113 international degree-seeking students, who were enrolled during the 2017 spring semester at a mid-size 4-year university in the Mid-Atlantic region, referred to as “the university site.” Approximately 43% (n = 48) of the respondents were master’s students, 37% (n = 42) were doctoral students, and 20% (n = 23) were undergraduate students. These sample demographic characteristics align well with the total population of international students studying at the university site, which enrolled a total of 2,606 international students (1,309 graduate students, 798 undergraduate students). International students at the university site represent 13% of all enrolled undergraduate and graduate students. Of the 33 countries represented in the sample, 36% (n = 41) were from China, 18% (n = 21) were from India, and 9% (n = 10) were from Iran. Approximately 65% (n = 73) of participants had been students at the university for 2 years.
or more. About 98% \((n = 111)\) reported that they were proficient in reading, listening, and speaking the English language. Of those who responded, 81% \((n = 92)\) felt that they were comfortable with and understood the language and jargon used on U.S.-run social media accounts. The demographic characteristics of respondents are represented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Demographic characteristics of respondents \((N = 113)\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top countries of origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average time at university</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency in English language</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>98.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrument**

We developed a four-component online instrument, which was initially established for internal office-related purposes. The survey consisted of 17 closed-ended questions, using the Qualtrics Survey Software for this study (see Appendix A). We then piloted the survey with a small, randomly-selected sample of the survey population and finalized before launching to a wider audience. The first section of the survey focused on the preferred methods of communication and their frequency of use by international students to send and receive information at the university site. The second section gathered data on the types of social media channels students used both in their home country and in the U.S. The third set of questions was focused on content that students prefer to receive from their support office and in turn share back with others in their community. The last part of the survey was designed to obtain demographic data on student respondents, such as country of origin, level of study, and length of time at the university at the time they took the survey. The instrument used a 6-point Likert scale to measure the use of communications methods, ranging from Very Frequently to Never, and a 5-point scale to measure interest in messaging content, ranging from Very Interested to Very Uninterested. Cronbach’s alpha was assessed for the communication preferences variables as .91, indicating internal consistency of the variables in the scale.
Procedure

Before launching the survey, we obtained approval from the university site’s Institutional Review Board for research on human subjects. The ISS office generated a query of all registered undergraduate and graduate international students, then used this to invite participants to take the online survey via email. International students completed the questionnaire anonymously and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The non-identifiable data were stored and still reside on a secure university server, only accessible by the researchers. For the purpose of this study, an international student was defined as a full-time enrolled, degree-seeking student holding non-immigrant visa status in the U.S. It did not include short-term English as a Second Language students, visiting scholars and researchers, international employees, legal permanent residents, and other immigrant visa holders.

Data Analysis

We imported the data into IBM’s SPSS Statistics software (Version 24) for quantitative analysis and developed a codebook to serve as a guide for defining variables and coding responses. Both descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (paired sample t-tests) were used to analyze the data. Paired-sample t-tests were used to compare the means of two communication variables within the same group and determine whether the mean difference between the paired observations was statistically significant. A homogeneity test was also conducted to identify any outliers in the analysis of communication preferences. All assumptions regarding the use of paired samples t-test analyses were met with the exception of the following variables, which failed the Levene’s test and homogeneity of variance assumption ($p < .05$): Social Media (Send), YouTube (Home), and QQ (Home). Paired-samples t-tests that included these variables were not found to be significant.

RESULTS

Methods of Communication

International students selected from a list, the communication methods they use to regularly send important information as students at the university. Email ($M = 5.51$) was the most frequently-used method of communication, followed by Face-to-Face Interactions ($M = 4.47$), and Social Media ($M = 3.94$). Students used Paper Communications ($M = 2.79$), in the form of letters, memos, posters, etc., rarely to convey information to others. When asked which forms of communication they received and
observed important information in, international students correspondingly selected Email as the most frequent ($M = 5.66$), followed by Face-to-Face Interactions ($M = 4.22$), Social Media ($M = 4.03$), and Paper Communications ($M = 3.38$).

We conducted paired-samples t-tests to compare the means of sending and receiving messages by the different methods of communication. There was a significant average difference in the scores for sending and receiving Paper Communications [$t(112) = -4.87, p < .001$], as well as in Face-to-Face Interactions [$t(112) = 2.92, p < .001$]. These results suggest that international students prefer to receive rather than send communications in paper format. They also prefer to use Face-to-Face Interactions when giving important information rather than when receiving information. Conversely, there was no significant average difference in how international students used Email and Social Media to send and receive information— they used both communication media frequently. Table 3 shows the comparison between sending and receiving information in different methods of communication, using paired sample t-tests.

Table 3. Differences in sending and receiving communications ($N = 113$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>$M$ (Send)</th>
<th>$M$ (Receive)</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>-1.88</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>-4.87</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>-0.67</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .001$

Additionally, a majority of respondents indicated their preference for using Email (69%) and Face-to-Face Interaction (23%) when initiating communication with their support office, rather than Phone (4%) or Social Media (3%). Moreover, 66% of international students would prefer to receive emails on key updates from their support office at least 4 to 5 times per month. Ninety-two percent reported that they understood and felt comfortable using expected email etiquette at their institution and in the U.S.

**Social Media Preferences**

When asked about their use of social media channels, international students reported that YouTube was their primary social media platform both in their home country ($M = 4.23$) and at the university site ($M = 4.531$). They occasionally used Facebook in their home country ($M = 4.07$) and when on campus ($M = 4.407$). Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to
compare the means of social media usage when international students are in their home country versus when they are on campus. There was a significant mean difference in the use of Facebook at home and in the U.S. \[t(112) = -2.28, p < .05\], suggesting that international students used this platform more frequently when they are on campus than at home. There was no significant difference in how frequently international students used YouTube at home and in the U.S.

In looking at Chinese social media channels, Chinese students \((n = 41)\) indicated that, of the platforms they subscribed to, they most frequently used WeChat both in their home country \((M = 3.0)\) and at the university \((M = 2.73)\). The students used RenRen least frequently at home \((M = 1.84)\) and in the U.S. \((M = 1.40)\). Chinese students had a tendency to use WeChat \([t(40) = 2.95, p < .001]\), Weibo \([t(40) = 2.24, p < .05]\), and RenRen \([t(40) = 3.11, p < .001]\) more in their home country than when they were in the U.S. Table 4 shows the comparison between sending and receiving information in different methods of communication, using a paired sample t-test.

Table 4. Differences in social media usage at home and on campus (N = 113).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>(M) (Home)</th>
<th>(M) (Campus)</th>
<th>(t)</th>
<th>(df)</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.407</td>
<td>-2.28</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.654</td>
<td>-1.60</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.699</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.531</td>
<td>-1.57</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.548</td>
<td>-1.53</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SnapChat</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.415</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WeChat</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weibo</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.03**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RenRen</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QQ</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \(p < .001\), ** \(p < .05\)

**Messaging Content**

The survey asked international students about the different topics of information they would be interested in receiving from their support office, and how likely they were to share that same information with other students. While respondents stated that all listed topics were of interest to them,
information on Academic Resources and Programs ($M = 4.36$) was the most highly rated, followed by Immigration ($M = 4.23$), Social and Cultural Events ($M = 4.16$), University Safety ($M = 4.01$), and Health and Wellness ($M = 3.94$). Students were not as eager to share information as they were with receiving it—they were somewhat interested in re-sharing information on Academic Resources and Programs ($M = 3.88$), Social and Cultural Events ($M = 3.84$), and Immigration ($M = 3.79$).

We conducted paired-samples t-tests to compare the means of receiving and sharing different topics of information. There was a significant mean difference in interest between receiving and sharing information on each listed topic, suggesting that, on average, international students were more interested in receiving information rather than re-sharing that same information: Immigration [$t(112) = 5.09, p < .001$]; Academic Resources and Programs [$t(112) = 5.53, p < .05$]; Social and Cultural events [$t(112) = 3.34, p < .001$]; Health and Wellness [$t(112) = 4.39 p < .001$]; and University Safety [$t(112) = 3.68, p < .001$]. Table 5 shows the comparison between receiving and re-sharing information on different topics, using paired sample t-tests.

**Table 5.** Differences in receiving and sharing messaging content (N = 113).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>$M$ (Receive)</th>
<th>$M$ (Share)</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Resources</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Cultural</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Wellness</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Safety</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.00*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .001$

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

As the role of ISS offices continues to evolve to accommodate a larger and more diverse population of international students, scholars, and families at U.S. institutions of higher education, communications will become an important area for growth within the profession. ISS offices should employ data-driven communications strategies with the goal of, first and foremost, ensuring that non-immigrant populations receive the information they need to maintain a legal status in the U.S. Beyond this, a collaborative communications strategy should seek to create a sense of community and
belongingness amongst its international population and to connect these same people to key ISS programs and to other resources across campus.

This study represents a step by the university site’s ISS office to support its immigration services and programming model with a tailored communications strategy that seeks to meet its audiences where they are with relevant and timely information. The data retrieved from this survey has produced a number of key implications for the university site, which are discussed below along with several examples of how they can be leveraged there and perhaps on other campuses to maximize student engagement.

Email

Email emerged as the most frequently used form of communication to both receive and send information amongst the international students surveyed. The majority of respondents indicated that they would like to receive four to five email messages per month (or approximately one per week) from their ISS office. While the literature suggests that the most successful communications strategies in higher education must reduce unnecessary email “noise” and diversify by employing additional digital channels (Education Advisory Board, 2017; Gikas & Grant, 2013), it is clear that, at least from this study and at the university site, email cannot and should not be discarded as the lynchpin in an ISS communications strategy. Hence, the university’s ISS office must emphasize developing and sending email communications regularly to international students, scholars, and university stakeholders with key calls to action and reminders ranging from immigration to upcoming cultural and social programs. An example would be weekly e-newsletters containing a calendar of events. Working closely with academic and co-curricular units to integrate messaging from the larger campus community would be another. To further support this communication tactic, the ISS office must collaborate with the university’s Office of Communications and Marketing to define a standard operating procedure that guides support staff on how and when to strategically send out mass or personalized emails.

Face-to-Face Interaction

Face-to-Face interaction was the second most preferred form of communication amongst the international students surveyed, confirming that the role of in-person advisors remains integral in the process, especially when it comes to addressing questions or concerns. It is therefore key that a strong connection between advising, communications, and programming staff is established. Messages, particularly those pertaining to immigration regulations, must efficiently direct students back to ISS advisory staff for
further support, and also inform them on how they can access the services and programs of the university’s ISS office.

It is common for ISS offices to host a number of social and cultural programs, such as a weekly coffee hour, welcome receptions, and other recreational activities, throughout the year to help students adjust to campus and engage with others in the local community. Such events provide a high level of face-to-face interaction among attendees and can serve as a strategic platform for ISS staff and other support unit representatives to enable the Counseling Center, Career Services, and Residence Life, to connect in person and convey important information and resources to this community.

Social Media

While the results indicate that respondents did prefer certain social media platforms over others, it is not clear that all international students are using one channel over another to communicate and receive information. In fact, it appears that the students surveyed are active on multiple channels and that preferences differ between students. Employing a comprehensive communications strategy, weighing audiences, consulting with the central office of communications and marketing, and making strategic decisions about which social media platforms the ISS office should have an active presence on are some important factors to take into consideration. It is helpful to communicate key messages across all social media platforms to ensure equal access by all students, though it may be necessary to tailor content for increased engagement on each channel.

YouTube was the most frequently used social media platform amongst the students surveyed in this study despite research suggesting that Facebook is the most popular social networking site for international students. This indicates both the fast-paced environment of social media and the ever-growing importance of video, both on YouTube and other social media platforms. The university’s ISS office must consider building social media content that tells the story of their community and promotes key campaigns, events, and calls-to-action throughout the year, using video content whenever possible. The ISS office should obtain support from the central office for communications or hire student employees with relevant know-how to develop video content if the office does not employ a communications specialist.

Of Chinese social media channels, WeChat was the most frequently used, though there was a statistically significant difference in frequency of use that indicated the students surveyed are more active in their home community than they are during their time at the university site. With China being the top sending country of international students to the U.S., it
is important for ISS offices to partner with the recruitment and admissions offices to explore a university-wide presence on WeChat with a central content calendar that targets students even before arrival to campus. Finding opportunities to employ Chinese students on campus or partnering with content expert units, such as the Confucius Institute and the Department of Foreign Languages, to translate content and maintain an official presence on the social media channel would be another strategy.

A Holistic Communications Model

Each of the key trends and communications methods outlined above require significant amounts of time, resources, and talent to implement. ISS communications strategies must and should not operate within a vacuum. While the ISS offices contribute the expertise in content and audience, the central office of communication supplies ample creative talent. In addition, coordination with a university’s central office of communications and marketing ensures consistency of brand style and opportunities for the amplification of messaging. It also provides the ISS office with direct and quick access to resources for managing media requests, crisis and risk management issues, and campus-wide messaging.

In order to ensure successful implementation of a communications strategy, ISS offices must develop communications plans throughout the year, also including details on learning goals and outcomes, staffing, timelines, budgets, and strategic points of collaboration. When developing a communications plan, it is also important to understand how the ISS office will partner with expert units to leverage all of its communications channels and achieve its short and long-term goals. This includes both in-person, print and digital communications, such as email and social media outreach. It is important that communications plans are crafted in coordination with ISS programming staff.

This study demonstrates that while key trends exist, students maintain a diversity of communications preferences, all of which must be catered to, and assessed regularly, in order to ensure optimal success in outreach and engagement.

Engagement Between Domestic and International Students

International students often experience difficulties in developing friendships and connecting with both domestic and other international students on campus. This can disrupt their adjustment and integration to many aspects of campus life, especially if they do not receive the social and cultural support they need from their institution. Having a better understanding of the communications preferences of international students
can support an ISS office in fostering engagement opportunities with the local campus community.

Based on some of the implications discussed in this study, the ISS office, which serves as the primary domestic host to international students on campus, has developed targeted communications strategies to effectively reach this community and encourage them to participate in campus-wide activities. Similarly, other service units have collaborated with the ISS office to guide their communications efforts and promote events and opportunities for meaningful, cross-cultural interactions among diverse groups of international and domestic students.

As an example, attendance at a weekly International Coffee Hour at the university site in this study has steadily increased as a result of a strong communications strategy and intentional collaborations with various partner offices on campus and in the local community. With over 200 in attendance each week, this program provides a platform for attendees to make friends, practice their language, learn about different cultures, and enjoy a free beverage and snacks. In addition to growth in new and repeat attendance among international students, a larger community of domestic students and scholars have also begun to attend this program. A meaningful communications and programming strategy has converted attendance into friendship.

CONCLUSION

Being a quantitative study administered at a large research institution, the reported findings were not meant to be generalizable in nature but rather serve as an impetus both for institutional change and for future research. It does not account for personal and cultural factors that may impact the preference and experience of international students nor does it include short term, credit mobility or English language training students. A larger sample size, a more diverse representation of students, and a comparative perspective from domestic students can further this area of research.

However, this study supports the argument for an intentional approach to ISS communications plans and, above all, reassures the importance of formal assessment and the frequent collection of analytics to drive strategy. The survey indicated several key trends that should inform the strategy of the university’s ISS office communications strategy:

- Email remains the most preferred form of communication by international students, and should be an anchor component of the ISS communications strategy.
Face-to-Face interaction was the second most preferred form of communication amongst students, emphasizing the importance of ISS advisory staff.

While the survey did show preferences for certain social media channels over others, it is not clear that all students prefer one over the other, meaning that the ISS office should adopt a diversified presence on social media.

Collaboration with a central office of communications and marketing is key in ensuring the successful implementation of a holistic communications strategy.

As the international student population in the U.S. continues to grow and diversify, and as the digital landscape evolves, ISS offices should be prepared to expand, assess, and optimize their communications strategies on a regular basis in compliance and coordination with other institutional departments and support units in order to ensure student engagement, experience, and success on campus.

REFERENCES


Saha, N., & Karpinski, A. (2016). The influence of social media on international students’ global life satisfaction and academic performance. In K. Bista & C. Foster (Eds.), *Campus support services, programs, and policies for international students* (pp. 57-76). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.


**Appendix A**

**Survey Instrument**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.) How often do you use the following communication methods to regularly send important information pertinent to your life at the</td>
<td>• Very frequently = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Frequently = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Occasionally = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| University?                                                            | • Rarely = 2  
| Email, Paper Communications,                                           | • Very Rarely = 1  
| Social Media, Word of Mouth (Face-to-Face interactions)                | • Never = 0  
|                                                                        | • Choose not to respond = 100  
|                                                                        | • Indeterminate (no response) = 200                                                                                                    |
| 2.) How often do you use the                                          | • Very frequently = 5  
| following communication methods to                                      | • Frequently = 4  
| regularly receive or observe                                          | • Occasionally = 3  
| important information pertinent to                                     | • Rarely = 2  
| your life at the University?                                           | • Very Rarely = 1  
| Email, Paper Communications,                                           | • Never = 0  
| Social Media, Word of Mouth (Face-to-Face interactions)                | • Choose not to respond = 100  
|                                                                        | • Indeterminate (no response) = 200                                                                                                    |
| 3.) How many times per month                                           | • 5 or more times per month = 4  
| would you like to receive official                                       | • 4 times per month = 3  
| emails from OISS focused on key                                         | • 3 times per month = 2  
| updates about your life at the University?                             | • 1-2 times per month = 1  
|                                                                        | • Never = 0  
|                                                                        | • Choose not to respond = 100  
|                                                                        | • Indeterminate (no response) = 200                                                                                                    |
| 4.) Rate the amount to which you                                        | • Strongly Agree = 5  
| agree with the following statement:                                    | • Agree = 4  
| “I understand and feel comfortable using expected email etiquette in    | • Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3  
| the United States.”                                                     | • Disagree = 2  
|                                                                        | • Strongly Disagree =1  
|                                                                        | • Choose not to respond = 100  
|                                                                        | • Indeterminate (no response) = 200                                                                                                    |
| 5.) How do you prefer to initiate                                       | • Email  
| communication with OISS?                                                | • Social Media  
|                                                                        | • In-person meeting  
|                                                                        | • Phone call  
|                                                                        | • Choose not to respond = 100  
|                                                                        | • Indeterminate (no response) = 200                                                                                                    |
| 6.) How often do you use the                                            | • Very frequently = 5  
| following social media channels                                         | • Frequently = 4  
| while in your home country?                                             | • Occasionally = 3  
| Facebook, Instagram, Twitter,                                           | • Rarely = 2  
| LinkedIn, Snapchat, WeChat, Weibo,                                    | • Very Rarely = 1  
| RenRen, QQ                                                              | • Never = 0  
<p>|                                                                        | • Choose not to respond = 100                                                                                                          |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7.) How often do you use the following social media channels while you are here at the University? *Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, SnapChat, WeChat, Weibo, RenRen, QQ* | - Very frequently = 5  
- Frequently = 4  
- Occasionally = 3  
- Rarely = 2  
- Very Rarely = 1  
- Never = 0  
- Choose not to respond = 100  
- Indeterminate (no response) = 200 |
| 8.) How strongly are you interested in receiving information on the following topics related to your life at the University? *Immigration, Academic events & programs, Cultural and social events and programs, Health & Wellness, University Safety* | - Very Interested = 5  
- Interested = 4  
- Neither Interested nor Uninterested = 3  
- Uninterested = 2  
- Very Uninterested = 1  
- Choose not to respond = 100  
- Indeterminate (no response) = 200 |
| 9.) How likely are you to re-share communications you receive on the following topics with your fellow peers? *Immigration, Academic events & programs, Cultural and social events and programs, Health & Wellness, University Safety* | - Very Likely = 5  
- Likely = 4  
- Neither Likely nor unlikely = 3  
- Unlikely = 2  
- Very unlikely = 1  
- Choose not to respond = 100  
- Indeterminate (no response) = 200 |
| 10.) Rate the amount to which you agree with the following statement: “In general, I am able to fully understand the meaning of the language and jargon used on American-run social media accounts.” | - Strongly Agree = 5  
- Agree = 4  
- Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3  
- Disagree = 2  
- Strongly Disagree = 1  
- Choose not to respond = 100  
- Indeterminate (no response) = 200 |
| 11.) Rate the amount to which you agree with the following statement: “In general, I pay attention to posters and flyers that are hanging around campus.” | - Strongly Agree = 5  
- Agree = 4  
- Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3  
- Disagree = 2  
- Strongly Disagree = 1  
- Choose not to respond = 100  
- Indeterminate (no response) = 200 |
| 12.) Rate the amount to which you agree with the following statement: | - Strongly Agree = 5  
- Agree = 4  
- Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3  
- Disagree = 2  
- Strongly Disagree = 1  
- Choose not to respond = 100  
- Indeterminate (no response) = 200 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“While attending school in the United States, I prefer to receive official communications in my native language.”</td>
<td>• Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3 &lt;br&gt; • Disagree = 2 &lt;br&gt; • Strongly Disagree = 1 &lt;br&gt; • Choose not to respond = 100 &lt;br&gt; • Indeterminate (no response) = 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.) How proficient would you say you are in reading, listening, and speaking the English Language?</td>
<td>• Very proficient = 4 &lt;br&gt; • Proficient = 3 &lt;br&gt; • Somewhat proficient = 2 &lt;br&gt; • Not proficient = 1 &lt;br&gt; • Choose not to respond = 100 &lt;br&gt; • Indeterminate/no response = 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.) Please indicate your home country.</td>
<td>• Coded after collection &lt;br&gt; • Choose not to respond = 100 &lt;br&gt; • Indeterminate/no response = 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.) Please indicate your native language.</td>
<td>• Coded after collection &lt;br&gt; • Choose not to respond = 100 &lt;br&gt; • Indeterminate/no response = 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.) Are you an undergraduate, Ph.D. or Master’s student?</td>
<td>• Undergraduate student = 1 &lt;br&gt; • Master’s student = 2 &lt;br&gt; • Ph.D. student = 3 &lt;br&gt; • Choose not to respond = 100 &lt;br&gt; • Indeterminate/no response = 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.) Please indicate your current location of residence (City, State, Country).</td>
<td>• Coded after collection &lt;br&gt; • Choose not to respond = 100 &lt;br&gt; • Indeterminate/no response = 200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Manuscript submitted: November 30, 2017*  
*Manuscript revised: March 14, 2018*  
*Accepted for publication: April 17, 2018*
Peers to Peers: Developing a Student-Coordinated Conversation Partner Program

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ABSTRACT

The lack of meaningful interaction between domestic and international students is a persistent concern in international higher education. Conversation partner programs are a promising measure to promote the rich and repeated contact necessary for the development of intercultural relationships and communication skills. This article describes the process of launching and managing a successful student-coordinated conversation partner program with no or minimal funding. The five core team members (two faculty advisors and three student leaders) explain why they created or joined the program, their responsibilities, what worked, what was challenging, and what they recommend should other institutions want to start a similar program.

Keywords: collaboration, communication, conversation partner program, culture, friendship, student-coordinated
In September 1945, Senator J. William Fulbright introduced a bill in the U.S. Congress to fund the “promotion of international good will through the exchange of students” (U.S. Department of State, n.d.), which was based upon the principles of international partnership and mutual understanding. International student exchange remains one of the primary ways for U.S. universities to internationalize. Unfortunately, studies show that international students often interact more with conationals or other international students than with domestic students (e.g., Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013), and a third or more of international students in the United States and other popular destination countries have no meaningful relationships with host nationals (e.g., Gareis, 2012). This situation is causing concerns that genuine internationalization is not achieved and that neither sojourners nor hosts derive maximum benefits.

Ward, Masgoret, and Gezentsvey (2009) call for institutions to increase qualitatively rich and repeated contact in order to facilitate cross-cultural interactions between international and domestic students. Towards this end, universities’ strategic development plans should include specific classroom practices and programs designed to foster such contact. An example with particular potential is conversation partner programs as they not only provide rich and repeated contact but also focus on key factors impeding relationship development: fostering oral communication skills, fluency, and social relaxation when conversing across cultural barriers (Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011).

Conversation partner programs require resources in the form of staffing and management that may not be available in some institutions. What follows is the description of a student-coordinated program launched without any initial funding.

**PROGRAM DESIGN**

In fall 2012, the two faculty authors, Ron Aaron and Elisabeth Gareis, met to launch a conversation partner program (CPP) at Baruch College. The college has a sizable number of students (immigrants as well as international students) who don’t speak English as a native language. We decided to match native and nonnative speakers, with the goal of fostering nonnative speakers’ comfort in conversing in English, native speakers’ ease in communicating across language barriers, and both native and nonnative speakers’ expansion of cultural knowledge and development of intercultural relationships. After attending an orientation, student pairs were to meet at least six times during the semester for approximately an hour. In addition, events (such as game night) were to be offered for CPP participants to
socialize. In line with established conditions for optimal intergroup contact (Allport, 1954), the program was structured so that native and nonnative speakers have equal status (i.e., the program was not to be seen as a tutorial service but as a peer collaboration, with the goal of both native and nonnative speakers benefiting equally).

The unique aspect of the program is that it was launched with minimal funding and operated by student volunteers. Three undergraduate students (the student authors of this article) were recruited as lead coordinators. Two of these students were international students from Italy and India, and the third was a local student with roots in the Dominican Republic. In addition, each student leader headed a committee of 5-6 student coordinators and oversaw one of the program’s three areas of operation: administration, events, and communication and technology.

During the pilot semester in 2013, 42 students participated. Feedback was excellent, and the program quickly grew to a current average of over 300 participants per semester. Roughly representative of the college’s overall student population, the vast majority of participants are undergraduate students with business-related majors. Likewise, the racial and ethnic composition of the native speaker participants parallel that of the student body, which is 40% Asian, 31% Caucasian, 17% Hispanic, and 11% African American. As to the international students, currently the top five native languages of CPP participants are Chinese, Korean, French, Japanese, and Turkish, which largely coincides with the languages spoken in the top home countries of international students at the college overall. Although the gender ratio at the college is roughly half female and half male, females outnumber males in the CPP 2:1.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

What follows are the personal narratives of the five core team members. They each reflect on their rationale for creating or joining the program, their responsibilities, their perception of what worked and what was challenging, and their recommendations for others looking to launch similar programs.

Ron Aaron: Co-Founder and Faculty Advisor

*Why I Helped Create the Program*

Working in the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, I met with students on a broad array of issues. I found that nonnative speakers were often rather quiet throughout our meetings. They were not comfortable sharing their thoughts, and, if they did, they tended to be very brief and soft-spoken. I wondered, if they acted this way when I engaged them, what
might be happening in their classes. Did they speak up and ask questions, and did they feel comfortable in approaching their professors in office hours? I felt that we had to find a way to make these students gain confidence and comfort in conversing, and I consulted with my colleague, Elisabeth Gareis. This became the seed for the establishment of our peer-run CPP.

**My Responsibilities**

I was responsible for securing funding support, arranging rooms for events, developing a recruitment strategy for participants, and structuring the motivational and leadership experiences for the volunteer student leaders and their teams of coordinators.

**What Worked**

Students who met on a regular basis with their partner generally were very satisfied. Nonnative speakers noted a greater degree of comfort to converse, native speakers developed a cross-cultural sensitivity as they learned a great deal about their partner, and both often mentioned a sense of friendship. Clearly nonnative speakers who maximized their involvement in the program also developed a much greater comfort in their ability to ask questions and to develop confidence in approaching other students and faculty members in the future.

**What Was Challenging**

About a quarter of the students who had applied to the program never really participated beyond attending an orientation session or one or two meetings with their matched partner. Even though all students were told to contact the administrative team should their partner be unresponsive, a lot of the students just did not do so. As a result, we added a note to the application form, saying that students should only apply if they can commit to meeting their partner six or more times. Another challenge was that the attendance at events was not as great as we had hoped. Other than taking part in our mandatory orientation session, participants were not required to attend any of the social and fun programs that were meant to further enhance their opportunity to converse and share with other attendees some of their thoughts and perspectives. One reason may be that the event meeting times conflicted with their class or work schedules.

**My Recommendations**

A successful student-coordinated program needs continuity in quality student leadership and coordinators, who are good communicators. In addition, feedback from the participants is important, ideally including
face-to-face interaction between student participants and the student coordinators or faculty advisors. It is essential to get to know as many “players” as possible to motivate them personally, secure meaningful feedback, and identify talent that could possibly take on broader responsibility in the following year. Finally, financial support for the development of promotional materials and the purchase of light refreshments for events is a necessity. To solve this problem, we registered the CPP as a student club, but the funding was only rudimentary. Developing an advisory board that includes some key college administrators might be the best way to secure some of the needed funding.

Elisabeth Gareis: Co-Founder and Faculty Advisor

Why I Helped Create the Program

As a professor in intercultural communication with a research focus on intercultural friendship, I have long been concerned with the relative lack of friendship between international and domestic students as well as the scarcity of research on measures for fostering interaction and friendship development. The idea of a student-coordinated CPP interested me because (1) it created a platform for the rich and repeated contact that promotes relationship formation; (2) it focused on conversation, which is often not part of the English-language training of international students abroad but essential for relationship initiation and maintenance; and (3) it allowed international and domestic students to collaborate in the management of the program and therefore fulfilled Allport’s (1954) conditions for optimal intergroup contact (i.e., equal status, common goals, cooperation, and support of the authorities). Last but not least, I was excited about the benefits for the domestic participants, who rarely study overseas and would gain a greater global perspective through close contact with their international partners.

My Responsibilities

I prepared the online application and assessment instruments (e.g., an initial “check-in” and a final feedback survey), kept enrollment and satisfaction statistics, created a handbook (with FAQs, suggested conversation topics, and tips for conversation management), and an online orientation for students unable to attend the face-to-face orientation.

What Worked

Creating an effective program from the bottom up gave all student coordinators as well as the faculty advisors a wonderful sense of accomplishment. Enrollment has been sustained at over 300 students per
semester for more than five years now, which is fantastic. Most important, satisfaction levels are high, with students reporting gains in cultural knowledge and communication competence, and the development of friendships with their partners.

What Was Challenging

By far the most challenging aspect was project management. Many tasks were dependent on meticulous coordination of time and people (e.g., scheduling rooms, ordering refreshments, making sure that rooms were equipped with writing utensils, etc.). Although I created a detailed timeline, it was difficult to ensure that team leaders and their coordinating teams adhered to it. In addition, when students graduate, the student leadership changes, requiring renewed training from the ground up. Also, launching the program was time-consuming. In the initial years, I spent a significant amount of time on creating the materials (forms, surveys, handbook, etc.) and building the CPP. Still, the success of the program made it all worthwhile.

My Recommendations

On a practical level, I recommend that faculty and students looking to create a similar program employ project-management software to define tasks clearly and monitor their completion. On a broader level, a recurring comment on feedback surveys was that the CPP takes students “out of their comfort zone” and allows them to “meet someone whom they would not have met otherwise.” This clearly shows that institutions should not expect for connections to happen simply because international and domestic students share space; instead, they should create an infrastructure that actively promotes contact and assists students in forging connections. I recommend that faculty members have the courage to initiate the creation of a program. Although it requires commitment and energy, working in a team with students is an immensely rewarding experience; plus, it gives student coordinators tangible skills for the workplace and an introduction to civic engagement that can change their lives.

Lalit Kumar: Leader of Administrative Team

Why I Joined

What attracted me to the CPP was the opportunity to give back and to create an atmosphere of shared community among native and nonnative speakers. As a high school exchange student from Italy, I was fortunate to get honest feedback about my English from my American host family. This
was critical in providing me with a solid foundation for communicating and navigating American culture with an increased level of confidence.

My Responsibilities

My team’s primary responsibilities were managing the application process (e.g., distributing the application forms and matching partners) and to maintain ongoing communication with the program participants (e.g., in case there were questions or conflicts, such as partners dropping out due to unforeseen circumstances). Our highest objective was addressing student concerns throughout the semester in a consistent and timely manner.

What Worked

There are strong benefits in having a program managed by student volunteers as opposed to college staff. Native speakers are genuinely inclined to devote their full attention to their partners and do not view this as a job or obligation. Similarly, nonnative speakers typically find it more beneficial (and comfortable) to interact with students in their own age group as opposed to college staff. We had a high level of satisfaction that led numerous participants to return as volunteers the following year, and to get some of their friends to join as well.

What Was Challenging

It was quite easy to attract nonnative speakers to the CPP, but challenging to attract enough native speakers. We had to find ways to emphasize to native speakers the benefits of participating in the CPP and to encourage them to commit to helping another student over the course of an entire semester.

My Recommendations

Recruiting student leaders that are truly passionate about breaking down barriers between native and nonnative speakers is key for other institutions considering the establishment of a CPP. I have come to realize that ambitious goals cannot be reached without surrounding yourself with other ambitious individuals.

Abhinaya Swaminathan: Leader of Events Team

Why I Joined

As an international student from India, I was especially conscious of the behavioral patterns of international students, who have a tendency to congregate with others of similar background. One reason for this is the lack of structures on college campuses to kindle cross-cultural interactions, and I
saw the CPP as a means for students to experience such interactions. I was also attracted to the CPP because it was brand-new and provided me with an opportunity to co-shape its peers-serving-peers structure in productive and enriching ways. I not only learned about group dynamics as a result of working with a leadership team, I also became more prepared to face situations where cross-cultural interactions are likely to occur. This is an invaluable skill in today’s global workplace and social environments.

My Responsibilities

I was in charge of the events team, which created, planned, and hosted the orientations and an array of interactive events.

What Worked

I felt that peers leading peers enhanced our ability to achieve buy-in from the student body. Utilizing international students as coordinators strengthened our ability to design an effective program.

What Was Challenging

Although we had some really creative events (e.g., ice skating, mini golf, game night), attendance was not optimal. The issue was likely the large group size (over 300 CPP student participants), which made the marketing of events via mass e-mail somewhat impersonal. Also, students joined as coordinators because of their general interest in the CPP’s mission, and it was challenging to define their specific roles within each committee.

My Recommendations

Most importantly, the leadership needs to believe that engaging with diversity is important on a college campus, be committed to the mission of the program, and seek student buy-in at all levels. It is also essential to obtain feedback, which requires repeated check-ins with the participants. Finally, roles and expectations within the student leadership should be clearly defined and committee members recruited with specific job descriptions in mind.

Carmen Cedeno: Leader of Communication and Technology Team

Why I Joined

I love communicating with people and learning about different cultures by knocking down communication barriers. Additionally, I thoroughly enjoy helping others who struggle with English, since my mother is Dominican and does not speak English well. I saw the CPP as the perfect opportunity to learn more about the people that make up the diverse
community at our college, while helping others navigate college life. I strongly feel that I am now able to understand nonverbal and verbal cues that differ across cultures in a more conscious way. Additionally, I feel that the program strengthened my empathy and also helped develop my leadership skills for the workplace.

My Responsibilities

My team was responsible for social media marketing and the design of digital marketing material, such as e-mail campaigns, digital flyers, and event sign-ups as well as website maintenance.

What Worked

The program benefited from being run by student volunteers in that the student volunteers shared a common goal and passion for the program. There is more of an authentic flavor and altruistic mission when it is being managed by student volunteers.

What Was Challenging

Most of our initiatives were very successful in attaining organic growth for the program; however, it was difficult to manage expectations and projects when only a few members of the team had the necessary skill sets (e.g., graphic design, social media marketing, event management, and budgeting). It was also hard to attract native speakers who truly felt a passion for the program and wanted to serve as coordinators. While nonnative speakers were willing to help, the program needed strong native speakers able to navigate the political landscape.

My Recommendations

If someone were to create a CPP elsewhere, I would recommend to find a faculty mentor who understands intercultural communication. The student volunteers should have a passion for communication and helping others, and to do this from a truly altruistic point of view. It is incredibly rewarding to be able to directly impact the life of one student without money or college credits affecting someone’s motivation.

UPDATE AND CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Since its inception, assessments and feedback have led to the revision of some design elements of the CPP:

- Initially, more nonnative than native speakers applied to participate. We employed a multi-pronged approach to address the issue. We
increased institutional support by promoting the CPP as a way to expand the global perspective of domestic students and secured the assistance of the associate provost, whose announcements of the CPP to all faculty now include the call for more native speakers. We also intensified recruitment of native speakers through mainstream student leadership organizations as a means to enhance personal growth and by targeting departments with a focus on communication across cultural and linguistic lines (e.g., Communication Studies and Modern Languages). Finally, we asked native speakers if they were willing to have two partners, with whom they would meet separately. Consistently, more than 50% of native speakers have been willing to do so. In combination, these efforts have been exceedingly successful. We have no nonnative speakers on waiting lists.

- In order to increase semester-long commitment, we created a certificate for students, who met their partner seven or more times and an “ambassadorship” for students who, additionally, attended at least four events.

- A faculty member in Computer and Information Systems volunteered his time to design a computerized partner-matching program that helped the CPP move from a time-consuming and complicated manual matching process to a largely automatic one. The matching criteria are native language, gender preference, and time availability. With many students commuting and working outside of school, matching for availability is the most difficult task, precluding the inclusion of additional criteria (e.g., hobbies and interests). Two manual steps remain, however: Prior to the automatic matching, the administrative committee sorts through special requests (e.g., cultural preferences) and tries to accommodate them. In addition, students are matched manually if someone’s partner drops out during the semester.

- We decided to pay the three core student leaders a small stipend, funded through an endowment for internationalization efforts at the college. The ability to attract students to leadership positions has not been affected by the stipends, however. The program worked just as well without the stipends.

- When one of the two faculty founders retired and the other went on sabbatical, we decided to hire a faculty director of the program. The faculty director receives one course’s worth of release time per
semester, paid for by Student Affairs. Faculty mentorship has proven essential to the CPP in order to ensure continuity, nurture leadership and communication skills, and provide oversight. However, all day-to-day operations and much of the planning is handled exclusively by the student leaders and their teams. The low cost and excitement engendered by being peer-focused sets the program apart and makes it a viable model for a variety of other institutions.

The CPP is now an established resource and one of the places at the college where students can further their communication skills, expand their global perspectives, and be part of a truly diverse community. End-of-semester assessments attest to positive change in communication skills, cultural knowledge, and relationship development. We have not assessed long-term effects (e.g., friendship duration and alumni networking), but we plan to do so in the near future.

Conversation partner programs are catalysts for the kind of interaction between domestic and international students that is at the basis for long-term friendship formation and networking. With internationalization often focused on curricular development, partner programs also fill an important gap by allowing students not only to apply knowledge gained in their academic work but also to learn directly from the cultural diversity of other students for the personal growth and mutual benefit of every participant. We believe that institutions should make engagement with cultural diversity an integral part of students’ educational experience and reinforce in students the value of making a difference in the lives of others. Peer-coordinated conversation partner programs provide this intercultural and civic engagement. They are an ideal model for what community involvement can be within our collegiate environments.

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*Manuscript submitted: February 28, 2018*

*Manuscript revised: March 26, 2018*

*Accepted for publication: May 3, 2018*
Building Bridges Across the International Divide: Fostering Meaningful Cross-Cultural Interactions Between Domestic and International Students

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we consider the ways in which both formal and informal social practices at colleges and universities can lead domestic and international students to engage in meaningful cross-cultural interactions. Employing a narrative-based approach, we reflect upon our own personal experiences as domestic students who developed close friendships with international students at two higher education institutions in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century. In one case, an international friendship grew from a formal, university-sponsored conversation partner program organized by the university’s international office, and, in the other case, a close friendship with an international student emerged through informal social interactions on a college campus. Taken together, these cases suggest that higher education settings have the potential to be spaces of meaningful cross-cultural interaction. However, this requires an active commitment on the part of both domestic and international students to engage in social interactions across the international divide.

Keywords: conversation partner programs, cross-cultural interactions, narrative, international friendships, international students

College and university campuses have the potential to be ideal settings in which to foster cross-cultural interactions and meaningful international friendships. Studies suggest that international students often build cross-
cultural friendships with other students from around the world when studying abroad, yet social interactions between domestic and international students are generally more limited, particularly in the United States (Trice 2004; Gareis, Merkin, and Goldman 2011; Gareis 2012; Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood 2013). This lack of social engagement has important implications not only for the student experience itself; it also shapes the social networks and professional opportunities that students encounter once they have completed their studies. If domestic students only interact with their domestic peers, this will most likely have the effect of limiting their cultural literacy as well as diminishing their ability to socially and professionally interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in different geographical contexts. As Lee suggests, there is a “need to concentrate on how to enhance the quality of intercultural friendships and how to make such relationships work” (2006, p. 6). How, then, might meaningful cross-cultural interactions and international friendships be fostered on college and university campuses? What formal and informal practices can effectively break down the social barriers between domestic and international students? Put simply, how might we actively seek to build bridges across the international divide in higher education settings?

This article seeks to address these issues by reflecting on our own personal experiences as domestic students interacting with international students at two higher education institutions on the East Coast of the United States around the turn of the twenty-first century. We employ a narrative-based approach to frame our discussion, which enables us consider the intricacies of how international friendships develop within higher education contexts. In one case, an international friendship with a Malaysian student grew from a formal, university-sponsored conversation partner program organized by the university’s international office, and, in the other case, a close friendship with an international student from Tanzania emerged through informal social interactions on a college campus. Although the mode of initial contact differed in each case, both resulted in lasting friendships that not only expanded our social networks and cultural capital but also broadened what we might call our “geographical empathy” based upon an ethic of care for those living in distant places around the world.

In the remainder of this article, each of the present authors provides a narrative account of our experiences developing an international friendship in a higher education setting. Our aim is not to claim that these experiences are representative of international friendships in general but rather to highlight how both formal and informal opportunities exist on college and university campuses that can facilitate the development of meaningful, long-lasting friendships between domestic and international students. For far too
many domestic students, the lack of cross-cultural engagement with international students results in a series of missed opportunities that could have enhanced their educational experience and enriched their understanding of the world. We hope that our stories will inspire more domestic students to cultivate their own international friendships and assist higher education professionals by illustrating two cases in which domestic and international students sought to break down the social and cultural divides on college and university campuses.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE #1: A JOURNEY FROM CONVERSATION PARTNER TO INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP

As a young Caribbean woman of East Indian descent, I (CindyAnn) moved from Trinidad to New York City in 1992, and I attended both high school and college in New York. Spending my formative years in a city of immigrants provided me with a deep understanding of the value of learning how to socially interact with people from a diverse array of cultures and world regions while also navigating between the “Western” idioms of American popular culture and my own creolized cultural upbringing. After completing my undergraduate degree in New York, I moved to Pennsylvania to pursue my graduate studies. While in graduate school, I interacted with a wide variety of students from different parts of the U.S. and abroad, and it was also during this time that I became a naturalized U.S. citizen. When I started my graduate studies, I was the only domestic, visible minority student in my incoming departmental cohort, and I interacted with both domestic and international students alike, playing the role of cultural chameleon so common among Caribbean islanders. On the one hand, I could fit in with domestic students because I had spent the past decade living in the U.S. and could speak excellent English, which is, after all, my mother tongue having been born in a former British colony in the Caribbean. Yet, on the other hand, my international origins helped me to form connections with international students from India, the UK, Australia, and Columbia.

Given my own hybrid social identity, I found myself placed at the intersections of both domestic and international students’ social networks, which is part of what led me to volunteer in the university’s conversation partner program, organized by the international student office on campus. When I saw an advertisement for the program, I thought it would be a great opportunity to help an international student practice their English language skills, since I knew that language barriers are often one of the greatest challenges impeding cross-cultural interactions between domestic and international students. I had seen this firsthand while living in New York,
where many of my friends in high school and college were newcomers to the United States, so I understood how difficult learning English could be for non-native English language speakers. In other words, I had developed a strong sense of empathy for international students even before arriving at the university, which predisposed me to seek out formal opportunities such as volunteering in the conversation partner program. When I contacted the international student office to inquire about this program, they matched my profile with a young woman from Malaysia who was taking English language classes while her husband pursued a graduate degree. After both of us agreed to become conversation partners, the international student office provided us with each other’s contact email and guidelines about our responsibilities as conversation partners.

I first met Zara (pseudonym) for coffee on campus, and we decided that it would be best to meet periodically throughout the academic year and to select “focused topics” for discussion during our meetings. As it turned out, Zara was already a good English speaker when I first met her, but she just wanted more practice speaking the language and was also interested in learning more about American culture and the colloquial “lingo” of everyday speech. She was particularly fascinated by my ability to “fit in” with domestic students despite the fact that I had been an immigrant to the U.S. and had only recently become a citizen.

Our conversations explored a wide range of different topics related to current events. Sometimes we would discuss local events occurring on the university campus, and other times Zara would bring a newspaper article about a national or global event. One of our very first conversations was about U.S. politics and then President George W. Bush’s recent speech about the War on Terror and the “clash of civilizations.” She asked me to explain what this “clash” was about, which led us to reflect on how our own cross-cultural interactions challenged the belief that cultural difference must necessarily lead to antagonism.

Over the course of a year, we met regularly and discussed everything from the myths and fairytales in different cultures to our own dreams, desires, and passions. Around the time of Halloween, Zara was curious to learn more about the American obsession with myths of vampires, ghosts, and werewolves. The more we shared stories about cultural myths, we began to realize how similar they were across cultures, and we found it amusing that the point of many cultural myths in different cultures was to scare little kids into listening to their parents so they wouldn’t get into trouble.

At the time, Zara wasn’t sure whether she would stay in the U.S. or go back to Malaysia after her husband completed his studies. We stayed
good friends for the remaining three years that I spent completing my doctoral research, continuing to meet regularly for coffee once a week, but eventually we began to socialize in other ways as well. For instance, she invited my partner and me to her house for a homemade Malaysian dinner. This was one of the most memorable experiences of our friendship, and I came to appreciate the significance of sharing food as an important part of fostering hospitality, mutual understanding, and friendship across cultural differences.

Over a decade has passed since Zara and I last saw each other, and it turned out that both of us would end up leaving the United States—her to Singapore and myself to Canada. We both have children of our own now and see each other’s lives through Facebook. Although we live far apart, I still value our friendship which had its beginnings in a university-sponsored conversation partner program.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE #2: INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP BEYOND THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAME

As a U.S.-born man of Eastern European Jewish descent with family ties to New York City, I (Reuben) grew up in the suburbs of Washington, DC, during the 1980s and 1990s. Many of my high school peers were the children of international diplomats, World Bank officials, and other professionals, which exposed me to a diversity of cultures and international perspectives prior to pursuing higher education. In 1996, I enrolled in a small, liberal arts college in rural Virginia and then transferred to a larger research university about an hour away in the middle of my second year. However, the friendships that I made during my freshman year of college remained strong even though I transferred to a different university, and one of those friendships was with an international student from Tanzania.

I first met Jeremiah (pseudonym) in the college dining hall when one of my anthropology professors introduced us, and we then began to meet regularly for meals over the course of the semester. I had never been to Sub-Saharan Africa before, and I was intrigued to learn more about Jeremiah’s life experiences and home country. Jeremiah was also curious about American culture and how it compared to his own cultural values. I recall us discussing everything from American misconceptions of Africa and how such stereotypes compare with the everyday lives of Africans, on the one hand, to the U.S. Constitution and race relations in the United States, on the other hand. We were both intimately aware of the racial divide on campus and in the surrounding community, since the town in which the
college was located had a long history of segregation along racial lines as well as anti-black racism and discrimination.

Although we came from different cultural backgrounds, the more we got to know each other, the more it became evident that we shared many common interests. For instance, we were both passionate about issues of social and environmental justice. Jeremiah was particularly inspired by role models such as Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. Similarly, I had grown up hearing my parents tell stories about the civil rights movement and how they had been involved with the anti-war movement as well as the grape boycotts that César Chávez led with the United Farm Workers in California. However, our friendship went beyond questions of politics and intellectual concerns, since we also went to see movies together, drove around town on the weekends, went shopping, and engaged in various other everyday activities of friendship.

After transferring to a different university, I began volunteering as an organizer of a guest speaker series in my academic department, and one semester I invited Jeremiah to give a talk about his experiences with environmental conservation in Tanzania. I also regularly visited Jeremiah and my other friends back at the college that I had left on the weekends, and we maintained our friendship even after we both received our undergraduate degrees and went to graduate school. Then, after completing my master’s degree at a research university in Pennsylvania, I finally took Jeremiah up on an invitation to visit him in Tanzania for about a month during the summer of 2002, which was one of the most incredible experiences I’ve ever had travelling abroad. His family welcomed me into their home with warm hospitality, and so too did the entire village, especially the school kids.

During my visit to Tanzania, our roles were reversed with Jeremiah hosting me in his home country. Now it was I who played the role of the “outsider,” since I was seen as a visible minority, albeit a very privileged one, in Jeremiah’s home town. I lost track of the number of times kids would point to me and call out, “mzungu” (white person), as I passed them on the road. While in Tanzania, I had many opportunities for cross-cultural interaction, including sharing home-cooked meals with Jeremiah’s family and playing a board game called bao with Jeremiah and other villagers. One of the most memorable experiences occurred sitting outside by a fire on a warm, moonlit summer night. When we approached the fire, a village elder was telling an origin story about his people and the land, and when he finished the group asked me to tell a mythic story about my “culture.” At first, I was at a loss, since I wasn’t religious and could not immediately think of a secular origin myth from the West. After a moment’s reflection, I
decided to tell them the myth of Plato’s cave with my own variation on the ending—instead of seeing the light of Truth when leaving the cave at the end of the story, the truth-seeker wanders into another cave and mistakes the shadows for reality yet again. Although I wasn’t a master-storyteller, the group seemed to enjoy the tale and we all had a good laugh at my attempt at cross-cultural, mythological storytelling.

After my trip to Tanzania, Jeremiah and I kept in touch as we continued to pursue our doctoral studies. He came to visit me twice and I went to see him as well during this time. When I got my first tenure-track faculty job in Texas, I invited him to give a public lecture at the university as well. Then, when I moved to British Columbia, Canada, a year later, he came to visit me there on the way to a conference he was attending a few hours away in 2010. Now that he has completed his doctoral studies and moved back to Tanzania, we keep in touch by phone and via social media, and he remains one of my closest friends despite the physical distance between us.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In this reflective article, we have drawn upon our own educational experiences to illustrate that college and university campuses have the potential to serve as spaces of meaningful cross-cultural interaction between domestic and international students. However, this potential all-too-often goes unfulfilled for a variety of different reasons (Rose-Redwood 2010). As domestic students, we both had the good fortune of developing international friendships as part of our university experience. In CindyAnn’s case, a formal university-sponsored conversation partner program initiated an international friendship, whereas in Reuben’s case a friendship emerged from a chance encounter in the college cafeteria. Although the two cases discussed above are unique, there are a number of lessons that can be drawn from these experiences that may have broader relevance for efforts to foster cross-cultural interactions and international friendships in higher education settings.

The first main lesson from this study is that cross-cultural interactions and international friendships can arise from both formal and informal encounters on college and university campuses. University-sponsored events and initiatives, such as conversation partner programs, can play an important role in fostering social interactions between domestic and international students. In some cases, these formal connections may even lead to the development of meaningful friendships that extend beyond the confines of the initial program itself. In other instances, international
friendships may develop from chance encounters on campuses that are not pre-determined by institutional programs. Yet, regardless of the means of first contact, such connections are dependent upon an openness and willingness among both parties to engage in cross-cultural dialogue.

The second lesson worth considering is that domestic students who have had cross-cultural experiences before going to college or university may be more likely to develop friendships with international students while pursuing higher education. This was certainly true in the two cases discussed above, although further research is needed to better understand whether this claim is generalizable. Based on our own experiences, however, it is clear that having been exposed to diverse cultures and perspectives prior to becoming university students led both of us to be more proactive in developing international friendships on college and university campuses. Yet, even in such cases, it would have been easier to socially interact with other domestic students within our established social networks, since it requires an active effort to reach out across the international divide of campus life.

The third main lesson to be learned from our narrative accounts is that international friendships which develop on college and university campuses may extend beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of student life on campuses themselves. Such friendships may lead domestic students or alumni to travel abroad to visit international students in their home countries, which may not necessarily be part of a formal study abroad program. These international connections could possibly even lead domestic students to relocate abroad after they have completed their studies. It is understandable that higher education professionals tend to be more concerned with the international student experience on higher education campuses themselves, yet from a student’s perspective the development of international friendships forges global connections and the university campus is merely one node within a global geography of social and professional networks that extend across space and time (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood 2013).

Lastly, at a time when xenophobic sentiments are on the rise, higher education institutions have an important role to play in broadening the horizons of our ethic of care beyond the narrow confines of nationalistic parochialisms. Our own experiences have led us to develop a greater sense of empathy with those living in other countries, particularly in places where we have friends who we initially met at university. Yet developing such an ethic of care cannot be achieved through formal institutional programs alone. Both domestic and international students themselves need to work toward building more bridges rather than walls and commit to meeting each
other halfway across the international divide on college and university campuses.

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Manuscript submitted: December 1, 2017
Manuscript revised: April 13, 2018
Accepted for publication: May 11, 2018
Structured and Critical Intercultural Programming: Faculty and Staff Collaborate to Put Research into Action

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**ABSTRACT**

This article describes the origin and curriculum of Identity Dialogues, a program which facilitates conversations about power and privilege among international and domestic students. It was developed as a result of findings from an ethnographic study of an unstructured conversation partner program at the same institution. The study found that power-laden issues were influencing the interactions and confirmed that intercultural competence development has to be actively facilitated (Bennett, 2009). Identity Dialogues sessions start with an examination of participants’ own cultural histories and then they are guided to analyze stereotypes and microaggressions. Finally, participants create action steps for fostering intercultural competence in their communities.

**Keywords:** critical intercultural communication, identity, intercultural competence, microaggressions, race

Higher education institutions in the United States provide diverse learning environments. In 2016-17, 1,078,822 international students made up over 5% of total enrollment in U.S. institutions of higher education (Institute of International Education, 2017). Many institutions are creating opportunities for intercultural learning with the goal of having students become interculturally competent (Bennett, 2009). However, this prioritizing of diversity and intercultural competence development in higher education
does not always translate to more effective programming for language and culture learning (Jurgens, 2008).

Real intercultural contact is complex and messy, and, in order to facilitate it effectively, such programs have to be well structured (Halualani, 2008). To achieve this goal, however, a close exploration of the complexity of intercultural interactions is necessary. Yet there is a scarcity of research regarding power dynamics in interactions between international and domestic students (Jon, 2012), and issues around power must be integrated into an understanding of these complex interactions. In the first part of this practitioner narrative, we describe key findings from an ethnographic study, analyzing intercultural interaction between international and domestic students, from a critical intercultural communication theoretical perspective (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). In the second part of this article, we provide an overview of Identity Dialogues, a structured and critical intercultural program, that was a faculty and staff collaboration designed to apply some of the research findings. Finally, we share several key points about program evaluation and outcomes.

ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

The ethnographic study explored a conversation partner program pairing international and domestic students to meet for weekly conversations about language and culture over a ten-week period. Ethnography was chosen as the method of choice because it facilitated the most comprehensive lens into the conversation partner program experience, focusing intently on the contextual nature of the interactions; the study investigated the students’ intercultural encounters through interviews and recorded conversations to see what was happening over the course of the ten-week program. The international students in this study all came from China to complete their degrees in the United States, while all of the domestic students came from the United States. In practice, the conversation partner program experience was unstructured intercultural learning because this program was not integrated into course curricula and participating professors did not actively structure it, and, thus, students did not engage with one another on a deep level. As Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) explain, intergroup contact alone does not always lead to intercultural learning. Some students actually feel frustrated by communication challenges and this frustration may be associated with an increase in prejudice (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). Given the unstructured nature of this program, the ethnographic study demonstrated that participants in this program did not seem to be developing intercultural competence. Deardorff’s (2006) model of
intercultural competence was used to frame the concept of intercultural competence in this ethnographic study because of its integration of a variety of intercultural experts’ models and definitions. In particular, it seemed that participants were not making an effort to see from one another’s perspectives, which is the only criteria that all intercultural competence models share (Deardorff, 2006).

Several findings were directly relevant to the creation and development of the Identity Dialogues program. First, international students were not passive participants in the intercultural exchanges and instead they saw themselves as knowledgeable leaders contributing to the interaction. Furthermore, race, socioeconomic status, and gender all emerged from what students had to say about their interaction experiences and from the analysis of their conversations.

Jon (2012) purports that power dynamics in international-domestic student interactions are inadequately examined. From these interviews and conversations, it seemed that there were shifting power dynamics in the interactions between domestic and international students. The international student literature often suggests that international students are disempowered in interactions with domestic students (Hsieh, 2007; Min-Hua, 2006). However, in this conversation partner experience, this disempowerment did not seem to be present. Although domestic students often spoke for longer periods of time than their international partners during conversations, international students initiated almost as much as the domestic students. In addition, there are a variety of power-laden dynamics, aside from domestic or international student status, that exist in an interaction.

Dimensions such as race, socioeconomic status, and gender appeared to influence the interaction. In contrast to the students who expected the interaction to be easy and had that expectation confirmed, one Black American student shared stories about how she always thinks about her race when she approaches interaction with anyone across cultures. She referenced stories about how, as an African American woman, she always has to think about whether someone will be racist when she interacts with them. She said, “She’s Asian. Are they going to look at me weird? Because literally, in my mind I’m like, okay, I’m Black. There’s no hiding it. Are they going to look at me weird?” (Interview 1 in Spitzman, 2014). Scollon, Scollon, and Jones (2012) as well as Halualani and Nakayama (2010) emphasize that there is always a power dynamic at play in intercultural communication, a contrast to culture being defined in neutral terms in the intercultural communication literature in the 1980s and 1990s. In this particular case, one domestic student expressed hesitancy and fear about
how she would be received as an African American woman, underscoring the importance of considering issues of race in intercultural programming.

Additionally, it became clear in the interviews that Chinese students regularly spoke with prejudice about non-Chinese people. In particular, they made some negative comments about Koreans on campus and shared stereotypes about American students, specifically about African American students. These expressions of prejudice show that they do not arrive in the United States with neutral or unbiased views about those who are different from themselves. Likewise, Gresham and Clayton (2011) have found that the challenges that came about in a Community Connections Program included racist attitudes of international students toward other international students on campus.

In addition, socioeconomic status became relevant in the interviews with the domestic students and played a role in their perceptions of international students. When describing their perceptions of international students, domestic students mentioned cars, fashion, and money. Many Chinese students who participated in this study have more than adequate financial resources, which provides a contrast to most of the domestic students enrolled at this university, who have to work and live at home in order to afford their education. This shows, from a critical intercultural communication perspective, that students did not perceive themselves in neutral cultural terms but, instead, in power-laden dimensions, such as socioeconomic status, which plays a role in how students view and approach one another. In Jon’s (2012) study of power dynamics between international and domestic students in a Korean context, he found that the economic power of students’ home countries was a factor in how students perceived each other and the relative amount of power that they were able to assert.

Furthermore, two of the domestic students mentioned the significance of gender when discussing their international student partners. Female students expressed that they would be more comfortable talking with other students of the same gender. Similar to the point about socioeconomic status, this demonstrates that students saw one another not only in regard to their cultures, but sometimes more significantly in their minds, with respect to their genders and other dimensions of their identities (Jon, 2012). Two male international students said that they would have preferred a male partner because they would have had more to talk about. Thus, perception of what characteristics accompany gender intervened into the conversation partner program experience. Rather than seeing this as a purely cultural exchange of ideas, students thought in terms of social constructs of which they already have well-defined ideas. Scollon, Scollon, and Jones (2012) discuss the notion that national identity is not necessarily
the most salient difference between people interacting across differences and it is important to note that other parts of their identity might be more significant depending on the situation. Signorini, Wiesemes, and Murphy (2009) also discuss the importance of moving away from national identity as the most critical difference in intercultural communication, as it might not be the difference having the most influence on the interaction at a particular time.

Thus, this ethnographic research on the conversation partner program underscored the power-laden dynamics, such as race, socioeconomic status, and gender that impacted the interactions across culture, pointing to the need for a program that tackles such issues purposefully. Identity Dialogues was created to engage students across differences, challenging them to think critically about dominant and subordinated identities, rather than only learning about cultural and linguistic differences. The next section describes the program in detail, explaining the ways in which it asks students to think about their interactions in power-laden terms.

IDENTITY DIALOGUES CURRICULUM

The Identity Dialogues program consists of seven weekly one-hour sessions. Identity Dialogues is open to all members of the campus community. Students make up the majority of participants, but staff and faculty occasionally attend. Students enrolled in the ESL program, international business or hospitality majors, student employees from JWU Global (the university’s international center), and students who have studied abroad often join the program. Students who are new to campus also tend to join as a way to connect with their peers. Both international and domestic students participate, but international students typically participate at a higher rate. Students participate voluntarily, but some faculty from the ESL and international business programs offer extra credit for their students to participate. On average, there are about 15 students and 3 faculty who participate during each seven-week session (happening once during each trimester).

Participants are not required to attend all seven sessions; however, this is encouraged, as each session builds upon the content of previous sessions. Each academic term, there is typically a cohort that attends most or all sessions and a smaller number of students who attend anywhere from one to three sessions. Some students even attend multiple iterations of the program from term to term.
Sessions are structured to progress through Kegan’s (1982) cultures of embeddedness, which has also been integrated into Bell, Goodman, and Ouellett’s (2016) social justice workshop design. This strategy maximizes the opportunity for deep learning to take place through potentially uncomfortable conversations and activities. In addition to following through the stages, described below, we also integrate critical intercultural communication (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010) into each of our sessions, always asking students to reflect on how issues of power intervene into their experiences of intercultural interaction. Kegan (1982) discusses the environments that are necessary for human beings to make meaning of themselves, others, and the world. The first stage is that of confirmation, where people first get comfortable and open with themselves. Our Identity Dialogues program begins with creating a safe and supportive learning environment where students are assisted by facilitators to examine their own cultural histories and how they were socialized into various belief systems. For example, students do a “Life as a River” activity where they draw a picture of the most important moments in their lives so far, and then they explain this picture to their classmates.

After the confirmation stage, the program moves into the contradiction stage (Kegan, 1982), where participants are guided to question their previously held beliefs and change some of their viewpoints. During this time, participants explore the concepts of stereotypes and microaggressions. Students discuss where stereotypes come from, what their consequences can be, and how to be more aware of the times that our biases influence our thoughts and actions. One such activity involves anonymously writing our own stereotypes down and then discussing them as a group. We ask ourselves about where the stereotypes come from, who holds them, and the ways in which subordinated identities might be put at risk by these stereotypes. During this time, students explore commonalities and differences among stereotypes that different cultural groups hold; many students are surprised that they have never heard of the stereotypes that exist in other countries and begin to see how their views are culturally shaped. During this stage, conversations about where stereotypes come from lead to discussions about how those in power are the ones who often tell the stories about others, creating the stereotypes.

Finally, the program ends in the continuity stage (Kegan, 1982), where participants consider how and where they can apply the material covered in Identity Dialogues to their lives on campus and beyond. For example, one topic of discussion centered on the experience of LGBTQ people feeling more comfortable coming out in the United States, as compared to doing so in their home countries. This led to a conversation
about how to convince others to become more open and accepting of differences, and the varied strategies necessary to effectively do this in various cultural contexts. One conclusion that students often come to is that personal experience and ideally friendship across differences is often what helps people adapt and become more accepting.

IDENTITY DIALOGUES EVALUATION

We have not yet conducted formal assessment of learning in the Identity Dialogues program. However, we distributed brief surveys during the first and final sessions to gauge students’ understanding of some of the concepts that are examined during the program. To accommodate populations of students that commonly participate in the program, we conducted surveys in English, Chinese, Korean, and Arabic. During the final sessions, facilitators also led focus groups about participants’ experiences in Identity Dialogues. Participants’ feedback contributes to the continuous revision of the curriculum.

Many students expressed positive learning through their experiences participating in Identity Dialogues. Multiple students have affirmed the confirmation stage (Kegan, 1982). As one participant stated, “It’s a safe place. I feel like I can make a mistake and still learn from it.” Another student appreciated the opportunity to “have a place to talk about topics that aren’t spoken about much. It’s refreshing and encouraging to hear others’ points of view.” Another enjoyed learning about different cultures. This student also said that it is hard for international students to make new friends, and this gave him the opportunity to talk with people from different countries, who have very different beliefs.

Others have noted the importance of the contradiction portion of the program (Kegan, 1982). One student who attended multiple iterations of the program stated that she learns something different every time, as there is the opportunity to develop further learning even if the same topics were covered. Another student stated that “Identity Dialogues has really opened up my eyes to different cultures and the way people from different places interpret different things. It also has helped me realize more about my cultural identity and what makes me who I am.” Finally, one student noted, “I love taking time out of the week to simply think about what makes me me.” Students mentioned how they do not have the opportunity to think about all of the dimensions of cultural identity in other intercultural interactions. This was a space where students were able to challenge stereotypes and talk openly about discrimination.
CONCLUSION

During one of our final sessions, a student participant expressed appreciation for the program, as “understanding each other is the key to improve our society.” Olson, Evans, and Schoenberg (2007) argue that “[t]he need for empathic understanding of others’ worldviews and life experiences is essential. Feeling comfortable and being capable of interacting with people who are culturally different is basic to being at home in the world” (p. vii). Through this ethnographic research and program creation, we add the notion that critical intercultural communication, which brings race, gender, socioeconomic status, and other power-laden dynamics, into intercultural interaction, is integral to reaching this empathetic understanding.

REFERENCES


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*Manuscript submitted: November 24, 2017*
*Manuscript revised: March 18, 2018*
*Accepted for publication: May 4, 2018*
Making Interactions Between Domestic and International Students Meaningful

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this practitioner narrative is to identify ways in which meaningful interaction can take place between English learners (ELs) and domestic students in a university setting. In order to learn English effectively, ELs require situations in which they can participate equally in an interaction with a domestic student capable of modifying their English so that it is comprehensible. We created a series of joint classes between teacher candidates and Japanese exchange students in an ESL class. In the class, the first author instructs the teacher candidates on strategies for teaching content to ELs. Second, the teacher candidates teach mini-lessons in their content area to Japanese students. The use of simplified English and visual aids allow ELs to gain confidence and the ability to participate more actively. Third, the Japanese students evaluate the teacher candidates in Japanese. Last, the first author translates the evaluations into English so the teacher candidates can gain meaningful feedback on their performance. The process effectively creates a balance of power that both educates teacher candidates in how to instruct nonnative English speakers and promotes meaningful communication and language growth in ELs. The conditions for meaningful interactions identified in this practice further contribute to the field of effective English learning for international students.

**Keywords:** English learners, meaningful interactions, Japanese international students, language barriers
It is projected that by 2025, nearly one out of every four public school students will be English learners in the U.S. (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2007). In 2014-15, the percentage of public school students who were ELs was 10.0 percent or more in the District of Columbia, Alaska, California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). However, the population of teachers will likely remain predominantly white and native speakers of English. Furthermore, the majority of these teachers have never seriously experienced learning a language other than their own and most of them are largely untrained to work with ELs (Reeves, 2006). To produce teacher candidates who can effectively work with ELs, all teacher candidates in our university’s teacher education program are required to take a class, EDBL 401: Principles and Practices for Educating English Language Learners. While teaching this class, the first author noticed that many teacher candidates have had zero to very little experience interacting with ELs before the class, and this situation undermined their understanding of ELs’ academic and social needs.

Lucas and Grinberg (2008) assert that extended contact with nonnative speakers of English has a positive impact on teachers’ attitudes towards ELs. To increase contact with ELs, the EDBL 401 class taught by the first author regularly collaborates with a university ESL program in the form of a joint class. In the joint class, teacher candidates teach a mini-lesson (15 to 20 minutes) based on their content areas in English to university ELs from Japan four times a quarter. For example, a math teacher candidate may teach a third-grade level math lesson, while a PE teacher candidate might teach a yoga lesson. Usually this mini-lesson is conducted in a small group setting where one teacher candidate carries two to three Japanese ELs. After each mini-lesson, the Japanese ELs evaluate the teacher candidates’ teaching effectiveness using a rubric where they write comments in Japanese (see the appendix). The first author translates these comments into English and gives back the rubric to teacher candidates to reflect. These joint classes are immensely popular among both the teacher candidates and the Japanese ELs, because the interactions are both educational and meaningful. In this article, we reflect upon why the interactions become meaningful in a joint class from the Japanese ELs’ perspectives.
LITERATURE REVIEW

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Studies have consistently found that simply bringing domestic and international students together does not necessarily result in meaningful interactions (Leask, 2009; Osmond & Roed, 2010). The most significant factor that influences interactions both positively and negatively is the language barrier. From domestic students’ perspective, international students’ lack of fluency in English affects the amount and the quality of interactions they have with the latter. When English proficiency is perceived to be inadequate, domestic students tend to conflate international students’ language skills and intellectual ability (Ryan & Viete, 2009; Trahar, 2007). In this mindset, language becomes a marker for an unspoken power relationship between the host students as “expert” and international students as “deficient” (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Due to the perceived accents and communication difficulties, Asian international students frequently receive comments from domestic students that presume that they are less intelligent (Kim & Kim, 2010).

Several studies have exposed this power relationship and revealed that Asian international students sensed an assumption of unintelligence from their peers and professors because their accents were deemed unintelligible (Hsieh, 2007; Junious et al., 2010; Swagler & Ellis, 2003). Moreover, Asian international students reported that they were ignored, devalued, and even discriminated against by domestic students. For example, Hanassab (2006) finds that many Asian international students felt that domestic students looked down on them, ignored them, and did not consider their opinions seriously.

Many international students themselves, particularly Asian students, seem to be aware of oral language barriers. They express feelings of inadequacy and frustration on their part while participating in oral classroom activities such as whole-class discussions and formal oral presentations in English (Kim, 2006; Liu, 2001; Morita, 2004). The higher the English proficiency is, the more meaningful interactions with domestic students may occur, and therefore the more intercultural learning takes place. For these reasons, studies, in general, conclude that spontaneous interactions between Asian international students and domestic students are rare (Li & Campbell, 2008; Ward et al., 2005), and domestic students sometimes purposefully avoid the company of international students instead (Peacock & Harrison, 2009).
THE CONDITIONS FOR MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS

There seem to be three main conditions for EL/domestic student interactions to become meaningful: self-perceptions, power relations, and monitoring. These conditions will be explained in this order.

Self-Perceptions

As the literature suggests, their inability to sufficiently and adequately use the English language may lead Japanese ELs to feel inferior to domestic students who are native speakers of English. This inferiority complex towards native English speakers is fueled by anxiety of speaking the language which they have not perfected, and this seems to prevent some Japanese ELs from engaging in conversations with domestic students. At the same time, most native speakers of English are not trained to interact with ELs. Therefore, they are not equipped with basic knowledge and techniques that are vital for interactions with ELs to be successful, such as slowing the speech speed, enunciating each word clearly, using simple vocabulary and grammar, and using visuals. The acquisition of the English language occurs when ELs are exposed to input that is linguistically comprehensible and is one step beyond their linguistic competence, which Krashen (1982) refers to as comprehensible input. Speaking slowly in simple vocabulary and grammar with visuals aids can lead to comprehensible input.

In a joint class, the Japanese ELs become the pupils of the teacher candidates and learn different content areas in English. The teacher candidates have learned how to make their lessons comprehensible to ELs in the EDBL 401 class and make an effort to demonstrate their knowledge with real ELs. They are taught to speak English slowly and in short sentences, proactively ask comprehension questions instead of waiting for the Japanese ELs to ask (which rarely happens), write down keywords on the board, use plenty of visuals (e.g., videos, photos, and pictures), and demonstrate rather than lecture.

Because the teacher candidates try to provide the Japanese ELs with comprehensible input, the latter have a much easier time understanding what the teacher candidates say and request in English. Considering that even international students who are relatively competent in English can find themselves understanding less than 10% of lectures (Ryan & Viete, 2009), the fact that the Japanese ELs comprehend the lesson conducted in English by a native English speaker carries a significant meaning to them. This experience seems to shift their mindset from deficient to competent ELs and boosts their self-esteem. Consequently, their raised self-esteem further encourages the Japanese ELs to participate more in the lesson verbally. The
more this cycle is repeated, the better the participation rate and the higher the self-esteem on the part of the Japanese ELs.

**Power Relations**

In his contact theory, Allport (1954) stresses that in order for a successful interaction to take place between different groups, groups must have an equal status within the situation. When domestic and international students interact, domestic students typically dominate the conversation. They become the talker, while international students become the listener, thus the interaction is one-way. In order for interactions to be two-way, international students need to be listened to by domestic students.

In a joint class, the Japanese ELs are the pupils of the teacher candidates, but the former is also the latter’s evaluator. After taking a mini-lesson from the teacher candidates, the Japanese ELs assess their counterparts’ teaching effectiveness in various areas: speech, grammar, vocabulary, visual use, comprehension questions, and overall comprehensible input. Furthermore, they write detailed comments on the teacher candidates’ strengths and weaknesses and make suggestions for improvement. These comments are written in Japanese, their native language, thus their assessments and critiques are not constrained by their insufficient English writing skills. While the Japanese ELs take time to write these comments, the teacher candidates patiently and anxiously wait for the assessment results. When the assessment results are returned to the teacher candidates a couple of days later, fully translated in English, they read the comments with pleasure and appreciation because the comments are useful for the betterment of their teaching skills.

The Japanese ELs assuming a role as an evaluator seems to effectively equalize the unequal power relations between them and the teacher candidates. In a joint class, the Japanese ELs’ experiences as language learners, which have been juxtaposed with the teacher candidates’ experiences as native speakers and labeled as deficient and inferior, transform themselves into valuable insights only ELs can have. In other words, the Japanese ELs become experts of the experiential-based pedagogical knowledge of ESL teaching. That is why the teacher candidates are eager to read the comments that the Japanese ELs make and appreciate their expert insights. Through the comments, the teacher candidates hear the Japanese ELs’ voices and focused feedback. This situation rarely occurs in spontaneous and free interactions with domestic students. Therefore, it changes the existing power relations in contrast to typical situations where Japanese ELs are often silenced by domestic students.
Monitoring

Allport’s (1954) contact theory further dictates that interactions between groups must be sanctioned by authorities for them to be successful. Along with joint classes, we have paired the teacher candidates and the Japanese ELs as conversation partners and encouraged them to interact outside the class freely. However, we also hear from both the teacher candidates and the Japanese ELs that they have not taken advantage of the conversation partners program. The most frequently cited difficulty is arranging a time to meet, followed by language barriers. To some domestic students who have no interest in cross-cultural learning, interactions with international students, if they are not required, are something they would avoid.

A joint class is a part of the curriculum both for the teacher candidates and the Japanese ELs, and their participation is required to pass the class. Furthermore, the instructors of the class also play the role of counselor because they listen to both sides’ concerns and suggestions and put them into practice accordingly. Although interactions occur primarily between the teacher candidates and Japanese ELs directly, both parties are aware that the instructors monitor their interactions and constantly advise both sides for betterment. It seems that this type of monitoring actually enhances the quality of interactions. We conduct joint classes only four times a quarter. However, the quality of interactions that the teacher candidates and the Japanese ELs collaboratively create appears to be more meaningful than more frequent free-style interactions in which domestic students tend to dominate in conversations with international students.

CONCLUSIONS

International students frequently perceive that domestic students and professors blame them for their unique patterns of participation (Archer, 2007), as well as language difficulties, and this perception implies that the solution lies solely with international students (Sawir, 2005). Our successful implementation of joint classes suggests, however, that it is both domestic and international students that need to make an effort for their interactions to be meaningful. Domestic students should be mindful of making themselves comprehensible by nonnative-speaking international students. If they speak and behave as they normally do, they will dominate the interactions, thus meaningful interactions will not occur. In addition, a carefully-monitored learning environment where nonnative-speaking international students and domestic students become equal in status should be pursued. If these steps are not taken proactively, even frequent interactions will be meaningless.
REFERENCES


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**APPENDIX**

**Rubric for Teaching Demo**

**Student’s Name_________________________**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exceed standards</th>
<th>Meet standards</th>
<th>Need improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appropriate speed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>早くしゃべっていない。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simplified grammar</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>簡単な文法を使っている。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of familiar words</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>難しい単語を使っていない。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of gestures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ジェスチャーがあるので分かりやすい。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clear directions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>何をしていいのか分かりやすく説明してくれる。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehension check</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>内容を本当に分かっているか、頻繁に確認してくれる。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exceed standards</td>
<td>Meet standards</td>
<td>Need improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>良</td>
<td>可</td>
<td>不可</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching content areas</td>
<td>教科の内容がよく分かる。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of visuals</td>
<td>絵や写真などをたくさん使っている。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Good teaching points （ここが良かったという点を書いて下さい）

Points to improve （もう少しこうしたら良くなるという点いて下さい）

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*Manuscript submitted: November 28, 2018*
*Manuscript revised: March 14, 2018*
*Accepted for publication: May 1, 2018*
Mission Impossible: International Students as Key Players in Cross-Cultural Team Activities

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ABSTRACT

An annual undergraduate project called Mission Impossible is designed to reduce issues of power and status that hinder the effectiveness of cross-cultural teams. Domestic students often think they must compensate for international teammates, and international students understand that they are seen as a burden by domestic teammates. To prevent students from falling into this common but damaging dynamic, this undergraduate full-day event is designed to help international and domestic students engage as equals. This sets the stage to allow collaborative relationships to deepen between domestic and international students in the rest of the program.

Keywords: Cross-cultural teams, international students, power and status

Students find working in teams stressful and time consuming (Loo & Thorpe, 2002), but employers emphasize the need for these skills in the workplace. In particular, cross-cultural teams are becoming an important part of international firms. Many large companies such as Ernst and Young, Royal Dutch Shell, and Marriott use cross-cultural teams (Mateev and Milter, 2004). As a business school preparing 250 undergraduates a year for the workplace, the Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada, saw the importance of giving students practice at working in cross-national (i.e., international plus Canadian/domestic students) teams. The School purposefully recruits a high number of international students from its non-English speaking partner institutions (over 80 in 40 countries) in order to build the international pillar of the School and to give both international and domestic students the skills
needed to work with colleagues both in Canada and abroad. International students currently join programs in both undergraduate and graduate courses.

The diversity of cultural backgrounds among international students makes it challenging to prepare them, and our domestic students, for differences they will face in teamwork. Such differences include a mix of individualist and collectivist cultures as well as high and low context differences, and, perhaps most importantly, cultural differences in use of time (Hall, 1983). Other well-documented differences include communication styles, power dynamics, and intercultural adjustments (Gundykunst, 2004; Jon, 2012; Hotta & Ting-Toomey 2013). Examples of these issues are revealed throughout the semester: Japanese students expect to work together in teams by setting up weekly team meetings (a collectivist approach), while Canadian students tend towards an individualistic approach where they divide the work assigned to a group and use a Google doc to assemble each participants’ efforts into a group submission. This low context, individualist approach may encourage individual productivity, but it fails to develop inter-personal relationships that smooth problems in the group when they occur (Hall, 1983). A second example—a common issue of power dynamics—occurs when Canadian students edit group papers to improve the spelling, punctuation, and grammar of group members who have English as a second language. This puts the Canadian student into a position of power, where they can change the meaning of thoughts and skew the overall paper to fit their analysis of the situation.

Jon (2012) documents issues with power in the Korean context which happen outside the classroom. In one study, Jon (2012) found that Korean students preferred Western European students who had strong English skills as their “buddies” in a faculty matching program, and they avoided building friendships with Chinese students who were not as adept at speaking English. The goal of the Korean students to improve their English speaking skills drove them to give more power to the Western European students. While not every student will experience all of these cultural differences, many of them will be challenged by one or more. A further complicating factor is that the differences may appear at different times and in different groups during students’ course-work on international teams. The Mission Impossible activity aims to give power to students with fewer skills in English and a higher level of expertise about their home country, thereby removing the English dominant power structure.

The difficulty of developing strong cross-cultural and cross-national groups on campus is well documented (Kim 1988, Brown 2009). Gundykunst (2004) builds a case that communication with people from
outside of one’s own culture is difficult because “interaction with people from other cultures is less routine and involves new and novel situations compared with interaction with people from our own cultures” (p. 6). While language barriers and cultural differences are usually blamed for the ghettoization of different cultures in the classroom, Hseih (2007) notes that unequal power relationships are an issue between domestic and international students, especially in group work. Every year, Gustavson faculty handle complaints about international students from domestic students including lack of preparation for group meetings (or not even attending), and submissions that are poorly-written, plagiarized, and/or unreferenced. Complaints from international students about domestic students, by contrast, include exclusion from discussions, unfair division of work, and expectations that are not clearly communicated.

In order to reduce group friction, a Gustavson professor’s assignment has been adapted for an annual program-wide initiative at the start of the fall semester that strives to accomplish three goals: first, to give students an opportunity to work together in groups in a non-threatening, low-stakes activity that helps them get to know students from different cultural backgrounds; second, to impress upon students the importance of environmentally sustainable business (one of the values of the School); and finally, to increase students’ oral and visual communication skills. Students are sorted into groups of five with four domestic students and one international student in each group. Power in the groups could easily default to the four domestic students, sidelining the international student. However, Mission Impossible is designed to establish the international student as a subject-area expert on their particular country. As a result, the international students need to be consulted at every step in the activity. They are often able to generate resources and research that the domestic students are not aware of, or were unable to access due to language limitations. Changing the power dynamic in the group allows barriers to come down and students to get to know each other in a more respectful environment.

THE MISSION IMPOSSIBLE ACTIVITY

To reduce friction and build stronger teams, the Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) program holds a one-day competition (Mission Impossible) that emerged from a course assignment with a sustainable business theme. The Mission Impossible activity occurs every fall in the first semester of the program when students are still getting to know each other. The activity includes 60 international students who are assigned to 60 student teams. Further, the groups are selected for male-female balance and remain active
for five courses over the semester. The Mission Impossible day begins with staff members briefing students on the goal to develop an idea for an environmentally sustainable business that would work in the international student’s home country.

Table 1. Mission Impossible timeline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Staff Responsibility</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:50 – 8:30</td>
<td>Hand out materials.</td>
<td>International student pre-briefing and materials distribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 – 8:40</td>
<td>Ensure matching occurs.</td>
<td>International and domestic student match up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:40 – 9:00</td>
<td>Brief students.</td>
<td>Clarify instructions with PowerPoint slides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 – 12:00</td>
<td>Project Work Time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 – 1:00</td>
<td>Set up for poster</td>
<td>Students travel to poster-making location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>session and pitches.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 – 1:45</td>
<td>- Welcome</td>
<td>All students convene in campus venue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Brief judges.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hand out score cards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:45 – 2:15</td>
<td>Keynote addresses.</td>
<td>Dean and Program Director offer opening remarks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>start/end pitches.</td>
<td>Presentation Fair and Official Judging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Collect judge score cards.</td>
<td>Whistle indicates the start of a round – bell indicates the end of a round.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:35 – 2:45</td>
<td>Judges on break</td>
<td>Judges on break (can discuss questions and compare notes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(can discuss questions and compare notes).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45 – 3:15</td>
<td>- Collect score cards.</td>
<td>Rounds 3, 4, and 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30 – 4:00</td>
<td>- Photographer.</td>
<td>Announcements: Prizes/Winners (1 per cohort plus one special mention), thanks and closing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Prizes handed out.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 – 4:30</td>
<td>Clean up/Take down.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students are instructed to build the idea into a concept, then design and construct a poster, and develop a verbal pitch to sell that idea to judges. Student groups work through the morning on the assignment. All students convene in the afternoon to pitch their ideas to a group of judges made up of
their professors and members of the city’s business community. One might expect multiple similar ideas to occur with multiple students coming from some countries. However, even ideas with a similar theme (composting or recycling) differ enough in their details that the judges are impressed with the variety of ideas. The winning group is rewarded with gift cards for each member as well as certificates authenticating their win. All groups benefit from achieving better team relationships and appreciating the specific knowledge of the international student in their group. The aim is to work toward developing equal power status for all group members.

DISCUSSION

The Mission Impossible exercise evolved from a classroom activity in one course to a program activity for all students because of its impact on reducing power imbalances between domestic and international students. The faculty had previously used the inter-cultural game “Bafa Bafa” to get students to work together and to create a basis for discussion of common issues when working in international groups. Mission Impossible is a better fit for students at this school, because it aligns with three of the school’s pillars: international, innovative, and sustainability/social responsibility.

While innovation is threaded throughout the school, one example of how Mission Impossible ties into the program is through the entrepreneurship specialization. Faculty in that program run “Pitch-It” and “Plan-It” competitions on campus where students compete for prize money for the best entrepreneurial idea. Mission Impossible lays the ground work for students who are interested in the entrepreneurship program, and it gives them a head start on brainstorming and analyzing ideas that could be entered into the competitions. In the past, some Mission Impossible teams have taken their ideas to national competitions.

Sustainability and social responsibility are also embedded in the program. For example, all students coming into the Bachelor of Commerce program are required to take a Business and Sustainability course. Professors from that course are judges in the Mission Impossible competition and are able to use the students’ ideas as discussion points in the classroom. Last year, one group of students suggested using cricket flour as a source of protein to reduce the need for environmentally damaging beef-based diets. To build on that discussion in a class, one professor ordered protein bars made of cricket flour so the class could try them and evaluate for themselves how successful it might be as a protein replacement and an entrepreneurial venture in addition to evaluating its impact on the earth.
Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) state that “international students need to feel welcomed, accepted, and included” if they are expected to integrate into a new culture, connect and make friends, and ultimately create a similar support structure to the one they left in their home country. Mission Impossible creates an environment where international students are valued for their country’s knowledge and given the opportunity to demonstrate their expertise in a low stakes activity. The power of the native English speaker is reduced, which opens dialogue, forces listening, and builds early bridges to future group work.

RESULTS

Mission Impossible changes the views that domestic students commonly have about international students and improves group relationships and thus team project quality for the rest of the semester. While orienting students to the Gustavson School’s values of social and environmental sustainability, we have also been able to change power dynamics in groups and create a learning context where international students are valued from the beginning. In fall 2018, a research team plans to use surveys, short interviews, and formal observations of changing power dynamics before and after the activity to formally assess its impact. The following results are based on qualitative interviews with professors, program staff, and students.

Professors and program staff note fewer group difficulties and increased involvement of international students in class discussions and projects since Mission Impossible was implemented. One professor noted that international students who were unfamiliar with sustainability did not contribute to idea generation during Mission Impossible but instead took on a researcher role in the group in order to live up to the title of expert that was given to them. Program staff like the activity because they see students learning from each other. Not only does the power dynamic change between international and domestic students, it also changes between faculty and students. Students are the country experts and have an opportunity to share and be valued for their knowledge.

Students offered several insights into the success of Mission Impossible. First, because it happens early in the term, students haven’t formed strong bonds with each other. As a result, judgement is deferred and Mission Impossible allowed students to “determine our individual strengths and weaknesses right then and there.” One student, who had students from the Netherlands in her group, emphasized that even when the group came up with ideas, it was the international students who “were able to communicate how locals felt about issues in their country, which helped make our idea
more realistic.” This deference to international students is new to our students. It opens up communication and discussion in a way that other inter-cultural activities did not and builds a sense of mutual dependence among group members.

CONCLUSION

Gydykunst (2004) asserts that “as we get to know strangers, the anxiety we experience in interacting with them tends to decrease” (p. 26). Mission Impossible provides a forum where students get to know each other; the activity requirements increase the probability every student will participate in getting to know other group members. The collectivist nature of this activity emphasizes the benefits of group meetings and discussion. This paves the way for future group work to also be conducted in the same manner. At the same time, the activity allows for individual participation and expertise, as well as a discussion on personal strengths and weaknesses, which can also be applied to upcoming projects and reports. With a strict three hour time limit for the activity and a public presentation before community business leaders and professors, students were mindful of time and even those with a culturally relaxed attitude towards deadlines could see the necessity to develop their ideas within the given time constraints. Mission Impossible addresses several inter-cultural communication difficulties students encounter in the university setting. Working through these in a directed and supported setting allows domestic and international students to meet each other on common ground where there is more openness to listen to each other and appreciate the strengths that students from different cultures bring to a joint project.

REFERENCES


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*Manuscript submitted: November 29, 2017
Manuscript revised: March 19, 2018
Accepted for publication: May 2, 2018*
Work a Way Out: Breaking Monoethnic Isolation through On-Campus Employment

Mengwei Su
Ohio University, USA

ABSTRACT

Since the global economic recession in 2008, Chinese undergraduate students have quickly risen to be the largest international student population in American colleges and universities, forming a monoethnic group that often isolates itself from domestic students on campuses. This study explores how twelve Chinese undergraduate students utilized on-campus employment as a means of engaging host nationals to improve language skills and engage in cross-cultural interactions. Thematic analysis affirms the efficacy of the university workplace as an educational space outside of the classroom. Based on these findings, various policy recommendation are proposed to improve the management of international student employees.

Keywords: Chinese international students, cross-cultural interaction, ESL learning, integration, on-campus employment

According to the United States Government Accountability Office (2014), between 2002 and 2012, state funding for all public colleges and universities decreased by 12% overall while the mean tuition rose by 55%. To secure tuition revenue growth, more and more American colleges and universities began to seek international students from foreign countries. Chinese students soon grew to be the largest group of international students studying in the U.S. (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2017). Among them, the proportion of full-tuition-paying Chinese undergraduate students increased exponentially. Compared with the 2006/07 academic year, a year before the economic recession started, their enrollment skyrocketed by more than twelvefold in the following decade (IIE, 2017).
International students often suffer from acculturative stress that is normally incurred by language barriers, academic struggles, lack of social support, financial problems, and so on (Melnick, Kaur, & Yu, 2011; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Tung, 2011). To make matters worse, they must also cope with the adjustment to American campuses without recouring to families and friends in their home countries. As a result, it is not an unusual phenomenon that international students become an isolated population within the host country and sometimes even resent the host country’s members (Hail, 2015).

Compared with other international students, Asian students are particularly vulnerable. A survey of 141 international students from different American colleges and universities found that Asian students demonstrated higher levels of acculturative stress than do European students (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). According to the International Student Barometer—a satisfaction survey of 60,000 international students at 48 universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, Chinese undergraduate students’ overall satisfaction ranked 26th among the thirty largest nationalities (Redden, 2014).

A very promising approach to facilitate Chinese international undergraduate students’ integration and development is on-campus employment. Research has shown a positive relationship between on-campus work and American college students’ development (Astin, 1993, 1999; Casella & Brougham, 1995; Cheng & Alcántara, 2007; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1998; Salisbury, Pascarella, Padgett, & Blaich, 2012). This study posits that on-campus work could also benefit Chinese undergraduate students by providing a constructive environment where international students could engage in language and cultural exchanges.

Definition of the Terms

The definitions of two critical terms used in this research are provided to ensure readers’ understanding.

**Chinese International Undergraduate Students** are defined as college students from the People’s Republic of China who are pursuing a baccalaureate degree at U.S. colleges and universities and hold an F-1 student visa issued by the U.S. embassy. Due to the different political and educational systems, Chinese students from Hong Kong or Taiwan areas are not included in this group.

**On-Campus Employment** is defined by the Department of Homeland Security as “specific to work that takes place on campus or at an off-campus
location that is affiliated with the school,” and international students “may not work more than 20 hours per week when school is in session” (“Working in the United States,” 2016). In this research, on-campus employment refers to the part-time work provided by the university, which pays student workers in the forms of tuition waiver, stipend, or hourly wage. Service learning for course credits, mandatory class projects or internships, volunteer work for student organizations, academic associations, and local communities are not within the scope of this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of the impact of employment on domestic students has generated divergent conclusions depending on the outcome indicators and methodologies adopted in the research. Some scholars raise concerns that work deprives students of study time, which results in poor academic performance and persistence rate (Astin, 1975; Choy, 2002; Cuccaro-Alamin, 1997; Lammers, Onwuegbuzie, & Slate, 2001). Other scholars have rebutted such accusations and commended employment for its positive impact on enhancing students’ GPA (Horn & Maw, 1994; Horn, 1998), cognitive development (Pascarella, et al., 1998), leadership ability (Salisbury et al., 2012), involvement in the institution (Astin, 1993, 1999), and employability on graduation (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007). There is, however, a literature gap in whether student employment could facilitate international students’ adjustment and development on campus. This study examines Chinese undergraduate international students’ overseas higher education experiences through the lenses of the following three critical areas that are vital to their educational experiences: ESL learning, cross-cultural exploration, and relationship with host nationals.

Learning English in Natural Settings

Workplaces provide a setting for English as a Second Language (ESL) learning outside of the classroom. In his book, The Study of Second Language Acquisition, Ellis (2008) discusses the main theories of second language acquisition that have emerged since its establishment as a field of study in the 1960s. He lists two situations where the acquisition of a second language normally takes place: educational settings and natural settings. In educational settings, such as classrooms, formal learning occurs, whereas in natural settings (e.g., the workplace), informal learning occurs.

Ellis (2008) suggests that natural settings have two unique advantages over educational settings in facilitating ESL learners’ acquisition of a new language: invoking informal learning and producing higher levels of second language proficiency. Scribner and Cole (1973) maintain that
formal learning tends to acquire knowledge through formulated rules and principles whereas informal learning focuses on providing a demonstration of the knowledge in context. Ellis (2008) further contends that even in natural settings where informal learning is prevalent, ESL learners also intentionally study linguistic rules rather than simply conveying meanings.

**Cross-Cultural Exploration**

Besides the lack of ESL preparation, another major source of depressive feelings burdening Chinese international undergraduate students involves acculturation barriers. Berry (2005) defines acculturation as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (p. 698). During cross-cultural exploration, according to Berry, individuals will inevitably face conflicts and look for negotiation between the two cultural groups. Before the term of acculturation was coined, Oberg (1960) found a similar transition of how individuals adjust to a foreign culture. The essence of his four-stage model of the culture shocks theory is overcoming the rejection to an unfamiliar environment and producing adaptation accordingly by improving language ability and expanding social interaction. In sum, both Berry and Oberg suggested that conflicts are inevitable during the process of acculturation and overcoming conflicts helps individuals develop multicultural competency. International students who immerse themselves in a new, foreign American college setting are not exceptional to these kind of conflicts; in fact, they expect to experience such struggle and learn from it, because it is an indispensable part of their educational goals of studying abroad.

**Bonding Host Nationals**

It is difficult for international students to make substantial progress in ESL learning or culture transmission without interacting with host nationals. Despite the fact that monocultural friendships can be vital in reducing international students’ distress in transition (Bochner et al., 1977, Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013; Ye, 2006), some scholars claim that contact with host nationals is one of the most important friendship bonds to facilitate international student success in a new cultural context (Y.Y. Kim, 2000; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). For instance, a survey of 497 international graduate students at an American research university indicated that students who socialized with Americans the most not only adapted to American culture more comfortably but also actively socialized with other international students and participated in campus cultural events (Trice, 2004). Another mail survey of 170 international undergraduate
students who attended U.S. colleges and universities showed that building interpersonal relationships with Americans not only improved their written and oral English language skills but also enhanced their perceived self-esteem (Barratt & Huba, 1994).

Both Bochner, McLeod, and Lin (1977) and Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) observe that the primary relationship international students have with American host nationals is academic-related. A problem with the current cross-cultural interaction between international and domestic students is that even when they manage to establish some forms of contact, the depth of the relationship remains shallow. Gresham and Clayton (2011) conclude from their extensive review of the literature that it is a daunting task for international students to transform their relationships with host nationals from having small talk to meaningful connections that could contribute to their success on foreign campuses. The focus of the present study is to probe whether on-campus employment can enhance the depth of the interaction between Chinese international students and host nationals.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative methodology and chose phenomenological inquiry as an approach to conducting data collection and analysis. Lichtman (2013) defines this method by noting that “[p]henomenology, as an approach, looks at the lived experiences of those who have lived with or experienced a particular phenomenon” (p. 85). This approach “interrogates phenomena which are not reducible to facts” (Giorgi, 2008, p. 2). In this study, I did not try to measure Chinese undergraduate students’ improvement in ESL acquisition and cultural transmission, nor did I seek to assess the satisfaction in networking with host nationals as an objective or existential fact. Rather, I saw these dependent variables as a perception of the experience the participants had. Therefore, I attempted to seek a deep understanding of how the participants navigated in the workplace on campus and how they interpreted its educational outcome.

Three research questions guided this study:
1. How do Chinese international undergraduate students learn English in the workplace on campus?
2. What new cultural practices do Chinese international undergraduate students learn about in the workplace on campus?
3. What kind of social relationships do Chinese international undergraduate students make in the workplace on campus?
Table 1. Participants’ demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Institution type</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Public community college</td>
<td>Pre-Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Private comprehensive university</td>
<td>Pre-Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Public research university</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Public research university</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Public liberal arts college</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fei</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Public research University</td>
<td>Political Science; Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheng</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>Public flagship research university</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jing</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Public research university</td>
<td>Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Public liberal arts college</td>
<td>English Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yue</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Public research university</td>
<td>Pre-Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Public research university</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Public flagship university</td>
<td>Economics; Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Public research university</td>
<td>Management Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiong</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Public liberal arts college</td>
<td>Tourism and Hotel Mgt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants

Three sampling techniques were utilized in recruiting participants. Using snowball sampling, I first identified a few participants from my former ESL students and then asked them to invite their friends to join the study. As the key to a successful phenomenology inquiry is the depth of the data, I also adopted maximum variation sampling and selected participants who had as much variation in demographic factors and work experiences as possible. Lastly, when deciding the sample size, I utilized saturation sampling, which continues to add participants as fieldwork proceeds until new patterns cease to emerge (Patton, 2014).

For phenomenological inquiries, Morse (1994) suggests that six interviews should be the smallest acceptable sample size. Creswell (2007), on the other hand, recommends the sample size ranging between five and twenty-five interviews. In this study, of the total of 14 interviews I conducted, I used 12 of them for data analysis and discarded two that contained recurring information. Table 1 and Table 2 below depict an overview of the demographics and work experiences of the participants.

Table 2. Participants’ work experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Starting year</th>
<th>Starting status</th>
<th>Length of work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>Restaurant Delivery (off-campus)</td>
<td>Fall, 1995</td>
<td>Pre-Academic</td>
<td>1.5 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Merchandise Delivery (off-campus)</td>
<td>Spring, 1997</td>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bell Ringer (off-campus)</td>
<td>Winter, 1998</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culinary Services</td>
<td>Fall, 1998</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>1 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Escort Service</td>
<td>Fall, 1999</td>
<td>Third-year</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>Culinary Services</td>
<td>Fall, 2012</td>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IT Services</td>
<td>Fall, 2014</td>
<td>Third-year</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jie</td>
<td>Orientation Leader</td>
<td>Summer, 2015</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>1 summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Starting year</td>
<td>Starting status</td>
<td>Length of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fei</td>
<td>Resident Assistant</td>
<td>Fall, 2011</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheng</td>
<td>Culinary Services</td>
<td>Spring, 2013</td>
<td>Third-year</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jing</td>
<td>Culinary Services</td>
<td>Summer, 2009</td>
<td>Pre-Academic</td>
<td>1 summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lab Assistant</td>
<td>Fall, 2012</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng</td>
<td>Cultural Ambassador</td>
<td>Spring, 2016</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yue</td>
<td>Culinary Services</td>
<td>Summer, 2015</td>
<td>Pre-Academic</td>
<td>1 year, and counting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou</td>
<td>Supplementary Instructor</td>
<td>Fall, 2012</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>Fall, 2012</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Ambassador</td>
<td>Fall, 2012</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESL Instructor (off-campus)</td>
<td>Summer, 2012</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>3 summers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administration Assistant (off-campus)</td>
<td>Summer, 2012</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>3 summers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>Culinary Services</td>
<td>Spring, 2014</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Culinary Services</td>
<td>Spring, 2015</td>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waiter (off-campus)</td>
<td>Fall, 2015</td>
<td>Third-year</td>
<td>2 semesters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese Instructor (off-campus)</td>
<td>Fall, 2015</td>
<td>Third-year</td>
<td>2 semesters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiong</td>
<td>Global Ambassador</td>
<td>Spring, 2016</td>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviewing

To address the research questions, I used one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to collect data. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded the participants of the confidential nature of the study. The language used for this study’s interviews was Chinese, because communicating in participants’ mother tongue allowed them to express complicated feelings and thoughts and at the same time enhanced the rapport between the researcher and the participants.

Coding and Thematic Categorizing

Phenomenological inquiry not only procures abundant descriptive data of the participants’ lived experiences but also captures the themes emerging from the rich narratives. After transcribing and translating the data, I coded the text that had interpreted meanings. Then, based on “recurring regularities or patterns” among the codes (Merriam, 2009, p. 180), I consolidated the codes into a small number of meaningful concepts, or themes, that were pertinent to the research questions.

RESULTS

Four distinctive themes were produced through data analysis: motivation for work, ESL acquisition, new culture encountered, and contact with host nationals.

Taking Part-Time Work for Non-Financial Reasons

In this research, I found that financial reward was not the main motivation for the new generation of Chinese undergraduate students to engage in on-campus employment. With the exception of one participant, Hui, all the participants came to the U.S. for higher education after 2010. Although the financial abilities of these participants’ families differed from each other, the participants were all from comparatively affluent families in China. Their parents prepared sufficient funds for not only their tuition but also the living costs. The financial status of the new generation of Chinese undergraduate students contrasts with Hui, who came to the U.S. for higher education in 1995. His family had a good income back then, but it was no match for the new middle-class families after more than a decade of fast economic growth in China. Table 3 illustrates what the participants’ initial motives were to start their first job on campus.
Table 3. Participants’ initial motives to work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Initial motive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>“If I did not work, I could survive, but not for long.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>“I wanted to get my SSN through on-campus employment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jie</td>
<td>“The administrator at the International Student Office recommended me this job, telling me it would build up my resume.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fei</td>
<td>“I noticed the two RAs in my residence hall were from China…If those two Chinese girls can do this job, so can I.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheng</td>
<td>“My main motivation was to improve myself, particularly my ESL proficiency.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jing</td>
<td>“I was studying ESL, and I had a lot of free time. I wanted to make American friends and know more about the American society.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng</td>
<td>“Making money was my secondary goal. I wanted to build up my resume because I plan to apply for graduate schools in the future.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yue</td>
<td>“I saw other students were taking part-time jobs, so I wanted to try, too…I plan to major in Business, and I need to have some social experiences.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou</td>
<td>“A first, I wanted to gain work experiences; therefore, I never applied for jobs that were not related to my study.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>“I had two goals at that time: first, getting my SSN; second, exercising my abilities.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>“My main motivation was to get my SSN so that I could apply for credit cards and buy firearms.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiong</td>
<td>“I started to feel I become more independent than before and I wanted to try accomplishing something new within my abilities.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improving ESL Learning in Natural Settings

In this research, I found that most of the participants reported having achieved a certain level of improvement in ESL proficiency through their on-campus employment. Table 4 lists the participants’ indications of their ESL levels before and after they took on-campus jobs. The only two participants who did not consider on-campus employment to have any significant impact on their ESL acquisition were Hui and Zhou. Both had participated in English immersion before they started working on campus,
which they considered more pivotal in helping them improve ESL compared to their campus employment experiences.

**Table 4. Participants’ ESL improvement.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Jobs</th>
<th>ESL level before work</th>
<th>ESL level after work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>Restaurant and Merchandise Delivery; Bellringer; Culinary Services; Safe Transportation Service</td>
<td>“My English was not bad when I started to work.”</td>
<td>“My jobs did not have a high requirement for ESL proficiency.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>Culinary Services; IT Services</td>
<td>“When I first arrived on campus, my English was poor.”</td>
<td>“I began to chit-chat with the domestic coworkers in the second semester.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jie</td>
<td>Orientation Leader</td>
<td>“The administrator knew I had my high school in the States and my English is qualified for this job.”</td>
<td>“I improved my English… I did not say a Chinese word for the entire summer… My colleagues praised my progress.” “I improved my ability in public speaking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fei</td>
<td>Resident Assistant</td>
<td>“I had no problems in basic communication in the second year.”</td>
<td>“My job responsibility as an RA required me to communicate with the domestic students… This job helped me understand the American cultures.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheng</td>
<td>Culinary Services</td>
<td>“I had no problems in basic communication when I arrived on campus.”</td>
<td>“I improved a lot… To be able to join their conversations, I paid attention to the hot topics among the domestic students.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Encountering Cultural Differences

The twelve participants all depicted their emotional and intellectual reactions toward the American cultural practices they had experienced in the workplace. Many of these new values and beliefs contradicted the old ones they held in their home country. In general, all the participants, who grew up in upper-class Chinese families, reported that they were impressed by their
American peers’ financial independence, and they learned the value of a buck through earning minimum wages. Seven participants who worked in the university culinary services reported that the respect they had at work made them admire America’s egalitarian ethos and feel sorry for how working-class laborers in China were commonly treated.

Participants’ work stories revealed that their employment exposed them to various diversity issues that they had never encountered before. For instance, after getting acquainted, Ming’s coworker started talking about his partner. When Ming asked him, “How old is she?,” his coworker corrected him, “It’s he.” Ming apologized immediately for his assumption although he was quite surprised inside at the time. The LGBT issue is still a taboo in China and is not openly addressed by either the government or the educational institutions. By routinely working and interacting with their gay coworkers, Ming concluded that “gay people are just like normal people,” and “they are equal human beings.” Another participant Fei, who worked as a Resident Assistant, even had the opportunity to take a class and training in diversity before she started to work, and she became a staunch supporter of gay rights.

In some cases, the clashes between two cultures were harder for the participants to resolve. For example, a student diner came to Sheng’s window shortly before closing and asked for gravy. When Sheng told the student that he had run out of it, his supervisor corrected him on site and told him to make a whole new bowl of gravy just to serve that one student’s request. In reflection, Sheng re-examined the different practices between the American and Chinese college dining halls, and he expressed his admiration of the American culture of always putting customers in the first place, even though he still did not agree with the food waste.

**Building Relationships with the Host Nationals**

In this research, I investigated the depth of the relationships that participants had with their American colleagues. The criterion used for measurement was whether the participants feel the friendship provides any emotional or professional support to them. If a participants’ descriptions of the relationship met the criterion, then that relationship was categorized as “satisfactory”; if not, it was categorized as “unsatisfactory.” Table 5 illustrates the result of such categorization: five out of the twelve participants built satisfactory relationships with host nationals.
Table 5. Participants’ relationships with host nationals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>“I had had a circle of Asian friends already.”</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Domestic students from big cities were more embracing international students than those from</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>small towns.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Domestic students had their ways of socialization, e.g., hanging out in bars on weekends.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>“My boss appreciated my work because I was there for a long time.”</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My domestic coworkers would invite me to their house parties on weekends.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jie</td>
<td>“At first, I was very upset that I could not make friends with my coworkers.”</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The administrators of the office volunteered to teach me how to drive on weekends…They let me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>practice with their cars.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I still go to them for advice after the summer job was over.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fei</td>
<td>“My coworker and I did floor check together every night… We became friends naturally.”</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheng</td>
<td>“To be frank, there was not enough time for me to make any friends (in the dining hall)… My</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coworkers were friendly to me, but we did not have communications after work.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jing</td>
<td>“I had good relationships with both of my professors… My boss encouraged me to apply for a</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research fund from the University… Under his guidance, I wrote a research proposal.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng</td>
<td>“I did not have American coworkers.”</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My supervisor gave us flexible work hours…I just need to say hello when I saw her in office.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yue</td>
<td>“Once there was a girl coworker who invited me to her party in a bar.”</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Zhou
“My professor promoted me to be the team leader.”
“I could talk about any work-related problems with him.”
“After I became the team leader, few coworkers talked to me anymore.”
“You know there is always a ‘wall’ between the American people and us. We could hug each other, but it still does not feel the same as being with your compatriots.”

Ming
“They invited me to drink…I went for a couple of times…We stopped contacting after I left the job…We were not good friends.”

Sun
“I did not make any friends from work.”
“The restaurant owner treated me like his child.”
“The owner of the Chinese language school invited me to live in his house free of charge.”

Xiong
“The director of the project treated our Chinese students with special care…She was like a mom to us…During the holidays, she would drive us to the Asian supermarket for grocery shopping and eat hotpot with us.”

DISCUSSION
Previous studies of on-campus employment have only focused on its impact on domestic students. In this study, I explored how the setting of the workplace on campus benefited the development of Chinese international undergraduate students.

New Setting for ESL Acquisition
The most prominent advantage of learning English in the workplace on campus is that this natural setting creates various contexts where ESL learners find different knowledge and usage of the English language. The participants of the study repeatedly noted that the English they learned in the classrooms was “formal,” “academic,” or “major-related.” In contrast, they appreciate how their on-campus jobs allow them to gain more contacts with the native speakers, had more opportunities to practice the target language, and focus on communicative messages rather than grammatical rules.
Participants were compelled to write work reports, communicate with supervisors, and cope with work issues. If they had not taken the part-time job, they would not have learned and practiced English in those language contexts.

On the other hand, the new language contexts could also be non-work related. The topics that the participants talked with their American colleagues about were quite broad: academics, entertainment, sports, politics, etc. These ESL contexts tested participants’ familiarity with American culture. For instance, a job that few would expect to be language-challenging is the culinary services. Although it is labor-intensive, participants who worked at the university dining halls were not laden with labor duties all the time; after the rush hours, they all reported having the necessity of striking small talk conversations with their American coworkers as well as the student diners. To be able to engage in conversations with domestic students, some participants endeavored to learn about culture-related topics, which constitute a wide range of language contexts. The following quote from one participant, Sheng, epitomizes such aspiration:

When I served meals, I did not just want to go through the motions quietly; I wanted to talk with the student diners like my American coworkers did. They chitchatted about fun stuff and made jokes. To reach that goal, I made extra efforts in learning.

New Setting for Cross-Cultural Exploration

In this research, fewer than half of the participants had built satisfactory relationships with their American colleagues, which corroborated Yang, Teraoka, Eichenfield, and Audas’s (1994) study. However, we must not conclude hastily that on-campus employment is an ineffective means for cross-cultural exploration on campus. On the contrary, the efficacy of on-campus employment is best reflected in how it propels international students and host nationals to interact with each other.

At International Students’ End

Bochner, McLeod, and Lin (1977) found that Asian international students rely on the conational network for cultural affirmation and expression as their fundamental relationship. Al-Sharideh and Goe’s (1998) study aligns with Bochner et al. as it found ethnic community helps boost international students’ self-esteem. However, they also indicated that involvement exclusively in the ethnic community has a counterproductive effect. In many American colleges and universities, Chinese students have grown to be the largest segment of the international student population, which leaves them prone to becoming “self-segregators”—international
students who “socially interact only with conationals, excluding other nationals and host nationals” (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013, p. 419). Findings of this study affirm on-campus employment is without a doubt a good pathway to lead Chinese undergraduate students to break through their language and cultural barricades.

Notably, cross-cultural exploration is not always pleasant. Both Berry (2005) and Oberg (1960) suggest that conflicts are inevitable during the process of acculturation and overcoming conflicts helps individuals develop multi-cultural competency. Findings of this study show working on campus makes it more possible for Chinese undergraduate students to experience the clashes of different cultures than studying in the classroom. Participants readily bonded with host nationals who provided them with the emotional or professional support they needed during cross-cultural exploration, and they found this type of intercultural relationships more satisfying than the purely recreational ones.

**At Domestic Students’ End**

Meanwhile, on-campus employment also instigates domestic students to engage in cross-cultural interactions. Previous studies indicate that most domestic students perceive international students favorably, yet few of them would make extra efforts to contact their international peers (Ward, 2001). Barriers such as language, indifference, ethnocentrism, etc., hinder host nationals from responding to international students’ need for close contacts and interaction (Brown, 2009; Hail, 2015; Volet & Ang, 1998). This research not only verified that the participants had been treated nicely in the workplace but also revealed evidence of the initiatives shown by their American colleagues to bond with the participants.

Compared with other efforts to foster cross-cultural interactions on campus, bonding with international students in the workplace is less burdening to domestic students. In 2009, the University of Newcastle launched a pilot project which recruited and trained domestic students to befriend international students (Gresham & Clayton, 2011). International students who applied for this project had the opportunity to meet domestic student volunteers and do activities together, such as studying, sharing food, watching movies, shopping, playing sports, and so on. Although it was a successful experiment, the domestic participants reported having difficulty in finding the time and common interests with the international participants; furthermore, over time a certain pressure of taking care of international student friends accrued on their shoulders. In this study, the bond between the participants and their domestic coworkers stemmed naturally from a
professional relationship. No host nationals felt obliged to take part in cross-cultural interactions during work.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Schlossberg (2011) indicates the importance of organizational assistance to the wellbeing of the people who are coping with work transitions. Hence, this study suggests that the following three recommendations to university administrators and personnel can provide strategies for managing Chinese student employees more effectively.

**Increase Cross-Cultural Interactions**

The findings of this research indicate that few Chinese undergraduate students are motivated by financial reasons to take up on-campus jobs. Most of them aim to improve ESL, make new friends, learn about American culture, or build a resume. Interactions with host nationals are an indispensable part of the work experience for them to realize their goals. Moreover, most participants in the study who worked in the dining halls joined the on-campus workforce mainly as a quick way to procure social security number. Nonetheless, in reflection, they spoke highly about the contact they had with their American coworkers as well as the student diners because they had improved ESL and cultural competence through the interactions they had with them. A notable good practice of a few college culinary services in this study is that they do not assign the Chinese undergraduate students to work together; instead, they paired them with domestic students on the same shift. The participants appreciated this kind of opportunity for cross-cultural interactions, and they considered it as a good learning experience at work.

Besides coworkers, supervisors are also the key host nationals that Chinese student workers have cross-cultural interactions with in the workplace. Compared with the students, supervisors are more competent to act as the mediating person who bridges between cultures (Bochner, 1981). They are capable of creating the cross-cultural connections partnership (Robinson, Woffe, Hunt, & Hoerr, 2002) with international student employees, providing “real-world, multicultural experiences that would help the students involved strengthen their individual self-identities while heightening their appreciation of diversity” (p. 537). In this research, participants spoke highly of the relationships they had with their supervisors who helped them navigate through the new cultural environment. These supervisors not only supported the participants in the workplace but also spent their private time connecting with the participants. For instance, they
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went to Chinese restaurants with the students, gave the students rides to buy groceries at Asian supermarkets, or they taught the students how to drive in the U.S. Such activities have brought the participants the most joyful memories of their work experiences.

Allow Room for Mistakes

Coming from an educational culture that is known for rigorousness and sometimes even fastidiousness, many Chinese international students hold high standards and high expectations for themselves. A study of the causes of college students’ social anxiety found that, compared with Caucasian students, mainland Chinese students are more susceptible to socially prescribed perfectionism (Xie, Leong, & Feng, 2008). Every participant in this research indicated that their on-campus job in the U.S. was the first formal paid work they had ever had in life, let alone in a foreign country. Despite receiving training before going on duty, they were anxious about not being able to perform their work duties well.

Therefore, many of the participants expressed thankfulness to their supervisors for showing the forbearance at the times when they made mistakes on the job. One participant, Sun, had work experiences both on and off campus, and he indicated that the former setting was more tolerant of mistakes. Indeed, another participant, Zhou, even considered it as advantageous to make mistakes early in college and learn lessons before entering the full-time workforce. By providing an uninhibited work environment, university student employment supervisors could mitigate Chinese undergraduate student employees’ work stress when they are climbing the learning curve.

Be Racially and Culturally Sensitive

Most Chinese international undergraduate students are undergoing a unique racial identity transition from being a majority group to a minority group after arriving in the States. Racial identity theorists have indicated that ethnic adolescents will go through a multi-phased racial identity transition before they eventually reach multiculturalism (Cross et al., 1991; E. Kim, 2012; Phinney, 1993). When initially exposed in a majority group, they will have a heightened racial consciousness and often reject the main culture.

Having understood the ethnic adolescents’ racial identity development, college student supervisors should develop racial and cultural sensitivity when managing international student employees. Especially when making a criticism, host-national supervisors should realize that the same disapproval they give to the domestic students and international
students might result in different reactions. In this study, participants reported a few unhappy interactions with American student managers and supervisors, who, for example, made sarcastic comments when finding their directives not understood by the participants, or referred the participants collectively as “you Chinese students,” etc. Being racially and culturally sensitive could mean that college student supervisors may need to be more patient and explanatory with international student employees to avoid inadvertent misunderstandings.

CONCLUSION

While international students are catalysts to campus diversity, the transformation of a university into a global community for knowledge and cultural exchange is a slow process. Over the past decade, the number of international students has quickly topped the one-million benchmark in the U.S., and nearly a third of them come from China (IIE, 2017). Although the surge of international student enrollment generated anticipated economic value, it also exacerbated the isolation problem between international students and their domestic peers (Su & Harrison, 2016).

To address this problem, I investigated whether on-campus employment could be used as a remedy. The research findings from this study suggest that Chinese undergraduate students who have taken part-time jobs in American colleges and universities generally showed positive results. Working on campus helped the participants to break through their monoethnic isolation and provided them access to engaging host nationals. Therefore, on-campus workplace constitutes as a supplementary educational space for cross-cultural academic and social learning in the university.

REFERENCES


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*Manuscript submitted: February 28, 2018*
*Manuscript revised: April 5, 2018*
*Accepted for publication: April 30, 2018*
Leveraging Common Ground: Improving International and Domestic Students’ Interaction Through Mutual Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Leading institutional pedagogies and practices tend to approach increasing international student populations from a deficit-based model, which focuses on the adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation of international students to the dominant host culture. We believe a better approach to improve international and domestic students’ interaction is to move to models of mutual engagement. In this article, as practitioners, we explore four common grounds that seem to be producing positive engagements: common experience, cultural celebrations, faith, and common challenges, in which students are encouraged to meaningfully engage with each other as equals in a spirit of mutuality. The resulting discussion explores how each
contributes to a culture of collaboration within institutional departments while improving and enriching the interactions between all students.

**Keywords:** collaboration, common grounds, cross-cultural learning, engagement, mutuality

International student numbers are projected to grow from five million (ICEF Monitor, 2015) to over seven million globally by 2025 (Bohm, Davis, Meares, & Pearce, 2002). Canada, in particular, saw a major surge in foreign students in 2016 with a 17.5% increase (ICEF Monitor, 2017). While campuses are increasingly international, research from within Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE], 2015) and beyond (e.g., Leask, 2009; Lee & Rice, 2007) shows that the “integration challenge” is real (CBIE, 2015). International and domestic students struggle to engage with each other and develop meaningful connections. An approach that seems to be improving mutual interaction is leveraging common grounds, such as common experiences, faith, cultural celebrations, and common challenges.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Dominant institutional pedagogies and practices tend to view international student populations from a deficit-based model. This model focuses on the adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation of international students to the dominant host culture (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Sandhu & Asarabi, 1994).

The deficit-based model assumes that international students need to change in some way to realize positive relationships with domestic students. Despite research and efforts aimed at helping international students acculturate, assimilate, and adapt so they can thrive and build cross-cultural connections with domestic students, there is still a significant disconnect (CBIE, 2015; Thomson & Esses, 2016). In fact, a research brief by CBIE (2015) suggests that current approaches have been unsuccessful in helping international and domestic students connect. A 2014 Canadian national survey by CBIE found that the majority of international students (54%) have no domestic friends (CBIE, 2015). Additionally, 1 in 3 international students (37%) found it difficult to get to know domestic students in Canada. Zhang and Goodson’s (2011) extensive review of 64 papers pointed out that this disconnect between domestic and international students is clearly associated with negative psychological outcomes for the latter.
On the other hand, some studies have found that specific types of programs facilitate relationships between international and domestic students. For example, Gresham and Clayton (2011) found that through their structured Community Connections program, built around mutual engagement, they achieved significant positive impacts regarding relationship development. The program required all students to agree to interact frequently in common tasks, responsibilities, and activities. Similarly, Thomson and Esses (2016) found that creating intentional environments in the context of a mentorship relationship had positive outcomes on relationship development between international and domestic students. Volet and Ang (1998) highlighted that the “mixing gap” between international and domestic students exists because too little attention is given to developing two-way relationships. Underscoring this, the literature is clear that when relationships are formed between international and domestic students, there are numerous positive sociological outcomes for all involved (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Ying & Han, 2006).

There seems to be an acute need for better approaches to improving international and domestic student relationships. Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) suggest that “programs would be more effective if they abandoned the assimilationist doctrine of adjustment to the dominant culture and instead promoted the programmatic goal of mutual engagement” (p. 426). Thus, we advocate for using common grounds to build mutual engagement to facilitate supportive and favorable learning environments in which all parties can thrive.

COMMON GROUNDS

Simon Fraser University (SFU) has continued to experiment with progressive and practical approaches that move away from simply categorizing students by visa status. SFU is rather choosing to leverage common grounds to meaningfully engage all students in topics, issues, or activities of mutual interest. Real friendships are built as each person brings their real self to the common ground.

In this practitioner narrative, we aim to share and discuss four common grounds: common experience, cultural celebrations, faith, and shared challenges. At SFU, these have been successful at producing mutual engagement, cultivating cross-cultural learning, and developing international friendships.
Common Experience

Shared experiences have proved to be a valuable common ground. One initiative that has brought international and domestic students together in meaningful ways has been the Community Cooking Workshops. This is a project within SFU’s Healthy Campus Community initiative and a partnership between the Health Promotion team, International Services for Students, and Residence and Housing.

International and domestic students work in small teams to prepare and enjoy a healthy meal together while learning about nutrition and gaining food preparation skills. The common experience encourages conversation and builds social connection while promoting feelings of belonging and mutual engagement. These types of supportive environments have been found to have major positive impacts in initiating social connections among students of different backgrounds (National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], 2015). This is further supported by Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood’s (2013) findings that “[t]he principle of mutual engagement encourages inclusive forms of global social mixing as the ideal type of social interaction, since this has the potential to foster meaningful cross-cultural dialogue among different nationalities, including the host community” (p. 426). The table below shows results of 124 international and domestic student evaluations of 10 Community Cooking Workshops between 2016 and 2017.

Table 1. Community cooking workshop outcomes for 2016-2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85%</td>
<td>Reported making a new friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84%</td>
<td>Reported that they were confident that they could incorporate ideas/tips/strategies into their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Reported that their knowledge/understanding about healthy eating improved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The workshops provide valuable spaces for mutual engagement and building social connectedness, as illustrated by the notably high percentage (85%) of students reporting new friendships. Furthermore, student evaluations included comments such as, “My favorite part was socializing, playing games and cooking with other people,” and “We need more events like this to gather people.”

The cooking workshops create an intentional environment which helps transcend cultural and social barriers, fosters connections, and engages
students in a spirit of mutuality. This results in enhancing both international and domestic student learning and personal connections.

**Cultural Celebrations**

SFU has experienced success leveraging cultural celebrations (e.g., lunar new year, Nowruz, Diwali, Gung Haggis Fat Choy) to enhance mutual interaction between international and domestic students. Another example is the annual Christmas Eve dinner held by the Interfaith Centre in partnership with International Services for Students. The dinner has proven to be a powerful way of bringing diverse individuals together so “no one dines alone” over the holiday season. Domestic students are intentionally encouraged to attend as a way for them to connect with international students during the season. The dinner involves food, Santa’s arrival, and a competition between group tables to build the best gingerbread house.

Celebrations such as these create opportunities for discussion and the formation of relationships, helping to combat the sense of isolation that the holiday season can induce for students. At the best of times, loneliness is a major issue in North American universities, with the American College Health Association (2016) reporting that 66.6% of students surveyed felt “very lonely.” The dinners have proven to engage students, help them combat loneliness, and enhance the opportunity for building new relationships.

In 2015 and 2016, 130 and 107 students, respectively, attended with minimal advertising. In 2016, a diverse group of students gathered for the celebration, with Iranians constituting 30% of participants, Chinese students making up 45%, and the rest were a mix of various domestic and international backgrounds. Moreover, 35% were graduate students, 50% were undergraduate students, and 15% were a mix of alumni, staff, community members, and families.

By coming together in celebration, there has been an increase in engagement and conversations between students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Similar results have been noted at the annual Thanksgiving dinner hosted to bring together international and domestic students to celebrate this Canadian cultural celebration. The attendance and interest in this event has also grown over the years from 70 students in 2010 to 225 in 2017. After the 2017 Thanksgiving dinner, a domestic student commented: “I had an amazing time and it was fun hearing the different things that students from other countries were thankful for.” These cultural celebrations appear to have provided opportunities for mutual engagement where domestic and international students can interact, connect, and build relationships.
Faith

Employing faith as a common ground has shown signs of positive outcomes when it comes to mutual interaction and cross-cultural learning. Faith is a common ground for the majority of the world’s population (84%) and is projected to grow to 87% by 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2015). The ability to wisely leverage the common ground of faith creates a starting point for connections amongst a large percentage of international and domestic students. Kuh and Gonyea (2006) point out that “[s]tudents who engage frequently in spirituality-enhancing activities … [tend to] exercise more, attend cultural events more often, and are more likely to perform community service. They also are somewhat more satisfied with college and view the out-of-class environment more positively” (p. 44). This is largely because they have a basis for connection with many others and can access networks of relationships. Kuh and Gonyea (2006) go on to argue that “[t]here is no evidence that spiritual practices have negative effects on other desirable activities, such as studying, deep learning, or extracurricular involvements” (p. 44).

Table 2. The number of students involved weekly at the SFU Burnaby interfaith centre at certain periods between 2007 and 2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involved weekly</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2011a</th>
<th>2014a (%)</th>
<th>2017a (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total weekly</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>1256</td>
<td>1447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalsb</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>97 (23%)</td>
<td>494 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domesticc</td>
<td>971</td>
<td>953</td>
<td>953 (66%)</td>
<td>953 (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate students</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>158 (11%)</td>
<td>98 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and staff</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80 (6%)</td>
<td>80 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group leadersd</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52 (4%)</td>
<td>37 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly gatherings</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aTotal enrollment 2011: 29,718, 2014: 29,579, and 2017: 29,563; bPeople who self-identify as internationals; cCalculated by total people less internationals; dNumber of chaplains and student leaders that facilitate groups.

The Interfaith Centre leads faith services at SFU, and the university has realized the potential of leveraging faith to respond to spiritual needs, reach recruitment goals, and increase connections between students. Since 2007, this has been attempted through incrementally aligning its practices with recommendations that Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2006) have proposed. Thus, faith has been recognized as an important aspect of holistic student wellbeing. Furthermore, SFU has significantly increased the size and number of spaces available for chaplains and students engaged in faith-related activities. Finally, as recommended by Chickering, Dalton, and
Stamm (2006), the centre’s services are now widely publicized in a variety of ways, such as in recruitment material and as part of new student orientation for the university and student residences.

The impact of these changes over the past decade seems to have resulted in significant growth in the number of international and domestic students using faith services. The table below highlights the growth in weekly use for certain periods over the past decade.

Table 2 describes the significant growth in use of the faith services at SFU. Over the same period, the profile of faith services at SFU has been promoted, with the increasing of space and mainstreaming of faith services. The SFU Burnaby Interfaith Centre weekly engagement numbers have grown from 70 in 2001 to 1,447 in 2017. In 2014 and 2017, the number and percentage of those self-identifying as international students, grew from 285 (23%) to 494 (34%). The notable growth means a third of those involved in the 116 weekly gatherings and activities are international students.

The centre is a hive of activity with large numbers of international and domestic students from various faith backgrounds. The open space, participation of faculty, large student numbers, and diversity of international and domestic students helps create the context necessary, as described by NSSE (2015), for high impact engagement between diverse groups. This interaction provides opportunities for the development of cultural learning and friendships. A number of joint interfaith events (e.g., Non-Violence Day) along with incidental connections in the open lounge spaces has been observed to foster deep relationships between students of various faiths.

Student feedback of services further supports the survey data that the centre helps create a platform for the formation of diverse friendships. Two self-described international students commented: “I feel at home here” and “When I first arrived in Canada, I had no one, but here I found friends who helped me find food and even how to get library books.” Furthermore, two domestic students commented, “We have a common bond of faith,” and “The group of people I have met through interfaith are the people I study with.”

Leveraging the common ground of faith has not only been advantageous in recruitment but more importantly serves as a starting point for students to build relationships. Our experiences, feedback received, and the results of surveys appear to indicate that leveraging faith facilitates the creation of mutual interactions that lead to the formation of new friendships and cultural learning.
Common Challenges

While common experiences, celebrations, and faith can provide the impetus for mutual engagement, the all-too-common challenge of racism and discrimination can impact both international and domestic students and can threaten to create division and misunderstanding.

Following the issuance of the first Executive Order under the Trump Administration in 2017 (Petter, 2017a) and the violence at the Centre Culturel Islamique de Québéc, Canada (Petter, 2017b), SFU mobilized in support of those affected and reaffirmed the institution’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Figure 1. Pictures from the event showing the We are all SFU badge, notes of solidarity, and Indigenous “Welcomes” in traditional languages.

At the event entitled “We Are All SFU,” approximately 1,300 domestic and international students, staff, and faculty gathered to participate in dialogue and show support for those facing discrimination, racism, and intolerance as a result of these discriminatory actions. SFU Indigenous community members arrived early to write welcome in their traditional languages as seen in Figure 1. Demonstrating solidarity, attendees wrote messages of support which were placed around the university. SFU’s President encouraged attendees to build bridges instead of walls and highlighted the importance of creating an environment where every member feels supported and valued (Petter, 2017b).

The outpouring of support and level of mutual engagement shown during the event demonstrated that many community members felt
impacted, either directly or indirectly. As the title suggests, the “We are all SFU” event was designed to dissipate the imagined boundaries between diverse student groups and stand in unity against discrimination, racism, and intolerance. Tinto (2017) identifies a sense of belonging as a pivotal factor for student persistence. In this case, the common challenge faced was racism and discrimination, but it became the basis for uniting a wide variety of domestic and international students.

In reflecting on the event, the Chair of the SFU-World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Local Committee spoke of the “great sense of comfort” that she felt when seeing the university come together as one and how grateful she was to be attending a university that is “boldly unafraid to make their stance on this subject matter clear.” The president of the SFU Shia Muslim Society (SMS), an international student, wrote a letter of thanks expressing her “warmest gratitude” and how “deeply touched” the SMS group of “students, majority of which are Canadian-Iranian, Canadian-Iraqi and international students from Iran” were for the event. This common challenge brought a significant spectrum of students together in action and dialogue. What could easily have become divisive and polarizing, instead became reconciliatory, promoting cross-cultural learning, understanding of each other’s faiths, and the development of friendship.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The integration challenge is real and current deficit-based approaches are not yielding significant positive outcomes. SFU shifted to developing common grounds that attempt to mutually engage students and staff working inter-departmentally to achieve mutual engagement, cross-cultural learning, and developing international friendships.

There are many powerful opportunities for institutions to identify and implement common ground activities that have meaningful outcomes for the whole community. To be successful, these should be diverse in size, topic, and/or activity to promote inclusion and provide opportunity for students with different styles and preferences for engagement within their communities.

Further research would help build a solid base for best practices offering achievable opportunities to enhance integration and engagement between domestic and international students, while increasing collaboration of staff and faculty to benefit the whole community.
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Manuscript submitted: December 4, 2017
Manuscript revised: March 20, 2018
Accepted for publication: May 1, 2018
Creating Peace Across Borders: The East-West Path to Unity

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ABSTRACT

This article is based upon autobiographical narratives of two students exploring their experiences in finding commonality through an institutionalized domestic and international student community. Both students’ paths intersected at the East-West Center (EWC), an independent, public, nonprofit organization formed by the US Congress in 1960 with the goal of bringing people together through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. The co-authors describe various factors that facilitated cultivating inner peace and minimize imposed oppressive tendencies. In particular, they analyze the importance of a learning environment that motivates each student to deeply reexamine their relationship to cultural and disciplinary boundaries, through exposing them to multifaceted perspectives. Their conclusions highlight the importance of EWC as a place where both domestic and international students can build dialogue, debate, and learn from each other, across disciplinary sectors in a relaxed setting. EWC, with its unique diplomatic-building environment, is a learning prototype that has the potential to unify global diversity through developing unique partnerships of empowerment.

Keywords: East-West Center, sustainable peacebuilding, multicultural friendship, collaborative education institution

Educational institutions that attract a diverse range of students from around the world, and offer collaborative learning environments, play an important
role in unify international communities. These institutions are incubators for creating multicultural strategies to address global issues and conflicts (Kester, 2016; Millican, 2018). Such environments can stimulate cross-cultural knowledge exchange through the development of multicultural friendships and help intensify unification processes (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977). As an example, the East-West Center (EWC) in Hawai‘i is an institution “established by the United States Congress in 1960 as a national educational institution to foster better relations and understanding among the peoples of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific islands through programs of cooperative study, training, and research” (East-West Center, 2017).

The co-authors first met as international students residing in the EWC dormitories, while attending graduate studies at the University of Hawai‘i Manoa (UHM). In this article, we share some of our experiences, triggered by the EWC environment, which led to an examination and expansion of our identities. Our intellectual development through the journey steered us both into the field of sustainable peacebuilding, where we continue to collaborate in research and peacebuilding action.

CONVERGING ON THE UNITED STATES FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

Personal Context of the Co-Authors

We were raised within different regional contexts and cultures, which shaped our narrations of self, yet our story is dominated by commonalities instead of differences. Baby boomer author, R. Don Peel, is a Caucasian male born and raised in Canada. In 2005, Don decided to retire at the age of 59 after a rewarding but challenging 26-year career as a geologist with the Alberta Provincial Government. Late in his career, Don’s geological training was heavily influenced when he participated in an educational outreach program offered to public schools by the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta (APEGA). While teaching Grade 3 students about rocks and minerals, his perspective of geology shifted. Young unbiased minds of students posed many questions that challenged some of the scientific assumptions that were taught during his university studies in the 1970s. Ultimately, it was these nine-year-old students who triggered a need for a 54-year-old professional to re-educate himself through obtaining a Master’s degree in Earth Sciences (2000-2004). During these graduate studies, as a measure to augment his government work mandate, he explored different avenues to develop policy that would stimulate sustainable mining practices. Given the complexities surrounding the concept of sustainable development, the four years of research offered
more questions than answers. The outcome further motivated him to continue the research effort by enrolling in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM). Coupled with a strong initiative sense and the UHM Strategy Plan with sustainability parameters, Don chose the UHM after extensively researching universities with programs focused on the concept of sustainable development.

Millennial author, Dian Mitrayani, is a female of Chinese ethnicity born and raised in Indonesia. In 2005, she was in her early career as an interior designer in Indonesia. She enjoyed her line of work but felt a strong call to pursue her passion for youth-related work. During this time, she actively volunteered in a faith-based, social-oriented youth organization on weekends. In Indonesia, social-related work, including youth work, receives little support, making them undesirable career options only to be handled on a volunteer basis (Chen, 2009; Santoso, 2016; Shin et al., 2018). The quest to pursue the passion for youth work led her to explore alternative career options, triggering the need to apply for a graduate studies scholarship. She also felt a strong desire to locate a safer learning environment, due to the 1998 political riot where there was prosecution against Chinese Indonesians (Purdey, 2002; Sai, 2006). Successfully being granted an Asian Development Bank (ADB) scholarship, she chose the Urban and Regional Planning Program at UHM. She felt this line of study provided ample career opportunities to work within communities, opening access to young people. The outcome of each of our decisions created a collision of cultures as our paths connected at the East-West Center.

**Building Friendship: Meeting in East-West Center**

We both became members of the EWC multicultural community on August 2006 and soon the EWC dormitory environment felt like a new home. However, the option of living in the EWC community comes with the obligations to achieve the EWC’s mission of stimulating relationship building. Thus, as community members, we had to be active in many EWC community activities. Our EWC residency and required extracurricular activities proved to be a highly positive experience as it soon became the spawning ground to develop common goals for building an academic action community.

EWC’s community activities started with orientation sessions that introduced the international students to the lifestyle of Hawai‘i and the UHM. The uniqueness of Hawaiian culture and history resonated with both of us. The history of Hawai‘i, as a state that was built on American colonization, illegal annexation, and the suppression of indigenous language and culture, matched the mounting evidence of historical injustices we had
become aware of in our respective countries (Goodyear-Kaʻopua, Hussey, & Wright, 2014; Sai, 2011; Vogeler, 2009). Don’s initial graduate studies had revealed the oppression of the Canadian indigenous population (Depalma, 1998; Johnson, 2000; Milloy, 1999). Dian was unaware of the oppression of indigenous peoples in North America. However, she also understood how Chinese Indonesians, as an ethnic minority in Indonesia, faced similar oppressive tactics. They were banned from using Chinese language, were forced to change their Chinese names to an Indonesian context, and could not celebrate any Chinese cultural celebrations until 1998. There is also discrimination in terms of access to public education and civil servant jobs (Coppel, 2002; Heryanto, 1998; Lindsey, 2005; Suryadinata, 2004). The orientation gave both of us an awareness of how this lingering oppression still permeates the globe. Tackling oppression is a focus for both authors and gives us a strong shared identity. Our lens of intersectionality taught us where our identity (i.e., gender, race, sexual orientation) is closely intertwined and affects the experience each person has of oppression (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Freire, 2000; Mattsson, 2014; Rawls, 2005). This understanding inspired us to work together with oppressed communities in Hawai‘i as a strategy to challenge our views of our own positionality with respect to oppression.

**Understanding and Building “Peace-Self”**

The concept of sustainable peacebuilding focuses on the achievement of peace through addressing the conditions that lead to conflict, such as: poverty, environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and human rights violations (Bajaj & Chiu, 2009; Ricigliano, 2012; UNESCO, 2012). To us, these issues are beyond solving as individuals. We therefore mutually agreed that the first step towards sustainable peacebuilding action is finding peace within ourselves. Both of us subscribe to developing the “peace-self” as an act of challenging our own internalized idea of oppression. Freire (1998) stated that, “I like to be human because in my unfinishedness I know that I am conditioned. Yet conscious of such conditioning, I know that I can go beyond it, which is the essential difference between conditioned and determined existence” (p. 54). Freirean philosophy served as our method of understanding and being mindful of the conditions of oppression. The understanding of our oppressive conditioning helped us to assess our thought patterns, which had a tendency to hamper developing more productive action plans. Don found that by regularly practicing meditation, the calming effect on his mind seemed to correlate with more satisfying achievements in his life. Dian relied on the meditation aspect of prayer in
order to induce inner peace, especially when dealing with stressful situations.

The relaxed setting of the EWC campus surrounded by the natural Hawaiian environment also induced a sense of peace. This environment, in combination with the community-building activities, activated numerous dialogue exchanges between us to mutually expand our perceptions and understandings on what we can do to challenge oppression. We concluded it was the “non-peaceful” aspects of our life that steered us towards the development of interest in sustainable peacebuilding, as a tool to challenge oppression. A non-peaceful experience for Dian that peaked her desire for change was the 1998 racial riot in Indonesia. For Don, it was the unsustainable mining practices that continued despite his best efforts to diagnose and recommend corrective measures. Don perceived sustainable peacebuilding through his studies on sustainable development, where the unsustainable practices of his generation should not impact the resources of future generations. For Dian, it meant focusing on the investment of human capital, especially the oppressed groups of people, such as young people or women, as the key component of sustainability and peace development.

Building our peace-selves continued through ongoing dialogues between us as the dorm life offered us the opportunity to join in a collectivist culture. We utilized food as a healing medium. A common dorm kitchen is where we shared our memories of “non-peaceful” experiences with many students of different ethnicities. Casual conversations in the EWC lounges induced reflection in finding our peace-selves. Before focusing on changing behaviors of others, we learned about each other’s oppression stories and how we could build our peace-selves from within. Important elements of our dialogue emerged from the juxtaposition of our identity, east vs. west, south vs. north, female vs. male, youth vs. elder, member of national minority vs. member of national majority. These juxtapositions expanded our hope of sustainable peacebuilding, which we shared with different groups of people. Freire (2000) describes our next step for peace-selves in which “true solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality in its praxis” (p. 50). Our dialogue became our motivation for a praxis in challenging oppression. The dialogue first turned into action through entering the Chaminade University’s Peace Program essay contest on the topic of “Creating Peace Across Boundaries.” In the essay, we described our unifying and empowering learning that was triggered by our diversity. We won first prize and the success motivated a stronger drive for the deeper development of our peace-selves as we continued through our EWC education experience.
Another EWC initiative that bonded our intellectual development was the requirement for EWC students to take one of many EWC certificate programs. Don enrolled in the Leadership certificate program to gain benefits associated with leadership development, such as the improvement of influencing techniques to change undesired conditions. Dian took the program with great reluctance as she did not see the connection between this coursework and her future. Also, the reluctance came from the mandatory aspect of the Leadership program. However, this feeling slowly changed after she joined the program for one semester. This course “forced” scholars to meet and work together as a cohort. It also provided a collaborative environment to discuss leadership in different contexts and cultures. Dian felt a sense of freedom in expressing her opinion and stories in the classroom, which was different from her Indonesian rote-learning education experiences. A service learning component of the program challenged both of us to practice the leadership theories that we learned. Service learning introduced us to local in-need communities and also exposed us to types of oppression that local communities experience (i.e., poverty, food desert) while also providing us with an opportunity to act.

**Peace Action**

The most important outcome emerging from peace-self development is the continuous quest of action that stimulates peace. We attribute that the action was a direct result of the EWC incubator environment stimulating dialogue and collaboration. As an elder and a youth, the flexibility of the EWC allowed us to communicate across a generation gap and share the different influences that have shaped our lives. We concluded that sustainable peacebuilding is more attainable through diversity. More importantly, the communication between us triggered the notion that the EWC, along with the associated educational institutes in Hawai’i, provide unequalled opportunities to serve as conduits for creating peacebuilding on- and off-campus community settings.

Another example of action occurred through an organizational evaluation project with a Native Hawaiian mentoring group, Ke Ola Hou. As part of an Urban Planning practicum class, we were members of an evaluation team of Ke Ola Hou. The intention of the project was to conduct an organizational evaluation process to empower the Ke Ola Hou staff and students. For this off-campus community project, the EWC became a coworking space that gave us the freedom of our “home,” where we could relax, eat, chat, and work at any time, day or night. We could also communicate with other EWC scholars, soliciting their knowledge. This environment was far superior to any other study space options.
The connection between our academic journey aligned with our desire to use the EWC as a conduit for our work and inspire others into action, both on and beyond the UHM campus. EWC became our center to connect people from diverse backgrounds to Hawaiian communities. We shared our evaluation work in a conference on service learning that the EWC and UHM promoted. At the conference, our involvement went beyond knowledge dissemination by providing a networking place for Ke Ola Hou high school students with UHM and EWC scholars. Besides giving the high school students a taste of university life, the Ke Ola Hou organization was rewarded with opportunities, including scholarships, all of which were empowering actions for the youth.

The diversity of ethnicities, cultures, experiences, and disciplines within the EWC collaborative community offered unlimited opportunities for action, stimulated by any imagination. This experience showed us the importance of an educational institution that empowers students to their full potential, by providing the environment to flesh out and challenge undetected oppressive tendencies (Dewey, 1997; Eisler, 2001; Freire, 2000; Mitra, 2013; Mitrayani & Peel, 2016; Robinson & Aronica, 2016; Wagner & Dintersmith, 2015).

CONCLUSION

This personal narrative was written to reflect and convey the development of an intercultural friendship and shared identity during our residency in EWC (Baxter, 1987; Gaines & Brennan, 2001; Wood, 2000). Sustainable peacebuilding became the shared relational identity that we passionately strive to strengthen. The relational identity that we share highly influences our “ways of knowing, being, and acting in relation to each other and the outside world” (Wood, 1982, p. 75). The EWC was our catalyst in developing our relational identity, where we put high value on the connection between learning, self-reflection, community building, and praxis/action. Our relational identity challenged us to continue to expand and use our knowledge. Through the EWC experience, we have developed a life-long learning friendship in which we continue to collaborate in projects that give opportunities towards sustainable peacebuilding.

An outcome from our EWC residency is the growing consciousness where we cast a critical lens on our day-to-day works by acknowledging our oppressive tendencies in a dominant exploitive culture. Currently, Don continues as an independent researcher in effective educational models that give more agency to the students in co-developing, with their teacher, a curriculum that explores and nurtures their natural talents, while building...
their learning interests. His objective is to ensure that his grandchildren are enrolled in such a learning environment. Dian is finishing her doctoral studies in Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where her research focuses on youth leaders as the main agent for change. We consciously reflect upon our position, power, and also the impact of research and action on the communities with which we are involved. Most significantly, this narrative shows us the potential of institutions supporting their scholars towards the development of peace-self and action. Through academic and day-to-day living activities, we utilized what EWC offered in terms of collectivism and collaboration. EWC, along with its selection of both US and international scholars, builds community where differences become an asset. It is our hope that more educational institutes will build on the EWC model to create more diplomatic educational environments of unification.

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Manuscript submitted: December 1, 2017
Manuscript revised: March 15, 2018
Accepted for publication: April 17, 2018
Community, Identity, and International Student Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the insights of cosmopolitanism as they relate to questions of international student inclusion. Enacting policies and practices that highlight a rooted cosmopolitanism, one where particular attachments are partially constitutive of identity, offers one way to successfully foster inclusion. Membership in particular communities need not stand as an obstacle to engaging; instead, values provide not a barrier but a means by which intercultural engagement can occur. One approach is to create communities organized around shared markers beyond national identity alone. This article illustrates this by highlighting the process of organizing a diverse group of international students in order to create a sense of community, a home base, so to speak, which served to foster both a sense of belonging and further social engagement with the university community.

Keywords: international student inclusion, cosmopolitanism, identity, engagement

Student mobility is often viewed as the hallmark of internationalization. US universities send their domestic students abroad and serve as host to students from around the globe, in ESL programs, non-degree exchanges, and undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The number of international students on US campuses is seen as a relevant marker of a college or university’s global engagement. Those working in international education know that mobility, getting students moved from one place to another, is only part of the story. So too is the knowledge transfer that takes place. While we want students to learn in the classroom and learn their disciplines in different ways, what we really hope for is that these international
educational experiences will change perceptions. The reason d’être of the US Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs underscores this idea that educational exchange effects real change, leading those who venture abroad to better understand others (“Bureau of Education,” n.d.). But we know that simple dislocation is not causation; in other words, just being abroad does not lead, ipso facto, to more open-mindedness or understanding.

As international student populations have grown, universities have had to look more closely at questions of inclusion, and how international students are acclimating, and being acclimated, to the social, cultural, and academic norms in their host countries and communities. We know that students do better when they feel a sense of belonging, whether they are domestic or international. There are a number of ways to foster inclusion. This article looks at the question of inclusion by highlighting the complexities of identity in relation to belonging. After a discussion of cosmopolitanism and identity, the article offers a view into how creating conditions that allow for a multiplicity of identities for international students might foster a sense of belonging and social engagement.

BACKGROUND

In international education, the goal is often stated as developing students who are interculturally competent, but what does that mean? Deardoff’s (2010) research on intercultural competency highlights three key areas: attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Attitudes relate to “respect, openness, curiosity and discovery” towards and about others (p. 1). Knowledge includes “cultural self-awareness (meaning the ways in which one’s culture has influenced one’s identity and worldview), culture-specific knowledge, deep cultural knowledge including understanding other world views, and sociolinguistic awareness” (p. 1). And skills refer to “the acquisition and processing of knowledge: observation, listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating” (p. 1). However, the idea of cultural competency, that someone can become an expert in another culture, has also been questioned. The concept of cultural “humility and not so much the discrete mastery traditionally implied by the static notion of competence” has been proposed as an alternative (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 120). Both ultimately aim at understanding, but they start from different places.

The question that one may ask though is why is inter-cultural competency or humility important? One could offer an instrumentalist view that we have a heightened shrinking of space and time, and we are indelibly interconnected to what happens over the horizon and beyond our borders.
Globalization has been defined as “the increasing interconnectedness of different parts of the world through common processes of economic, political and cultural change” (Marston et al., 2002, p. 10). Manfred Steger (2003) argues that globalization is a “multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant” (p. 13). Although there is some debate about when we became global (i.e., whether this is a wholly new phenomenon), it seems more persuasive to say that we have been global far longer than we have been provincial (Ritzer, 2010). Wherever one comes down on this debate, it makes sense to think about this as a question of scale and scope.

In order to succeed in a globalized world, an international education can give one an advantage. Macready and Tucker (2011) note that one of the push factors for international education abroad is the market. They cite arguments from the OECD that, “Globally oriented firms seek internationally-competent workers who speak foreign languages and have the intercultural skills needed to successfully interact with international partners. Governments as well as individuals are looking to higher education to broaden students’ horizons and help them to understand the world’s languages, cultures and business methods” (p. 42). Many times, when students are making the argument for pursuing an international education they note that “it will look good on a resume,” thus invoking a crass instrumentalist view. It is not simply the line on the resume but what it signifies. It is because of what happens, what one gains in pursuing an international education in a foreign setting, that matters.

A more salient argument for why it is important to attend to intercultural concerns is the intrinsic argument of what this does for you not as a member of the marketplace but as a member of society. One way to think about this is through the lens of cosmopolitanism. Martha Nussbaum (1994) contends that “[i]f we [Americans] really do believe that all human beings are created equal and endowed with certain unalienable rights, we are morally required to think about what that conception requires us to do with and for the rest of the world” (p. 7). Students, she argues, should “be taught that while they themselves happen to be situated in the United States, they have to share this world of human beings with the citizens of other countries” (1994, p. 3).

This cleaving to identity is a pervasive need of creating a sense of belonging. Amin Maalouf (2000), the French, Lebanese, Arab, Christian, Melchite novelist speaks of murderous or mortal identities. The idea of belonging can reduce identity to “one single affiliation—encourag[ing]
people to adopt an attitude that is partial, sectarian, intolerant, domineering, sometimes suicidal, and frequently even changes them into killers or supporters of killers” (p. 30). The reality is that identity is multifarious, scaled and shifting, and if we follow Maalouf, by allowing our identities to be fluid, we can find common ground with others across boundaries and borders, across the chasms that seem deep and impassable. In many cases, it is dislocation in space that can evoke this attitude. We want to create belonging, and even in the smallest of places, we begin to create distinctions between “us” and “them.” The things which we find to create that division between “us” and “them” is context dependent. By immersing ourselves in a new environment, we can break down perceived barriers.

The humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) has written extensively on our perceptions of our physical environment, noting that obvious physical signs are not good indicators of the ways in which we conceptualize the spaces around us. One way to see this is his focus on perceptions of crowding, where he notes that paradoxically we may feel crowded in the confines of a small town where everyone is in our business, but the anonymous teeming crowds of the big city allow us to breath more freely. These perceptions of space allow us to find connections with others when we are removed from our normal spaces. On many college campuses, it is not unusual to see hundreds of other people each day wearing shirts or hoodies embellished with the school’s logo. It is a commonality. And one remains almost unaware of its frequency. But imagine being thousands of miles away on another continent and finding a stranger wearing your school colors. You may feel a sudden sense of kinship and may reach out to acknowledge your mutually shared identity in spite of your not knowing one another and perhaps having nothing more in common than that tenuous shared hoodie.

Spatial and social context matters for the exercise and privileging of the various facets of our identity. Ulrich Beck (2006) contends that we need a “nonlinear, dialectical process, in which the universal and the particular, the similar and the dissimilar, the global and the local, are to be conceived, not as cultural polarities, but as interconnected and reciprocally interpenetrating principles” (pp. 72-73). The best way to do this is to ensure that there is an interweaving of the local and the global, that the similar and dissimilar can bounce up against one another and interact, that the dissimilar can be made familiar. For international and domestic students, the differences in national identity should coexist with the similarities of being a foodie, or a footballer, and not overtake these other identities.

To go back to Nussbaum (1994), in her diagnosis for US students, she notes that in order to adopt a disposition of cosmopolitanism, students
should both learn about their own culture and traditions, but they also need to “learn a great deal more than is frequently the case about the rest of the world in which they live, about India and Bolivia and Nigeria and Norway and their histories, problems, and comparative successes” (p. 2). In the context of the internationalized university, this learning takes place not just in the classroom but in the social and cultural life of the campus. But it does not happen passively. It requires effort to create the context for such learning to take place, and we must attend to the expectations of international students.

In studying abroad, students face the dilemma of interacting with people and places that do not lend themselves to the sense of well-being one can find at home. Part of the tension here goes back to this issue of identity—of wanting to feel a sense of belonging. For many international students studying in the US, especially for those coming from more communal rather than individualistic cultures, the experience can be alienating. Studies dealing with social integration of international students highlight the misperceptions that arise as international students are drawn to each other, and domestic students then see this clustering as itself alienating. However, research on integration has shown that,

*international students most engaged in activities and events sponsored by their own culture are also most likely to also be engaged with events sponsored by cultures different from their own. Own culture events help develop a strong social network with co-national peers as international students explore an unfamiliar cultural environment, including forming friendships with U.S. students and international students from other countries.* (Glass, Buss, & Brasskamp, 2013, p. 13)

In their comprehensive study of nearly 2,000 international students and just over 35,000 domestic students at 135 colleges and universities, Glass, Buss and Brasskamp (2013) highlighted this lack of belonging. The authors found that “[i]nternational students rate their sense of community significantly lower than their U.S. peers along every dimension, especially when asked whether they feel part of a close and supportive community of colleagues and friends at their institution” (p. 2).

These findings are echoed in the work of other researchers. In a notable qualitative study of 24 international students studying at a US institute in the Southwest, the authors found what they cite as disturbing stories about disrespect, prejudice, and exclusion from domestic students, faculty, and members of the larger community (Lee & Rice, 2007). International students reported being ignored by classmates during group
work, not being invited to social events, having disparaging comments about their perceived or actual cultural heritage lobbed at them, and exasperation by faculty as they struggled to be active participants in the student-centered classroom where discussion is prized. Equally troubling was the lack of interest of American students. As the authors write, “though perhaps unintentional, such indifference to other ways of life can marginalize anything not American, anything not understood. Such apathy and unwillingness to attempt understanding translates to the rejection of international students’ cultural identities” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 19). This othering is problematic and stands to prevent the student from fully finding their place in their new adopted home. One student at our university perhaps best summed up the problem when they quipped that making friends with local students depends on your luck. Universities can try to maximize this luck by creating the conditions that will foster a sense of belonging for international students by creating an environment that allows for international students to explore their multiple identities.

In writing about how to cultivate a cosmopolitan attitude, the British-Ghanaian philosopher and novelist Kwame Appiah (2006) suggests that we “should learn about people in other places, take an interest in their civilizations, their arguments, their errors, their achievements, not because that will bring us to agreement, but because it will help us get used to one another” (p. 78). There are many ways to approach the idea of cultural competency/cultural humility. Appiah’s idea of “getting used to one another” is an appealing summation of what to hope for in its approximation of what happens when we forge relationships. Getting used to one another, though, will not simply happen by being proximate to one another. It will not happen by simply saying “hey” in class twice a week. It will only happen when we stop and open up, when we engage, when we risk ourselves in conversation and in friendship, when we work towards a common task, when we move out of bubbles. One way to do this is to find a common ground on which to meet that transcends national identity. What follows is a description of one attempt to create community for international students based on shared markers unlinked to shared citizenship but one which allowed for students’ cultural identities to be recognized.

THE FULBRIGHT EXPERIENCE: AN EXAMPLE OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY BUILDING

Western Michigan University is a mid-sized, comprehensive university with approximately 24,000 students, located in the town of Kalamazoo, Michigan. There are around 1,800 international students from almost 100
countries, the largest groups coming from Saudi Arabia, India, and China. Global Engagement is one of three stated pillars of the university and international issues are handled by a centralized office, the Haenicke Institute for Global Education, headed by an associate provost. The Institute houses international admissions and student services, an ESL program, study abroad, an office of international student activities, immigration, scholar services, and works in cooperation with other units to promote comprehensive internationalization across campus.

Several years ago, the university administration made Fulbright a priority, centralizing the responsibility for the Fulbright US and Foreign Scholar and Student programs in the Haenicke Institute under the author’s responsibility, and putting financial resources towards support for foreign Fulbright students. In the 2016-2017 academic year, the university was recognized by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2017) as being a top producer of Fulbright Scholars among research universities. Since 2009, the university has seen an increase in the number of Fulbright Foreign Students coming to do graduate work, going from single digits to over 40 fellows in 2017-18. The diversity of programs in which Fulbright foreign students have been enrolled has expanded to include graduate programs from five of the major colleges. The breath of countries from which fellows come also expanded to nearly two dozen. This diversity among students offered opportunities and challenges. As part of the efforts to support this expanding population, the author’s role as the Fulbright Foreign Student Advisor (FSA) was also expanded to provide support for students in addition to that mandated by the Fulbright program.

This work took two parallel paths: first, creating the context and infrastructure at the institutional level for Fulbright foreign students to be supported, and second, encouraging the students to organize themselves into an official group, which is referred to as a Registered Student Organization (RSO). The ultimate goal has been to create a sense of community and belonging that would allow students to flourish, academically and socially. Each of these paths will be discussed in turn.

The university, which has been hosting foreign students since almost its opening in 1903, already had a structure in place for international students through the Haenicke Institute. These included the office of International Admissions and Student Services (IAS), International Student Activities (ISA), and the International Student Advocate. The admissions office, which also houses immigration, holds drop-in and appointment-based advising hours for students during the week to address problems or questions they may have about visa status, Optional Practical Training, reduced course loads, etc. The International Student Advocate handles
problem cases such as medical emergencies, or students who have found themselves in serious academic or financial trouble. This position works closely with Student Affairs and other units across campus to assist students in crisis, mobilizing resources, and offering insight on the specific aspects unique to international students, such as immigration implications. ISA offers year-round cultural and social activities for students, such as trips to local attractions, seasonal dances, and the international festival showcase. It also organizes orientation for incoming international students.

As we looked to create community for the Fulbright students, there were several nodes we identified: pre-arrival, orientation, the academic year, and graduation. Once confirmation of placement was received, Fulbright students were sent a welcome letter with details about housing, orientation, local transportation, and arrival. Much of this information was similar to what the general international student population was receiving with two exceptions. The letter included the names and emails of enrolled Fulbright students who had volunteered to be “Welcome Ambassadors” along with the email and cell number for the FSA. It also included invitations to social media, specifically the closed WMU Fulbright group on Facebook. Through these resources, newly admitted students were able to pose questions to continuing students about the university or the town, inquiries about things like housing options, cold weather clothing, academic programs, etc. These ambassadors and the members of the Facebook group were also instrumental in hosting or arranging temporary accommodations for newly-arrived students before their official apartments were ready. The Facebook group also allows for incoming students to meet each other and to arrange to room together.

The next step in creating a sense of belonging was holding a series of Fulbright specific events during orientation. Over 400 students attend the Fall orientation annually, and one of the goals has been to create more differentiated experiences for these students by creating smaller interest groups. The Fulbright experience is one way of doing this. These students are assigned to a larger orientation group made up of graduate students and attend the regular sessions, but they also attend two events that are Fulbright only. The first is a special Fulbright Orientation session with the FSA. There are several goals for the session. First, new students get the opportunity to meet each other in person. Second, administrative tasks such as explanations about how the Fulbright and the university insurance work are undertaken, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and student information and interest sheets are completed. Third, we discuss things like stress, study tips, where to go with specific concerns, work-life balance, etc. We also discuss the need to stay connected to one’s home community but
how it is also important to get involved in their new university community, and we talk about the Fulbright specific activities that are planned during the year (more below) through the Institute and the student organization. Students also receive a number of material items marking their belonging to the Fulbright group at WMU.

The following day during orientation the Fulbright lunch takes place with new and returning students. Along with the opportunity for students to get to know each other, returning students reconnect after the summer break. We have also used this event as a chance for returning students to offer tips and insights to new students, from where to buy hard-to-find grocery items, and how to handle the cold weather, to academic resources that are available on campus. The event is open to Fulbright “alumni” as well, including those students who have completed a Master’s degree with Fulbright sponsorship and have continued into Doctoral programs. These students tend to have the most useful academic tips on handling the challenges of graduate school.

Early in the move to creating a sense of community amongst the Fulbright students, we recognized that it was important to offer a critical mass of activities early during the year in order to create numerous contact points. This would give students plenty of opportunity to become familiar with each other and to hopefully become comfortable in their new home. We have found that the familiarity of repetition, of seeing the same people, seems to help students who might be shy or uncomfortable in social situations. To this same end, we also make sure that we focus gatherings around activities and that we balance structure with the opportunity to have some down time for those students who might become tired from socializing. Two large events are interspersed with smaller activities. This also works with the academic calendar when course work is lighter at the start of the semester. Students travel to Grand Rapids for the day to attend Art Prize in September. This is a vast exhibition of art throughout the city. In October, after mid-terms, we travel to Chicago for a two-day visit. Depending on the year, the students visit the Art Institute or the Field Museum, and then have time to explore the city in smaller groups. Other activities during the Fall have varied. Students have gone apple picking at a local farm and we have organized a football tail-gate. We also participate in some of the Fulbright Association Michigan Chapter events, including the Welcome Party that takes place in December.

The spring semester features two major celebratory events. In February, the Haenicke Institute hosts the annual Fulbright Reception. Faculty and student alumni, Fulbright foreign students, the President, Provost, Deans, faculty mentors, and others who are friends of the program attend the event which is held in the university art museum and features a
student jazz band, speeches, and the chance for students to meet with the president. It has become a highly visible way to recognize the achievements of students and faculty. The other event, held in coordination with the Fulbright Student Organization (FSO), is the Graduation Celebration in April. Soon to be alumni are given the opportunity to speak at the ceremony and reflect on their experiences, and they are again presented with material items marking their belonging with Fulbright at WMU.

The idea to organize students into an official recognized student group came from a colleague at Eastern Michigan University. When we reached out to the then Fulbright students on campus, one of the selling points was the opportunity for them to gain leadership experience and to access university resources that would allow them to organize student-led events. There was also an ancillary benefit for our particular students that became apparent once the organization was up and holding its first elections. A large proportion of our Fulbright students come from emerging democracies. During the inaugural meeting, prior to voting, students were asked by the interim president to tell about their experiences with democracy and with voting. For some students, this was their first time participating in an election and they spoke movingly about what this meant for them. The running for positions within the leadership structure also served as a mini-lesson in the art of persuasion and campaigning. The early rounds of the FSO experimented in radical democracy, holding multiple elections several times throughout the year in order to share power widely. As new students entered the FSO, elections were standardized to once per year.

Each of the executive boards and the groups themselves have set their own priorities. Some groups have focused on community engagement and volunteering. Other groups have focused on cultural sharing, hosting specific nights dedicated to the food, history, and culture of their home countries. These have been especially interesting when students share a nationality but come from different ethnic groups. These culture nights are open to the larger community, and friends from both inside the university and the town have attended. The FSO has also participated in the annual International Festival, sponsored by International Student Activities. The event, which brings together international RSOs, offers groups a showcase for their culture. The student groups host a booth that highlights material culture artifacts and work with dining services to cook up to four dishes from their home countries. There is also a fashion show and dance performances. Most RSOs are specific to one country and will offer regional and ethnic variations in their costumes and performances. The FSO has taken up participation in the festival over the last several years and has
performed dances from close to a dozen different countries, and offered an eclectic mix of foods from around the globe.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Fulbright students have, to use Appiah’s (2006) phrase, learned “to get used to one another” (p. 78). In preparing for the festival, they have had to find ways to make choices about which of the nearly two dozen countries they will highlight. They have had to negotiate vastly different spatial proxemics as they learned dance moves from across the globe, from Latin America to the Middle East. In their meetings and in the Institute-sponsored activities that they attend, they have had to sit next to students from neighboring countries and other ethnic or sectarian groups within their home countries and have had to get over any biases they might have brought with them. It is too much to claim that they have abandoned those biases, but the key is that they have learned to get along. We have witnessed students develop strong relationships with one another that cross borders. This includes making connections with domestic students and members of the larger Kalamazoo community. The FSO officers participate in RSO leadership councils and have had the opportunity to learn about governance and student affairs, and individual students have joined other non-international RSOs. As Glass et. al. (2013) demonstrated, “leadership programs that involve collaboration and teamwork with others from varied cultural backgrounds has a markedly strong effect on international students’ sense of community” (p. 13).

One of the key factors in the success of this community building, at both the university and FSO level, has been the fluidity by which student identities have been acknowledged. Students have had the opportunity to be seen as an international student from x or y country, but they have also been able to be seen as a student in x or y program, as a guitar player, as a baker, as a member of x or y tribe or ethnic group, as a former teacher, a banker, etc. This sounds trivial but if we reflect on the earlier discussion of identity, we know that this is a fluid concept. Too often when students are abroad their identity as an “international student” takes center stage and becomes the dominant thing that the university community sees about them. How often have we heard discussions around campus about “international students” that fail to take into consideration the vast differences that this seemingly benign administrative category entails? We want to avoid forcing upon students Maalouf’s (2000) “one single affiliation” because a single identity is limiting. By creating a community that transcended one’s national identity and citizenship, the students were able to find a sense of belonging that afforded a complex and fluid exercise of identity, which helped students
make connections across seemingly fixed national boundaries. This allowed for connections to be made that transcended Maaloof’s (2000) “murderous identities.”

Cosmopolitanism has sometimes been accused of flattening identities. As Marianna Papastephanou (2002) writes, “the core assumption of most cosmopolitans from the Stoics to Rousseau, Montaigne and down to some contemporary liberals...is that cosmopolitan attitudes emanate from the realization of our common human nature” (p. 74). The global slate is wiped clean, in effect, allowing history to start anew on a level, global field. This is unrealistic and is ultimately doomed to failure because one cannot shed one’s constitutive identities at will. Rather, a rooted cosmopolitanism, one where particular attachments are partially constitutive of identity, is what should be the aim. Membership in particular communities need not stand as an obstacle to engaging in respectful dialogue. The values one brings provide not a barrier or unbridgeable gap between cultures but a means by which dialogue can begin.

Our identities, and the ways in which we carry them out into a diverse and multicultural world, offer a starting point from which to engage. In paraphrasing Nussbaum (1996), we should

continue to regard [our]selves as defined partly by [our] particular loves—[our] families, [our] religious, ethnic, or racial communities, or even [our] country. But [we] must also, and centrally, learn to recognize humanity wherever [we] encounter it, undeterred by traits that are strange to [us], and be eager to understand humanity in all its strange guises. [We] must learn enough about the different to recognize common aims, aspirations, and values, and enough about these common ends to see how variously they are instantiated in the many cultures and their histories. (p. 9)

There is much to be gained from “teaching and learning in a culturally diverse environment” (Wächter, 2003; in Clifford et al., 2009, p. 2), because it opens up new possibilities for approaching challenges, problems, and even just quotidian existence. This article has offered a glimpse into the ways that we can support community building and the exploration of fluid identities for international students at the institutional level. None of the activities that were offered are particularly unique; rather, it is the fact of offering students the opportunity to gather and get to know one another that has helped to foster belonging. It affords international students a sense of belonging that helps them reach out to their fellow international and domestic peers. The presence of international students enriches the classroom and campus
experience and helps get us closer to an attitude of cosmopolitanism. But it will not happen without effort on the part of the university and the part of the actors involved. Universities need to avoid reducing international students into a monolithic group defined by the simple fact of their citizenship. Instead, there needs to be effort to find common ground among students, to offer an environment which fosters belonging beyond national identity and instead allows the multiplicity and fluidity of identity that these students bring into play.

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*Manuscript submitted: November 30, 2017*  
*Manuscript revised: March 14, 2018*  
*Accepted for publication: April 1, 2018*
Critical Intercultural Practice: Learning in and for a Multicultural Globalizing World

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ABSTRACT

Universities fail to offer equitable learning experiences for their diverse students. At the same time, the value of diverse student identities and perspectives remains largely unrealized. In a globalising higher education context, these issues are exacerbated while the post-national university is increasingly complicit in advancing the neoliberal project and neglecting its potential to enable its diverse students to enhance social justice locally and globally. Although much current practice in outcomes-based higher education contributes to each of these processes, its underpinning theories of learning and its design features are compatible with more expansive and inclusive aspirations. Drawing upon critical and culturally relevant pedagogies, this article presents principles for the development of “critical intercultural practice” to empower all students in and for a multicultural globalizing world.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, diversity, internationalization

As Anglophone western universities (AWUs) expand their influence among increasingly diverse global stakeholders through the full range of their internationalization activities (de Wit et al., 2017; Knight, 2016; Marginson, 2007), there is a tightening of the tensions concerning their role and purpose in the world. In particular, AWUs have contributed to the ascendency of the neoliberal agenda for employability (capabilities to meet the demands of the labor market) at the expense of education for (global) social justice (capabilities to contribute to the advance of a more equitable global society). While the ascendency of neoliberalism is not restricted to Anglophone
western countries, they are among its most powerful advocates, and as many AWUs expand their global engagement, they are simultaneously exporting the neoliberal project into the international spaces in which they operate and from which their students are drawn. The students within these emerging “post-national universities” (Killick, 2017) come from highly diverse societies and cultures, many of which are not equal beneficiaries of, or contributors to, the spread of global capitalism. They are also individually diverse, entering and experiencing university with differential privilege and disadvantage, and with potentially highly valuable diverse understandings and experiences of the world.

All universities have responsibilities to strive to achieve equitable outcomes for all their students and to develop graduates who can make their way in a multicultural and globalizing world, but the post-national AWU must do so for complexly diverse stakeholders. This article proposes an approach to practice which has the potential to support that work and to reassert the role of higher education as a contributor to the advance of social justice, locally and globally.

STUDENT DIVERSITY AND MULTICULTURAL GLOBALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION

It is well-documented that universities in many countries fail to provide their domestic students from across diverse minority groups with relevant and inclusive learning experiences (Ancis et al., 2000; Bailey, 2016; Bourke, 2010; ECU, 2009; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; NUS, 2011) and thereby deny them equitable academic and employability outcomes (Berry & Loke, 2011; ECU, 2014; HEFCE, 2015; NCES, 2010; Stevenson, 2012; Turner, 2013). At the same time, international students within AWUs are often identified as being challenged by poor English language skills and/or a lack of familiarity with the educational norms and rituals of their host university (e.g., how “collusion” differs from “collaboration” or how students are expected to enact group work). As with other minority groups, this kind of “deficit modelling” of international students (Leask, 2009; Smit, 2012) serves to perpetuate stereotypes which then potentially exacerbate unconscious biases in academic judgements (ECU, 2013; Malouff et al., 2014). The limited focus within this deficit modelling process also serves to mask other potentially disadvantaging dimensions of student diversity. Although rarely acknowledged, international students belong to and identify with as full a range of minorities as their domestic student peers, and so many are likely to be similarly ill-served by their university learning and teaching experiences. We can be sure that some, for example, belong to
ethnic minorities, some have specific learning needs, some are female, and some identify as belonging to the LGBTQ community (while some remain terrified to do so).

Intersectionality research (Crenshaw, 1991) identifies how multiple dimensions of structural disadvantage, such as being Black and being female, multiply the challenges faced by individuals in terms of their educational and wider social successes. Even within local AWU contexts, neglected aspects of diversity, such as the differences within and across minority immigrant and indigenous populations, demands fuller recognition and an expanded conceptualization of diversity and disadvantage (Mukherji et al., 2017). More widely, as post-national universities expand their global footprints through the complex gamut of operations under the transnational education (TNE) umbrella (ACE, 2015; Knight, 2016), they must also work to gain sophisticated understandings of their complexly diverse international student bodies. Whether they are studying on branch campuses, online, at partner institutions, or on an institution’s home campus, data on international student diversity tends to be poorly captured, if at all (James, 2012). Thus, administrators and academics alike have limited understanding of the specific intersecting structural inequalities (e.g., ethnicity plus sexuality plus gender) which may advantage or disadvantage individual students across the local and global contexts in which their university is operating, or from which their students are drawn. In such circumstances, the provision of equitable and empowering learning experiences for minority domestic and international students becomes increasingly problematic. Exporting practice which is failing many at home is unlikely to achieve better outcomes elsewhere.

At the same time, student diversity is projected to be a positive stimulus for learning. Exploring a subject among students of diverse ethnicities, genders, nationalities, and so forth is touted as a means to engage with alternative perspectives, and it has been shown to develop critical thinking, civic mindedness, openness, and other learning gains (Cole & Zhou, 2014; Crisp & Turner, 2011; Curşeu & Pluut, 2011; Denson & Bowman, 2013; Denson & Zhang, 2010; Lewis et al., 2012; Loes et al., 2012). Within the internationalization literature, however, the greatest focus appears to be on the potential learning gain for domestic students, while studies of the benefits of multicultural diversity more generally are “often focused on the experiences of White students, their experiences with Black students, and any subsequent impact on learning and/or development” (Bourke, 2010, p. 127). Despite the claimed learning gain advantages, the majority of domestic students appear resistant to finding their “international” or “multicultural” course-mates sufficiently interesting to
make the efforts needed to interact with them or learn from them (Fozdar & Volet, 2016; Volet & Ang, 2012). This should not surprise us; students, like all human beings, are reluctant to move out of the comforts of their in-groups, their established communities of similitude, in which they have developed and can retain their social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Despite commonplace assertions that we live in increasingly diverse societies, meaningful encounters with people who are different to ourselves may not be commonplace at all. The demographics of the communities which are home to the vast majority of domestic AWU students are arguably experiencing greater social segregation, as widening wealth distribution gaps, for example, turn whole neighborhoods into no-can-go areas for any but the middle classes, while a growth in anti-immigrant and Islamaphobic attitudes are fracturing already fragile multicultural experiences. Many of the societies from which AWU international students are drawn are not at all ethnically diverse or religiously plural. In reality, moving among, let alone across, dimensions of diversity is not something with which many students have much prior experience. If students are to develop capabilities in this area, approaches to learning and teaching need to be designed that will build, reward, and assess those capabilities.

The lived experience of diversity among AWU students at home and overseas, then, appears to be one of being undervalued and ill-served by current learning and teaching practice and the attitudes and behaviors of their peers. Practice which sets out to overcome these limitations is needed if higher education is to address these challenges and realize the potential learning gains of the increasingly diverse student body brought by internationalization and widening participation.

LEARNING AND MULTICULTURAL GLOBALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION

Although the social classification of people into groups is a part of what it is to be human, this does not mean that students cannot transcend the limitations of group membership. Groups are “real if people think they are: they then behave in ways that assume that groups are real and, in so doing, construct that reality. They realise it” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 13). Education is a deliberate intervention in people’s lives intended to enable students to realize themselves and aspects of the world in ways which would not have been possible without it. The post-national university, with its expanded range of student diversity and global stakeholders, is positioned to develop approaches to practice designed to enable all of its students to realize a more inclusive sense of others and a more expansive sense of self. However,
given many students’ inexperience of meaningful cross-cultural interaction, and their apparent inability or unwillingness to act inclusively towards their peers, building their capabilities to engage with diverse others and perspectives requires designing learning experiences which develop and reward boundary crossing. At the same time, overcoming inequities in the learning experiences of minority domestic or international students requires deliberate “act[s] of inclusion” (Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2014, p. 3). These are complementary objectives, which are compatible with theories of learning familiar within the AWU.

Social and constructivist learning theories (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978), which underpin dominant best practice models in AWUs, emphasize that students construct their learning among social others. Among the core assumptions surrounding student-centered learning theories are the necessity of “access to multiple perspectives, resources, and representations” (Land et al., 2012, p. 8), and of building communities of practice within which successful learning can be situated (Lave & Wenger, 1998). However, social learning is a complex reciprocal process which can lead to a modelling of selected peers and their communities or cultures which is more accepting and inclusive, or less so. Participant equality is a key contributor to prejudice reduction within encounters with others (Allport, 1979 [1954]; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Learning experiences which are not designed to build equitable mutual engagement across differences—real or perceived—risk maintaining or enhancing established, socialized fears, distrusts, and dislikes of “Others.” They also, in the same process, reduce the need and opportunity for the development of critical thinking about established ideas and ways of being. For students from majority groups, such learning experiences constitute a form of “banking” education (Freire, 1970), in which their established worldviews are reinforced; for minority-group students, they risk being alienating and disempowering. In a similar vein, work upon the internationalization of the curriculum (IOC) has identified that access to international content or global perspectives can itself be characterized by “add-on” approaches (Bond, 2003), which retain all the fundamentals of the original curriculum, adding largely spurious content which students continue to engage with from majority (“domestic”) perspectives, and continue to be assessed on the basis of their capabilities to replicate those perspectives. By contrast, a “transformation” approach seeks to enable the kind of perspective transformation embedded within transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1995). However, where a student’s learning experiences continue to be circumscribed by differential power dynamics across diverse peers and academics (and countries and continents), there remains the danger that the
greatest transformation requirements fall to minority students. While this offers the greatest learning gain to those students, it may do so at the cost of their cultural integrity/identity and require them to jump higher hurdles in order to achieve as well as their majority peers.

Within AWUs, assessment has long been recognized to be a significant driver of student behavior and learning (Brown, 2005; Knight, 1995). In a constructively aligned program of study (Biggs, 2003), what is assessed, how it is assessed, and what elements of performance are rewarded are determined by the learning outcomes of the unit of study (module, course, etc.). Enabling students to achieve and evidence those learning outcomes through their assessments determines how learning experiences are structured. While outcomes-based curriculum design has often been harnessed to the neoliberal project, it can also serve to deliver more equitable and empowering education for a multicultural globalizing world. Within the outcomes-based paradigm, enabling students to make shifts in how they (1) envision and interact with the full range of their diverse peers, (2) engage with alternative perspectives and priorities within their discipline, (3) interact with diverse others locally and globally, and (4) are enabled to take actions in and for a multicultural and globalizing world may be achieved by deliberate and sustainable structural action to build disciplinary learning outcomes, experiences, environments, and assessments which develop and reward their capabilities to do so.

Several universities have sought to introduce graduate attributes which encompass relevant skill-sets as a mechanism to achieve some of these (or similar). In the main, such attributes have been presented as representing the skill-sets of all students of a particular university. However, limited work seems to have been done within those universities to embed such attributes within mainstream programs of study, or measure the degree to which a particular university’s students can actually evidence them by graduation. Unusually, one university project has sought to embed its graduate attributes across disciplinary learning outcomes (Jones & Killick, 2013), but the degree to which it has succeeded has yet to be researched.

Generic graduate attributes, then, are almost inevitably at some remove from a student’s chosen discipline. They are also created and interpreted within those same academic traditions which are demonstrably failing many minority students, and which are simultaneously being subverted to achieving outcomes which reflect the marketization values of neoliberalism. Both of these trends are increasingly less tenable as higher education institutions work with diverse students in different international contexts, and widen participation at home to larger numbers of non-traditional and otherwise-diverse students. The advance of the post-national
university, when characterized by the export of an educational philosophy and curriculum designed to enable a majority domestic group to succeed in ways valorized by the local marketplace, risks becoming a colonizing venture which disregards, disrespects, and dismantles local and minority group ontologies, epistemologies, and identities. Apart from the violence that such education commits against individuals and their cultures, it also negates the potential learning advantages being created through the widening of student diversity and the contexts within which learning is taking place and might be applied.

CRITICAL AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGIES

Although the potential benefits of bringing together insights and agendas from internationalization of the curriculum and diversity education have been noted for some time (Caruana & Ploner, 2010; ECU, 2011; Olson et al., 2007), little has been achieved in terms of policy or practice. In a similar vein, international educators have rarely articulated their aspirations within a critical pedagogy frame, yet the ethos surrounding intercultural/global learning has important synergies with critical pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy when seen within a global context. Fundamentals of critical and culturally relevant pedagogies are briefly noted in this section as they underpin the proposals for critical intercultural practice below.

A “complex critical pedagogy” for the twenty-first century frames education as a process of transformation through which students develop a “critical consciousness” that empowers them to take social action, while appreciating the “fact that all educational spaces are unique and politically contested” (Kincheloe, 2012, p. 155). A critical consciousness requires challenging established interpretations of the world, understanding forms and sources of power and oppression, and recognizing the consequences of the decisions/actions of one’s self and others. For Freire (1974), this process begins with the recognition that the socio-cultural world is a created world which is, therefore, open to challenge and change. It is also a world which begs “the wisdom of being able to live with what is different, so as to be able to fight the common enemy” (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 18; cited in McArthur, 2010, p. 497). Developments within the post-national university, as noted, complicate already complex questions of equity and empowerment across student diversity, and so it is also relevant that critical pedagogy recognizes that the experiences and forms of oppression of marginalized people “vary across time and space” (Edwards Jr, 2010, p. 228), and critical pedagogy itself “has much to learn from the often subjugated knowledges of African, African American, Asian, and indigenous peoples” (Kincheloe,
Equitable and relevant practice within the post-national university must recognize and seek to surface subjugated knowledges across its stakeholders and their societies, and seek to reform wherever institutions or practice may be complicit in further subjugation. In all of this, critical pedagogy situates the academic practitioner as a “self-reflective educator who is more than the instrument of a safely approved and officially sanctioned worldview” (Giroux, 2006, p. 33).

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) developed in the contexts of multicultural education in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). CRP is founded upon three principles (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160):

- Students must experience academic success.
- Students must develop and/or maintain their cultural competence.
- Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order.

CRP learning environments are designed to be inclusive, which means helping students to value and understand their own cultures and the “cultures of their peers” (Byrd, 2016, p. 2). CRP and its allied approaches are also committed to “collective empowerment and social justice” (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 164), and CRP educators “acknowledge and honor the diverse viewpoints of their student population and refrain from promoting homogeneous perspectives as universal beliefs” (Oran, 2009, n.p.). Becoming an effective CRP practitioner requires the deconstruction and reformation of some “longstanding pedagogical assumptions, beliefs, and practices” (Gay, 2000, p. 203).

Ladson Billings differentiates CRP from critical pedagogy by virtue of it being “specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (1995a, p. 160). I suggest that this distinction is not now sustainable in a globalizing world in which students of multiple disadvantaged groups, each potentially carrying multiple intersecting individual identities, collectively study programs with common curricula across diverse global contexts. A program which advances the empowerment of Black students in the United States is legitimate, but only insofar as it similarly advances the empowerment of its LGBTQA students in Malaysia, and its female students in the United Arab Emirates (for example), and, indeed, of its White LGBTQA students in the U.S. A critical, culturally relevant pedagogy for a multicultural globalizing world necessarily focuses on individual empowerment for engaging in collective, intercultural, social action within and beyond an individual’s group(s) by
requiring, for example, that Black students in the U.S. recognize how they, too, may be complicit in the subjugation of indigenous peoples at home and of exploited labor overseas.

**CRITICAL INTERCULTURAL PRACTICE**

To combat the marginalization of minority students, to build capabilities to see oneself and others in more inclusive ways, and to develop agency to take action in a multicultural globalizing world, critical intercultural practice (CIP) sets out to engage students’ cultural identities and experiences through *the critical exploration of diverse perspectives among diverse others*. CIP is proposed as a set of emergent principles upon which learning environments, learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities, and student assessments might be designed, as outlined below.

**Guiding Principles for Critical Intercultural Practice**

Within the current and emerging contexts of global higher education, I suggest the three culturally relevant pedagogy principles set out above might be reframed for critical intercultural practice along the following lines:

- Students must experience academic success.
- Students must develop and/or maintain their cultural *and* intercultural competence.
- Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of current social orders *locally and globally*.

Each of these might be realized through meaningful, critical learning *with and from and for* culturally diverse others. Echoing Pope Francis’ “culture of encounter” (see, for example CNA, 2013), gaining agency in and for a multicultural globalizing world requires knowing how self and others inhabit and are inhabited by the world we share.

**Practitioner Goals for Critical Intercultural Practice**

To achieve the three principles set out above, CIP practitioners have a need to:

- critique their own practice and the socio-cultural assumptions and values which it contains and projects;
• respect and continuously seek to understand the cultures, capabilities, and aspirations of their diverse students and the diverse contexts in which they live;

• engage with students, peers, and communities locally and globally to develop practice which is equitable, relevant, and empowering.

Through approaches such as these, CIP practitioners situate themselves as reciprocal learners, committed to the individual and collective empowerment of themselves, their diverse students, and their diverse peers.

**Table 1.** Illustrative capabilities for graduates in a multicultural globalizing world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How I identify my action and disposition capabilities</th>
<th>Act-in-the-world capabilities: “I identify myself as being the kind of person who is able to:”</th>
<th>Self-in-the-world capabilities: “I identify myself as being the kind of person who is inclined to:”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cross-cultural capability</td>
<td>• reflect upon my own cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to the ideas, behaviors, and values of others;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which enables a graduate to work, enact their discipline, and live their life among diverse cultural others</td>
<td>• modify my own communication in order to ensure others understand and are understood;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• take a mindful stance when engaging with others;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• accept that all cultural norms, including my own, are arbitrary and susceptible to critique;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• critique cultural norms from a respectful and informed position.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global perspectives</td>
<td>• evaluate how an action might impact upon the lives of others;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which enables a graduate to see how their work, discipline, and life impacts upon the lives of others.</td>
<td>• critique a policy or practice from the perspectives of peoples in diverse contexts;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• locate and draw upon alternative data sources to gain a more complete understanding of an issue;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• reflect upon how my own choices make differences to the capabilities of others to lead lives they have reason to value.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Principal Outcomes of Critical Intercultural Practice**

Through the mainstream disciplinary curriculum and associated learning environments, experiences, and assessments, CIP sets out to develop and assess:
• abilities to critique majority and minority, own and others’, local and global perspectives upon disciplinary knowledge and its application;
• capabilities to successfully enact dialogue and interaction across social, cultural, and linguistic boundaries;
• agency to take personal and professional actions to enhance social justice for their own communities and those of others.

Much work has been done to identify the kinds of cross-cultural capabilities and global perspectives which students and graduates in a multicultural globalizing world might need. Table 1 (adapted from Killick, 2018, p. 54) presents one illustration of the kind of capabilities which are involved. CIP places such learning at the heart of the mainstream curriculum—embedded within disciplinary learning outcomes and then across assessments and learning experiences through the processes of critical alignment.

Capabilities such as these are not developed through encounters with the like-experienced and like-minded, nor within learning environments in which students of various minorities are ill-represented. It is through successful and meaningful encounters with diverse others within equitable learning spaces that the kind of dialogue and relationship building which enables students to advance and critique own and others’ perspectives and priorities can be built.

CIP in Practice

As with critical pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy, CIP is not in itself proposed as a teaching method. Established student-centered approaches such as problem-based learning and collaborative learning may be appropriate ways to enact CIP, though for some learners and in some contexts, they may not. CIP does, though, require structural changes across the mainstream, disciplinary curriculum, involving all levels and types of practice to achieve the outcomes outlined above. How these applications manifest in practice is illustrated in Table 2. These applications are not discipline specific, and the ways in which they can be applied to practice will vary according to the contexts in which any discipline is being learned and the diversity of the learners who are engaging with it.
Table 2. CIP outcomes applied to learning & teaching practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIP sets out to develop and assess:</td>
<td>learning outcomes throughout a program explicitly build towards abilities associated with critiquing diverse perspectives;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abilities to critique majority and minority, own and others’, local and</td>
<td>diverse perspectives are represented throughout the curriculum;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>global perspectives upon disciplinary knowledge and its application;</td>
<td>students are enabled and positioned to bring their own perspectives into the curriculum;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assessments require students to critique diverse perspectives, including their own;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learning experiences are designed to build capabilities in identifying, comparing, and critiquing diverse perspectives and their sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capabilities to successfully enact dialogue and interaction across social,</td>
<td>learning outcomes throughout a programme explicitly build towards abilities associated with successful interaction with diverse others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural, and linguistic boundaries;</td>
<td>assessments require students to engage in dialogue and other forms of interaction with diverse others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learning experiences are designed to incorporate significant engagement with peers and others from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic boundaries (virtual and/or face-to-face);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agency to take personal and professional actions to enhance social justice</td>
<td>learning outcomes throughout a program explicitly build towards abilities associated with self-efficacy and agency in professional and social contexts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for their own communities and those of others;</td>
<td>issues of local and global social justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


are represented throughout the curriculum;

assessments require students to develop and critique individual and group action plans to advance social justice in local and global contexts;

learning experiences are designed to incorporate engagement with communities and social justice issues of relevance to those communities.

SUMMARY

Where culturally relevant education is seen to represent “our best hope against” neoliberal education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 164), critical intercultural practice, along the lines set out here, may extend that hope to the diverse students and contexts of the post-national university. CIP is proposed principally as an approach to practice which can build diverse student and graduate identities (self-in-the-world) and agency (act-in-the-world) to be and to act in a multicultural globalizing world. It represents the (re)assertion of a higher education which strives to develop learning and teaching practice which simultaneously:

- achieves greater equity in educational experiences and outcomes for all its students;
- engages with diversity as a valued resource for learning; and
- empowers all its students to act for social justice, locally and globally.

In each respect, it is of relevance across the emerging global higher education landscape, but perhaps most significantly for the post-national Anglophone western university. CIP may be achieved through a range of approaches and techniques consistent with current learning theory and best practice principles, and is underpinned by:

- **educational principles** concerning the centrality of the student as a cultural and intercultural being, who is to be empowered through the development of critical consciousness;
- **the critical stance of the practitioner** with regard to their own and others’ cultures and ways of being, which informs a continuing
effort to develop more equitable practice through reciprocal learning;

- **key learning objectives** concerning the critique of diverse perspectives, meaningful dialogue with diverse others and agency to enhance social justice locally and globally;

- **applications in practice** requiring structural changes throughout the mainstream curriculum at all levels of practice, including the design of learning outcomes, content, assessments, learning activities, and learning environments.

Learning and teaching practice can enhance or diminish student capabilities to realize a more global sense of self-in-the-world, along with the capabilities to act-in-the-world. CIP is proposed as an approach to practice to better meet both the needs of diverse students in diverse contexts and of a multicultural globalizing world, but structural change is needed also with regard to university governance, estates, quality assurance, and human resource functions if the messages they send through the hidden curriculum (Banks, 2001; Kentli, 2009) are to support rather than undermine those within the formal learning experience.

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*Manuscript submitted: November 15, 2017*

*Manuscript revised: March 1, 2018*

*Accepted for publication: April 2, 2018*
Developing a Host Culture for International Students: What Does It Take?

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**ABSTRACT**

This article argues that international student integration is not only a university issue, but a community one. Thus, the next step for universities’ internationalization strategies requires expanding efforts to include engagement with the greater community and bringing a community-based approach to internationalization processes. Doing so will both better serve the international student population and also create a more well-rounded internationalized university experience for all students by acknowledging and harnessing the inherent diversity of the local community. In particular, this article discusses the university’s role in facilitating such a community-based approach. It will then examine possible strategies and practical suggestions for how universities can step beyond campus-specific policies and instead foster student engagement with and within the greater local community.

**Keywords:** community engagement, higher education, international students, internationalization, social integration, student experience

The internationalization of higher education has been a prominent focus of discussion among researchers, higher education administrators, and policymakers for over two decades. During this time, many initial aims of
building capacity and international standards have been replaced with a focus on the commercial benefits of recruiting large international student populations. The persistent challenge of integrating those international students into the university community suggests that the available strategies are limited and that it is time to shift our internationalization approach to one that has a more far-reaching potential.

Dynamic increases in student mobility have affected the internationalization of higher education institutions around the world as the number of tertiary students who are studying outside their home country continues to increase dramatically. In 2016, approximately five million tertiary students studied in another country, an increase of 67 percent since 2005, and that number is speculated to increase to 8 million students by 2025 (ICEF Monitor, 2016). A high concentration of these mobile students choose to study in English-speaking countries and at English-medium universities, creating learning environments that are rich with possibilities for cultural and linguistic exchange but also opportunities for tensions to arise around language, conflicting expectations, and differing academic practices.

Universities and researchers have reacted to this influx by primarily focusing on improving the experience of this large international cohort and on helping international students from non-English-speaking backgrounds succeed in English-speaking universities. Key efforts have been enacted to help students adjust to university life, with heavy emphasis on the international student doing the adjusting, adapting, and changing. Specific focus has been put on improving international students’ English-language proficiency and in improving their academic skills (Baik & Greig, 2009).

As a result of these efforts, international students generally perform well enough academically, meaning that they are likely to pass their studies, though their marks do not tend to be as high as those of domestic students (Norton, 2016). Despite well-documented language and integration issues, responses on the International Student Barometer suggest that international students are generally satisfied with their study experience (Department of Education and Training, 2017).

However, these efforts do not adequately provide an “equitable student experience for international students” (Proctor & Arkoudis, 2017, p. 129), because they often inadvertently emphasize the experience of international students and overlook the wider aspects of internationalization such as the development of global perspectives (Lunn, 2008). While some universities embrace a holistic approach to internationalization that incorporates top-down and bottom-up efforts, such positive examples are less common (Lunn, 2008). Issues such as increased commercialization and...
emphasis on economic rationales for internationalization pose challenges for many universities (Jones & de Wit, 2012). Most notably, difficulties have persisted in successfully integrating international students into the local community (Arkoudis et al., 2010). Thus, a combination of the ever-shifting student experience and the endurance of specific challenges suggests that it is time to welcome an approach to internationalization that considers the wider context and embraces a broader, more community-driven priority.

In this article, we propose a more community-based approach to internationalization with the aim of better fostering a supportive, well-rounded, internationalized learning experience for all students. First, we outline some of the current challenges facing the internationalization of higher education institutions and tensions around the integration of international students. Next, we discuss the ways that those challenges take shape within the community-university relationship. Finally, we provide practical suggestions for implementing a community-based approach that keeps these challenges in mind.

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN INTERNATIONALIZATION

The literature consistently shows that there remain tensions around student interactions. In many environments, students from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds do not freely interact with each other (Arkoudis et al., 2010; Pham & Tran, 2015). This seems to be the case across a range of host countries and with students from all backgrounds. Not only do international students demonstrate difficulty integrating into the host community, but even in the classroom, students tend to associate with those who are culturally or linguistically similar (Arkoudis et al., 2010; 2012). In addition, there exist a range of intercultural challenges that may inhibit interaction on the part of both domestic and international students, including language difficulties (Arkoudis et al., 2010), differing communication styles (Straker, 2016; Zhang, 2015), anxiety (Dunne, 2009), a lack of common interests (Arkoudis et al., 2010), differing schedules (Arkoudis et al., 2010; Kondakci, Van den Broeck, & Yildirim, 2008), and feeling judged by other students (Dunne, 2009; O’Reilly, Hickey, & Ryan, 2013). Such reluctance to interact despite proximity and contact has been exhibited in institutions of higher education in multiple countries, including English-speaking countries such as the US, Australia, Ireland, the UK, and Canada, as well as non-English speaking countries such as Finland, Belgium, and Japan (cf. Arkoudis et al., 2010; Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen, & Meadows, 2014; Dunne, 2009; Etherington, 2014; Harrison & Peacock, 2010).
This perceived lack of positive, substantial interaction between domestic and international students is a major challenge of internationalization (Arkoudis et al., 2010; Yates & Wahid, 2013). A lack of interaction between diverse students can slow international students’ English language development (Etherington, 2014), reduce the opportunities for all students to gain global perspectives (Arkoudis et al., 2010), and result in feelings of dissatisfaction and isolation (Kormos, Csizér, & Iwaniec, 2014; Rochecouste & Oliver, 2014; Yates & Wahid, 2013). Additionally, peer interaction within learning environments is believed to aid comprehension of the learning material (Arkoudis et al., 2010; Etherington, 2014), assist academic achievement (Akanwa, 2015), and prepare students for intercultural workplaces (Etherington, 2014).

Researchers agree that contact alone is not enough of an impetus for interaction and that interaction needs to be managed and facilitated in order to be successful (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). However, the more problematic aspect is that interaction between international and domestic students, if poorly managed, may also result in negative interaction experiences and subsequently lead to feelings of resentment by all parties. This is particularly evident by students’ frequent referral to the “other” as being “excluding.” Such homophily, or spending time with only those of the same background, is frequently interpreted as a barrier to interaction (Arkoudis et al., 2010; 2012). However, Centola et al. (2007) have coined the term “induced homophily” to explain that interaction may not only be affected by segregatory behavior but that it can produce homophilic behavior as well, meaning it may actually encourage students to spend time only with those of the same background. At the same time, researchers disagree on the role of proximity and familiarity in intercultural relations. Some highlight their potential for reducing biases (Bornstein, 1989, cited in Kormos, Csizér, & Iwaniec, 2014) and others warn that proximity can lead to homophilic behavior and feelings of threat (Dunne, 2013; Koen & Durrheim, 2010). These conflicting outcomes, then, emphasize that the result of interaction is not only uncertain but that interaction itself has risks when not managed actively.

One potential risk is the feeling of resentment towards fellow students. Currently, there exists an alarming perception among some domestic students that the quality of education is lowered due to the presence of international students, that grades are negatively affected by group work with international students, and that entry requirements have been lowered for international students (Barron, 2006; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Strauss, U-Mackey, & Crothers, 2014; Sweeney, Weaven, & Herington, 2008). These combined factors can lead to resentment on the part
of the domestic students and a feeling of unfairness that Barron (2006) warned over a decade ago was the most potentially problematic response from domestic students. Yet, over these last ten years, little work has been done to reduce such resentment or even identify what causes it. Importantly, this resentment may occur even as domestic students state explicitly that they understand the benefits of multicultural interaction, intercultural study, and multicultural group work (Barron, 2006). International students also understand the benefits; however, the preconceived notions they each hold about interacting and the fear that this causes (of offense, anxiety, and low grades) can take precedence. These are some of the many contradictions in the literature between what students seem to “know” and how they behave.

While we know little about what can reduce this resentment, it appears that the potential for such resentment may increase when the proportion of international students reaches a critical mass. Parsons (2010) explains this as domestic students’ potential fatigue over having to frequently overcome the difficulties of working with international students. However, for international students, it also seems to matter that the size of the particular co-national group is large enough for students to depend on. The lack of opportunity to fall back into culturally similar circles may be the necessary push international students need to embrace the risks of interacting with domestic students (Edgeworth & Eiseman, 2007). Especially when there is an existing, comfortable network of peers, there may be less of a need for, and more of a risk in, multicultural interaction. In fact, domestic and international students may both focus on the risks of interacting, rather than the benefits (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). In addition, an outwardly diverse student body can also lead to feelings of apathy and anonymity among the students, resulting in an unintended justification for their lack of interaction (Halualani, 2010). In such circumstances, many students believe that passive forms of interaction such as sitting in the same room can suffice as intercultural interaction (Halualani, 2008). Thus, the continuing increase of the incoming international student population may start to exacerbate the potential for homophily among all students and, thus, feelings of resentment as well.

Though such attitudes may be heightened by university environments, they often do not start in the classroom. Instead, they are a symptom of greater societal issues. Harrison (2015) argues that we have to “situate any discussion about [internationalization] in a wider context of inequalities, social mobility and class transmission” (p. 424). Other authors highlight the potential racial tensions and social challenges that will likely bleed into student relations (Lantz-Deaton, 2017), especially as the number of international students increases (Ritter, 2016).
A review of the existing literature suggests that current strategies appear to have a limited ability to solve these issues of apathy, resentment, and active avoidance, primarily because they focus only on the academic environment. By being academic-centered, most interaction-promoting strategies ignore the social issues and tensions that the students bring with them, and simultaneously disregard students’ fears of reduced grades, communication challenges, and conflicting expectations. In addition to focusing only on the academic challenges, current strategies are also limited in who they assist. At the moment, the students who show most improvement in their intercultural skills are those with existing dispositions toward intercultural interests (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). This is partly because most on-campus activities around internationalization are geared toward the study abroad experience and do not benefit the “non-mobile majority” (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 68), likely the student group that is least inclined to naturally seek out multicultural experiences. A third issue is that international students are often positioned as the inferior party, despite discussion in the literature to move away from a “deficit model” which portrays international students as the unskilled party (Dunne, 2013, p. 572). This unequal power distribution is commonly demonstrated in the establishment of peer mentoring programs that position the domestic student as the “mentor,” perpetuating the idea that it is only the international student who needs to adjust.

These academic-centered efforts also put unfair pressure on individual instructors. Arkoudis et al. (2010) and Etherington (2014) note that some teachers may be subject specialists but are not well versed in educational theory, and, thus, are not prepared to adapt their teaching style to different cultures of learning or to English language learners. Similarly, teachers of particularly content-heavy courses might not have the time to fit more multicultural, discussion-based activities into their lessons (Arkoudis et al., 2010; Arkoudis & Baik, 2014; Etherington, 2014) nor include additional intercultural competencies in their lesson aims (Etherington, 2014).

We propose that it is time for universities to move beyond the idea that internationalization strategies can be limited to either the classroom or the campus. Instead, we present the concept of a community-based approach to internationalization that would foster a more far-reaching and tolerant host culture, offering opportunity, interaction, and respect for international students. In the following sections, we first outline our reasons behind such an idea and then offer practical suggestions for how to implement such an approach.
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY

Despite how well international students may do academically, there is consistent evidence that they are often unable to successfully integrate into the host community. This circumstance is demonstrated in Anglophone communities throughout the world, even though over one third of student life is spent within the host community (Arambewela & Hall, 2013). Cultural integration, specifically, may not be as important to adjustment as academic preparation (Seow, 2005), but being part of a social community has been shown to make the transition to the new environment much smoother for international students (Gautam, Lowery, Mays, & Durant, 2016; Romerhausen, 2013). In addition, interaction with the host community is a primary aid to not only cultural adaptation (Yu & Wright, 2016), but to student satisfaction (Arambewela & Hall, 2013; Bianchi, 2013) and future employability (Arkoudis & Baik, 2014). The community environment may, in fact, have a larger influence on student satisfaction than the university environment (Arambewela & Hall, 2013). Nevertheless, international students do not easily integrate into the host community.

On the other hand, the marked increase in international student enrollments has long benefited the host communities in which these students study. While it is impossible to quantify all the benefits that international students bring, there are some easily recognizable economic benefits, primarily in students’ spending on tuition and fees (Vickers & Bekhradnia, 2007). International students in Australia, for example, are estimated to contribute around A$20 billion annually (US$15.5 billion) (Deloitte Access Economics, 2016). This financial contribution includes far more than university costs. Communities also benefit financially through increased employment, hospitality, accommodation, and everyday spending (Deloitte, 2016; Group of Eight Australia, 2014). International students also attract other tourists, bringing around 160,000 overseas visitors to Australia (Group of Eight Australia, 2014).

There are consistent non-financial benefits to the community as well, particularly in improved cultural literacy and cultural capital (Deloitte, 2016). The community’s projected image becomes more favorable due to the diversity of the population, the increase of cultural influences, and the image of openness and progressiveness that such multicultural populations bring with them. Transnational connections also offer potentially huge benefits to Australian businesses (Tran & Gribble, 2015).

Yet, there is very little reciprocity in community benefits that are returned to the international students. International students often meet more
hardships than favors, specifically regarding issues with employment, accommodation, exploitation, discrimination, and cultural segregation (Kinnaird, 2015; Knight, 2017; Ryan et al., 2016). In many host environments, international students find it incredibly difficult to find employment, either because of working regulations, lack of familiarity with employment processes, English language competency, or because of the circular logic that one should already have had previous work experience in the host country in order to get further work experience in that country (Arkoudis et al., 2009; Gribble, 2014; Lee & Rice, 2007). As a result, students often end up with work options where they are paid “under the table” for nominal sums under unfair working conditions, unable to speak up about the circumstances out of fear that they would have no other opportunity for employment should this option no longer exist (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Likewise, international students are often housed in substandard living environments, sleeping multiple to a room with little privacy, no lease, and under seriously pitiful conditions (Knight, 2017; Ryan et al., 2016; Tovey, 2009). The circumstance of many international students living in squalor is documented in at least Australia, the US, and the UK (Ryan et al., 2016). For many, such accommodation is the only possible option because international students may not have the local references and rental history that may be required for more well-maintained accommodation, city housing prices are often unaffordable, and university-managed accommodation may not meet demand (Ryan et al., 2016; Tovey, 2009). Yet occupants without leases are vulnerable to hidden fees and spontaneous rent increases, and they often feel unable to speak up against unfair treatment for fear of their visas being revoked and their only housing option removed (Ryan et al., 2016; Tovey, 2009). These factors combine to put international students’ safety and wellbeing at great risk (Ryan et al., 2016).

Lastly, the issue of cultural segregation deals with the fact that international students are not always integrated or welcomed into the community (Lee & Rice, 2017). Of course, each of these situations requires an acceptance on the part of the students as well, but the frequency of the phenomena poses a worrisome challenge for both the international student experience and the students’ relationships with the community.

As a response to these challenges, many international students take advantage of extensive support networks established by their cultural group outside of the university that often include childcare, employment opportunities, and housing networks. While these systems may have originally been born out of the necessity for support, they may now act unintentionally as reasons to further avoid integration with the larger
community. These supports undoubtedly provide valuable assistance for students without any other networks, and, of course, we cannot ignore the fact that some students study internationally without any intention or desire to integrate; yet, there are other students who would like to become part of the host community if given the opportunity. At the moment, the opportunity rarely exists, and when it does, it is frequently met with pushback.

Universities have certainly taken many steps to try mitigating these issues, including starting mentor programs, adding more group work to the curriculum, and promoting “know your rights” campaigns. Yet universities only have so much reach and influence when the source of the problem is societal. As long as there continues to be a disconnect between the universities—international students’ primary connection to the community—and the off-campus, host community, universities’ interventions can only remain limited and superficial.

This puts universities at a particular disadvantage, as many issues in the classroom are born directly from community tensions, including racism, segregation, exploitation, and active avoidance of cross-cultural interaction. As mentioned earlier, we cannot isolate discussion on internationalization without also discussing the greater social context, because the two are interdependent. For example, the foreign community with the largest presence on campus is often also that with the largest presence in the community, and, as a result, is the cultural group that often experiences the most targeted prejudice and scapegoating. Feelings of specific resentment, prejudice, and social stigma also overflow into the classroom environment where stereotypes—both positive and negative—often inform student interactions. On the other hand, communities that are genuinely more tolerant of diversity and multilingualism also tend to support more tolerant classroom environments where polylingualism is seen as a resource rather than a hindrance. However, many international students believe that they should accept discrimination as a natural cost of their education in Anglophone countries (Lee, 2007). The harassment they experience, though, has a direct effect on the classroom experience.

Harassment due to appearance has become particularly notable, with “foreign looking” students being yelled at from passing cars (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011) or even having bottles thrown at them (Lee, 2007). Many experiences, such as the preceding two examples, often occur when walking home from class, an activity that sits at the blurry border between community and university. Even students’ definitions of “culture,” and who they interact with, is often based on more general societal assumptions. International students in the United States, for example, have been known to
build stereotypically negative attitudes towards Latinos only after arriving in the US and being surrounded by existing prejudices and misconceptions (Ritter, 2016). Assumptions about who is “worthy” of interaction have palpable and direct consequences for the internationalized classroom. Until these issues are addressed, they will continue to affect the social dynamic between domestic and international students. Thus, universities are not only well-placed to advocate on behalf of international students, it will also be in their best interest to pursue a better solution to these community-based challenges.

A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH

Based on the literature described above, it is clear that international students are integral contributors to the broader community, but universities are naturally the students’ primary focus and community hub during their studies. In order to move forward with internationalization efforts and engage with the community as a whole, the university needs to embrace a community-spirited approach where the role of the university is one of advocate on behalf of the international students towards the community.

This shift in perspective is the first and most fundamental change we propose, on top of which the other suggestions depend. It requires that universities serve as the students’ link and spokesman in the community. There needs to be a proactive acceptance that the university is not isolated from the community, nor vice versa, and so universities must take an active role in establishing a solid relationship with the community organizations that most directly affect their students. It will not do to say that they serve as a link to the community simply by bringing new students to that community. Instead, they must establish firm relationships with community groups, agencies, and organizations that are built on bi-directional advising, respect, and program planning. Wherever possible, universities and communities need to establish practices and policies together, in a manner that holds all parties accountable. All other suggestions hinge on the acceptance of this fundamental role. Once that role is adopted by the university, the following practical steps can offer more specific ways to move forward in this capacity.

Practical Step 1: Community-Based Projects

In addition to policy-making, universities need to expand their use of community-based projects. At the moment, only a small portion of programs utilize community-based projects as part of the curriculum. While many of these programs already offer well-designed opportunities for innovation and community engagement, we agree with Smith and Sobel
(2010) that such place-based education is applicable to all disciplines. Thus, we argue that a version of this can be implemented in almost all faculties and should be done so for credit and in a facilitated, purposeful manner, rather than on an elective, make-your-own-experience basis.

These projects would be facilitated with a wide range of community groups that would keep the international students in mind. Specifically, rather than expecting the students to establish their own relationships when they would be likely to resort to familiar cultural groups, students would instead be connected to community organizations through relationships established by the university, thus connecting students with organizations with which they would otherwise not be connected. This would allow for the promotion of cross-cultural experiences and for positioning the student population as a diverse and invaluable resource.

Next, in arguing that almost all faculties can and should benefit from such a program, we understand that some faculties, such as business, often do engage practices in which groups of students solve specific problems for community groups. We also understand that not all programs will be so direct. At the very least, though, all programs could require some type of community-immersed activity which includes cooperation with classmates, accountability, assessment, and reflection on the part of the students. As examples of unobtrusive activities, first-year students could complete reflection journals on their observation of a number of outside locations; students could be required to give presentations to community groups; one-semester internships could be completed for credit, rather than pay, in a wide variety of fields; volunteering could be established as a for-credit portion of a particular course. However, we emphasize again that even the observations and volunteering would need to be arranged by the university and with diverse organizations so that mutual expectations and accountability are established. Likewise, even the less structured activities, such as volunteering, would need to require intentional, well-designed reflection.

The third characteristic of these programs is that they be completed for university credit and be required of all students. There are two primary reasons for this. First, it is already problematic that only a small portion of students seem to benefit from cross-cultural or intercultural activities. Relying on students to select these options as electives almost guarantees that the uninterested majority will continue to avoid intercultural experiences. Likewise, we cannot assume that students will proactively embrace the benefits of these programs when they have so far learned that the risks of intercultural interaction often outweigh any benefits. By making these programs required, even for a short intensive period, it would reach
the students most in need of intercultural experiences and skills. It would also prompt a more fundamental shift in university culture and expectations. The second reason for making the programs for-credit is that they allow for accountability and assessment of the participating students. Only by consciously managing the requirements, aims, and structure of the program can universities build connections and encourage relationships that would not exist otherwise.

The key to these programs is to build a bridge that helps students engage with members of the community that they cannot access easily on their own. In turn, it will make a small step towards altering the community’s conceptualization of international students and the students’ experience of that community. Although the concept of community-based projects is not new, such service-learning provides the unique opportunity to benefit both the provider and the recipient (Furco, 1996). Thus, it is our belief that such projects would provide a valuable opportunity to restructure students’ relationships to the community when adhering to the three main points described above: facilitated relationships, for-credit value, and purposeful activities that keep the international students in mind and consciously promote cross-cultural understanding. As a result, domestic and international students alike would be exposed to new aspects of the community, would be seen as a valuable resource, and would be engaged in a socially-benefiting action together in which each member is a vital piece of the final product.

**Practical Step 2: Establishing Safeguards Against Exploitation**

One of the ways that universities should work together with the community would be in establishing safeguards against exploitation. This would involve connecting with homeowners, employers, community boards, and advocacy groups in establishing guidelines and policies that will be enforceable and actionable. Exploitation continues to take shape only when there is no other competitive option. Importantly, the students also need to be seen as a responsible party, but not as the sole decision-maker. In focusing only on informing the students of their rights, universities continue to place primary responsibility onto the students, the exact population that is vulnerable to exploitation. So, it does not make sense to simply focus on “better informing” students when it is the complex relationship between circumstances, limited opportunities, and need that fosters exploitative situations.

At the same time, it is unreasonable to believe that all universities can simply offer more housing and employment options themselves. While
doing so is certainly an invaluable way to increase students’ opportunities, such expansion may not be possible.

Instead, we suggest that agreements made between the university and the community parties be written down, officially endorsed, and held to some type of actionable enforcement. It is essential that the agreements include not only what is expected of each party, but also what will be explicitly unacceptable. Parties that have established written agreements with the university, such as rental agencies, homestay companies, employers, or employment agencies, can be advertised as “verified” and receive the benefits of university endorsement. Then, if the agreement is broken, the university would be responsible for ending its endorsement of that agency, advertising that the party has broken their agreement, and establishing an agreement with an alternate party. Ideally, agreements will be arranged with two or more parties of the same kind (e.g., rental agencies) to lessen the likelihood of exploitation due to lack of options.

Next, for more serious offenses, arrangements with community boards or local law enforcement need to be instituted that would have the power to punish exploiters either via fine, legal action, or the revoking of licenses and permits. This would not only ensure that students have more options in the case of difficulty, it would also serve to tell potential community partners that mechanisms have been established to keep them accountable.

The implementation of this step also requires that there is indeed a mechanism set up to review and monitor each party’s compliance. Most importantly, though, is that students have a place and process to report their concerns and that action is taken on their behalf. It works in neither the community’s nor the university’s favor to have international students taken advantage of, undercutting established worker laws, or at physical or emotional risk.

**Practical Step 3: Streamline Information**

University-community partnerships should next focus on streamlining information related to accommodation issues and advocacy. We acknowledge that many universities have already established accessible information hubs for students regarding housing. However, at many institutions, information is scattered across a variety of organizations, including student associations, university housing offices, advocacy groups, and accommodation posting boards. This makes it difficult for students to know where to go when questionable circumstances arrive or when trying to make smart, preventative decisions. Having a safe living environment is a fundamental requirement for a satisfying study experience, and universities
must acknowledge that unsafe living environments can lead to undue stress and danger for their students. Thus, once they have accepted their new role as outlined above, universities’ next step would necessarily be to actively include the students in a mutual understanding of what is acceptable.

After all, while some homeowners or agents may turn a blind eye and others play active roles in encouraging unfavorable housing circumstances, still others may be unaware that their units are being sublet to so many students. At the same time, many students consciously accept overcrowded living environments because they feel it is their best option, either because they are the cheapest solutions or because traditional means are inaccessible. Just as we insist that the community be held accountable, so too must the students. Yet punishing students when there is no seemingly viable alternative would be unethical.

CONCLUSION

We understand that each university has its own needs, systems, and priorities and that the steps outlined above will need to be adapted for each institution’s particular context. Furthermore, we acknowledge that each university may have existing versions of one or more of these suggested approaches. What we contend, though, is that one piece is not sufficient by itself. Instead, it is necessary that the approach be holistic, structured, and done under the understanding that the university become the students’ advocate. These suggestions are also certainly not exhaustive. The premise remains, though, that the university would benefit from taking a more active role in linking international students to the greater community.

It is time to attempt new approaches and strategies to internationalization and in fostering interaction between international students, domestic students, and the wider community. The four points outlined here offer a starting point for expanding internationalization efforts into the greater community. While we strongly believe that such a shift in approach is necessary for improving the international student experience, it is far beyond the scope of this article to propose ways to completely eliminate racism and prejudice, even specifically prejudice towards international students. However, taking steps to reduce issues of exploitation and cultural segregation will help establish a more tolerant, supportive learning environment for all students. By creating a more solidified bridge into the community, the us-versus-them mentality has fewer opportunities to thrive. Furthermore, this fundamental shift in attitude from one of “information providing” to one of “connection building” can help make the student-community benefits more reciprocal and increase cross-cultural
involvement and understanding on behalf of all students, international and domestic.

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Manuscript submitted: November 29, 2017
Manuscript revised: March 12, 2018
Accepted for publication: April 1, 2018
International Education is Political! Exploring the Politics of International Student Mobilities

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that, to date, debates (both public and academic) around international students and the internationalization of higher education have been overly concerned with economic issues and insufficiently attentive to the political ramifications of associated changes in educational practices. It takes seriously a call made by Madge et al. (2009), in which they assert that notions of “engaged pedagogy” and “responsibility” need to be explored in relation to international student experiences. Debates have thus far neglected the wider “politics” (with a small “p”) that underpin the relationship between international students and their “host” university. An awareness of these political relationships has the potential to encourage progressive practices within the institution of the university, including the campus. The article examines the case of transnational education programs in Hong Kong, and considers why a political perspective on international student mobilities is important. The wider goal of this article is to inject some much needed “politics” into discussions of international—and domestic—student experiences.

Keywords: international students, politics, transnational education programs, Hong Kong

Ideas about mobility consistently risk becoming locked into ahistorical and depoliticized tropes that presume flattened geographies, opportunities without borders, and autonomous, raceless/genderless mobile subjects. (Stein and Andreotti, 2017, p. 135)
This paper underwent revisions in the aftermath of an initial round of strike action by UK-based academics and other members of the University and Colleges Union. As reported by Xinhua (2018), the Chinese Embassy in Britain expressed “concerns” about the impact that the strike action was having on the thousands of Chinese nationals studying at UK universities. They are said to have voiced their concern to the Ministry of Education and promised to monitor the situation to ensure that the “legitimate rights” of Chinese students studying in the UK are being upheld. The involvement of the Chinese Embassy in this way has been one of many unexpected turns of events arising from this recent (and unresolved at the time of writing) industrial action. It neatly highlights the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of international student mobility in the wider context of the internationalization of higher education and the neoliberalization of the university (Smyth, 2017).

Prior to the strike action, international higher education in the UK was also receiving public interest and attention in relation to an ongoing political row over international student numbers and their inclusion within overall UK immigration statistics (see Waters, 2017 in The Conversation). As OECD (2017) figures attest, the UK hosts large numbers of international students on its university campuses (ranked second behind only the US, globally, as a destination country for international students). Some recent work by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and HEPI (2017) (using responses to the National Student Satisfaction Survey) has shown that, compared to “home” students, international students in the UK demonstrate far lower levels of “satisfaction” with their experience.

The fact that the UK delivers higher education to an even larger number of students overseas (than it does to international students relocating temporarily to the UK), through transnational education (TNE), has not received anywhere near the same level of media (or academic) interest. According to the British Council (2018), TNE can be defined as “the provision of education for students based in a country other than the one in which the awarding institution is located. TNE essentially involves the mobility of providers or institutions and academic programs across jurisdictional borders to offer education...opportunities” (n.p.). TNE is a significant growth area in the UK’s export strategy; the government has committed to increasing education exports from £18 billion in 2012 to £30 billion by 2020 (HE Global, 2016). Yet TNE raises so many unanswered and critical questions about: the ramifications of delivering higher education in different (non-UK) national contexts, the interaction between TNE and local/domestic higher education provision, the “reception” of TNE qualifications by local/domestic labor markets, the degree of knowledge that
higher education institutions possess of the students they teach through TNE, and the spatialities attendant with these processes and interactions. This article focuses on the “university” as potential site, or place, of political possibilities for the manifestation of some of these issues. To date, TNE has invariably been discussed solely within a neoliberal (materialized, privatized, and commercial) frame of reference, which does the students—both domestic and international—a disservice.

The article begins by providing an overview of some of the key issues relating to the politics of international higher education followed by a discussion of academic literature on international student mobility (for higher education). Next, I consider how we might draw out some of the important political aspects of international student mobilities, including its postcolonial and decolonial dimensions. The final part of the article utilizes data collected during a project on transnational education and suggests some of the ways in which this area of internationalization might be both in urgent need of political intervention while also holding the potential to redress some of the most trenchant critiques of international higher education (Sayed et al., 2017; Stein, 2016).

**KEY ISSUES: AN OVERVIEW**

The internationalization of higher education has implications for how we understand international relationships and global responsibilities, not to mention *local* relationships and responsibilities (Stein, 2016). As Tannock (2013) argues, academics and policy makers need to pay far greater attention to the links between international and domestic students, particularly when it comes to issues around educational equity. He maintains that “demanding educational equality across borders, at the global level, could play a vital role in protecting the interests not just of international students, but domestic students as well” (p. 450). Whilst the economic arguments pertaining to international students in the UK are well rehearsed and commonly understood (they can pay up to three times the tuition fees of domestic students for the same course—Tannock, 2013), the non-pecuniary justification that UK HEI representatives have provided for the growth in TNE is less well known. It is claimed that TNE has the potential to forge progressive and equal international alliances that can:

> rebalance [the] global higher education market, allowing more students to study in their own countries and reducing the costs to developing countries in terms of foreign exchange and “brain drain.” It can build capacity both at home and overseas, a key driver for universities offering TNE and partners and countries
**hosting TNE alike.** (HE Global—British Council and Universities UK, 2016, p. 9)

One interpretation of this quote might be, therefore, that TNE has the potential to foster a non-colonial form of overseas “development.” And yet, this claim is built on almost no information on the actual nature of TNE “partnerships” other than a few small “case-study” examples. This claim is largely speculative and unsubstantiated. An alternative reading of the emphasis that the UK government is placing on TNE growth might be that by “offshoring” its international education (exporting education to students overseas), UK institutions are able to reap the financial benefits of international education (through tuition fees) without impacting immigration statistics. Later in this article, I will explore the latent promise of TNE to foster more egalitarian, decolonizing forms of learning.

There are two major, enduring lacunae in knowledge around international higher education—one that relates to public understanding and one that refers to academic debates. In the UK, public understanding of international higher education is limited to interventions around immigration control and, occasionally, to the funding of UK domestic higher education (although international education is notably absent from recent government documents on domestic HE policy, as noted by Brooks (2017); also, see Lomer, 2014). There has been no discernible discussion of the ethical dimensions of international higher education (see Stein, 2016) within the media or in UK policy. In particular, there has been little debate around the implications of “offshoring” higher education through TNE—whether this is in fact desirable—and how it relates to the international mobility of students (that come to the UK to study). There would seem to be inherent and yet largely unexplored problems linked to presenting “the internationalization of UKHE as a ‘neutral experience’ within normalizing conceptions of internationalization,” instead moving towards achieving “a more ‘layered’ understanding that highlights the connections between the geographical, historical, political, economic and cultural spheres in order for an ‘engaged pedagogy’ to emerge” (Madge et al., 2009, p. 35). Unanswered questions remain about what it means to undertake international education responsibly and ethically, with a geographical sensibility; or to view students not as individualized, atomized, neoliberal consumers, but as inextricably embedded in wider social and spatial relations that will have global “ripple effects.” Doreen Massey’s (2004) work on “geographies of responsibility” is of great relevance for understanding the spatial (moral and relational) implications of international higher education. I concur with Clare Madge and colleagues, who have suggested that international education has the potential to be politically progressive. They have written that the “multi-
sited, multi-scalar character of international study challenges simplistic dichotomies of here/there and unsettles the spatial imagination away from thinking about ‘the international’ and about pedagogy solely in relation to (largely unmarked) European-American-Australian centres, and instead explicitly locates itself as coming out of, and to, multiple locations” (Madge et al., 2014, p. 692). It is these multiple locations—the fact that through internationalization the university finds itself “multiply located”—that require institutions to adopt a global understanding of responsibility (towards their “overseas” students).

Some scholars have recently, tentatively, explored the internationalization of higher education from a critical perspective that encompasses ethical considerations—including Clare Madge, Parvati Raghuram, and Pat Noxolo’s (2009; 2014) work on postcolonial responsibility and international students, and Ravinder Sidhu’s (2006) research on neoliberalism and internationalization (also, see Stein, 2016). These papers signal three broad areas of scholarship around international education that demand further consideration. Work on, first, ethics, care, and responsibility (especially in relation to postcolonialism, de-colonialism, neo-colonialism, and development); second, neoliberalism and the contemporary university (the extent to which universities perceive students as neoliberal subjects whilst prioritizing raising revenue through international higher education over other concerns (Brooks et al., 2015)); and third, diversity and the politics of difference within the university. In this article, I will consider the first two of these important areas.

There is a pressing need, within the academy and beyond, for a discussion on the politics of international student mobility and the potential for universities to become progressive sites undertaking “engaged pedagogy” (Madge et al., 2009). All too often, economic debates, driven by neoliberal agendas, dominate discussions of international student mobility (Lomer, 2014). More recently, arguments about the relevance of “soft power” in higher education policy vis-à-vis international students have been made (Lomer, 2017). Sorely lacking is an understanding of the sense of political and social responsibility that universities should have for “their” international students. Furthermore, the dehumanizing of the international student means that they are rarely seen as political or social actors in their own right, but rather are portrayed as relatively inert bodies. The adoption of a “PREVENT” strategy within UK HEIs suggests that international students may become politicized in more nefarious ways. In the next section of the article, I briefly introduce the literature on international student mobilities before suggesting some of the ways in which a specifically political approach to these issues might be usefully introduced.
“POLITICS” OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITIES

There is, now, a substantial literature upon which to draw when discussing educational mobilities. A decade or so ago, this was not the case—but over the past 15 years, geographers and sociologists have found a growing interest in studying movement for education (see Brooks & Waters, 2011 for an overview of this work). “Migration scholars” have come to view student mobility as an important sub-set of highly skilled migration (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Findlay et al., 2012), or even a “type” of migration in its own right (Raghuram, 2013). In multiple ways, international students have become more visible: in political discourse, on university campuses and in towns up and down the UK, and in academic debate (Beech 2014, 2018; Tran, 2016).

Interestingly, however, work on international students has tended not to engage with work on “student politics.” As Brooks (2017) notes in her discussion of the ways in which social science has until recently represented “student politics,” students have been frequently characterized in popular media as politically apathetic and uninterested. In the last few years, however, it has been increasingly apparent that students have had key roles to play in global and national political movements—such as the Occupy movement (in Hong Kong and elsewhere), the pre-democracy “umbrella” protests in Hong Kong and young people’s recent mobilization in the 2017 UK general election; a large turnout among young people has been attributed to the significant swing of votes towards the Labour party and away from the Conservatives (the Conservative party won the election but lost a number of seats and failed to secure a majority, after a “landslide” in their favor had been widely predicted). Brooks also comments on “the role of higher education institutions in the politicisation of students” (2017, p. 1). Here, it is perhaps important to distinguish between the “institution” (an amorphous locus of power) and the physical site(s) of the university, and how such spaces might be used for political effects (social areas, walkways, squares, lecture halls, seminar rooms, residential blocks, and so on). The physicality (or materiality) of educational spaces is clearly an important consideration (see Brooks & Waters, 2018) in understanding student political movements. The nuances of young people’s politicization in relation to education, specifically, are suggested in a report by Jeffrey (2012), who is in fact making a wider point about “youth agency” and its different manifestations. As he explains:

Youth agency can only be apprehended by understanding how children and youth navigate plural, intersecting structures of power, including, for example, neoliberal economic change,
governmental disciplinary regimes, and global hierarchies of educational capital. (p. 246; also, see Findlay et al., 2012)

Below I will discuss some findings from a research project on UK transnational education and how this might demonstrate issues around both “global hierarchies of educational capital,” and a more rudimentary concern with “spatial variations in the quality of education” (Jeffrey, 2012, p. 246).

There are different ways in which we might approach, and attempt to understand, the politics of international education and student mobilities. For example, we might link international students to discussions around immigration and its “securitization” (Mavroudi & Warren, 2013; Warren & Mavroudi, 2011). In particular, this has entailed the use of restrictive and biomedical measures imposed by nation states in the policing of their borders, which have included the monitoring of international student mobilities. The politics of mobility, however, can also be about the differential access that individuals and groups of individuals have to mobility, and the power that this bestows upon them (see Massey’s 1991 notion of “differential mobilities”; Waters, 2006; Tran, 2016; Forsberg, 2017). The politics of student relationships can be evoked with reference to Doreen Massey’s work on relational space and responsibility. Massey (2004) writes:

*If space is a product of practices, trajectories, interrelations, if we make space through interactions at all levels, from the (so-called) local to the (so-called) global, then those spatial identities such as places, regions, nations, and the local and the global, must be forged in this relational way too, as internally complex, essentially unboundable in any absolute sense, and inevitably historically changing.* (p. 5)

If we begin to view space in such relational terms, then we must also, thereby, adopt a more globally-oriented sense of responsibility and care—one that avoids “that territorial, locally centred, Russian doll geography of care and responsibility”; a view “crucially reinforced by the persistence of the refrain that posits local place as the seat of genuine meaning and global space as in consequence without meaning, as the abstract outside” (Massey, 2004, p. 7).

There are also geopolitical arguments to be made around international study, but I am more convinced by those that pertain to the “geosocial” as the most strategic lens through which to understand this. In a recent article, Ho (2017) makes a compelling case for considering linkages developed through international education in terms of the “geosocial.” Ho’s (2017) research has specifically examined African educational migration to
China. It begins from the point that much work on China-Africa relations has focused on either “geo-politics” or “geo-economics.” In addition to the linkages between Africa and China that are being developed through trade, significant linkages are being forged, she argues, at the household level, as families undertake “transnational education projects” involving the migration of young adults to Chinese cities to attend university. In her article, the “geo-social” is defined as an intertwining of transnational social reproduction and global trade and politics (the coming together of geo-politics, geo-economics, and social reproduction), consequently highlighting the “geopolitical significance of education and concomitant power geometries populating the transnational circulation of knowledge” (Ho, 2017, p. 16). Other writers have explored the “soft power” implications of international education, especially in relation to China (e.g., Caruana and Montgomery, 2015).

There has been a suggestion that, post-Brexit, new educational alliances and linkages will emerge between the UK and countries outside the EU, which might signify a period in the opening up—rather than closing down—of global relations. After Ho, however, I would suggest that it might also be useful to consider what these relationships indicate at a level “below” that of the nation-state or even the institution. We need to understand more about what international education means operationalized at the household or individual level, rather than simply in terms of policy and institution-wide practices. This article turns now to address, specifically, postcolonial (theoretical) perspectives on international higher education and the mobility of students.

POSTCOLONIAL POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

The links between international education and postcoloniality have only very recently been addressed within extant scholarship. Madge et al.’s (2009) article on “engaged pedagogy and responsibility” provides one of the key texts in this regard. It makes some very important and insightful points about how we should think about “international students” (also, see Madge et al., 2014; Noxolo et al., 2012; Raghuram, 2013; Stein, 2016), stressing the connections between students and institutions, places and spaces, rather than seeing international education as something that “happens to” a small group of students in an isolated (often campus) location. “Engaged pedagogy” can only emerge from an open and frank understanding of the historical and contemporaneous imbalances of power and the reality of different types of exploitation underpinning the learning process and associated
institutionalized “accreditation.” They are keen, like other postcolonial scholars, to emphasize that colonialism is not “over” but “lives on” through contemporary academic practices.

Other recent explorations of postcoloniality and decolonization in relation to international education include Sayed et al.’s (2017) work on attempts to decolonize university curricula in South Africa, wherein they describe decolonization as a process of “expanding imaginations” that involves “rethinking what counts as relevant and rigorous scholarship” (p. 61). Their arguments clearly have a lot of relevance for thinking about transnational education in the context of post-colonial sites (such as Hong Kong). A focus on the legacy of colonialism in the lives of students within another post-colonial location—Malaysia—is provided by Koh (2017) in her excellent, recent book. She notes that “British colonialism introduced and implemented fundamental structural changes to Malaya—especially in the realms of race, education, citizenship, and the nation-state—that continue to underwire Malaysian social life during the post-colonial period. More importantly, this has implications for mobile Malaysians’ culture of migration” (p. 50). The book goes on to demonstrate a direct link between colonial structures and institutions and contemporary international student mobility from Malaysia. Less directly, Kenway et al.’s (2017) work on elite schools at different global sites shows the ongoing legacy of colonialism in determining where (in the world) global elites choose to pursue higher education.

Arguments around decoloniality/postcoloniality have been especially germane in Africa, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) discusses in an influential essay on “decoloniality” and “the future of Africa.” He argues that decoloniality is:

*a necessary liberatory language of the future for Africa. Decoloniality speaks to the deepening and widening decolonization movements in those spaces that experienced the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, and underdevelopment. This is because the domains of culture, the psyche, mind, language, aesthetics, religion, and many others have remained colonized.* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 485)

These arguments are particularly germane for discussions of education, and specifically international education where, as Madge et al. (2009) note, there has been a notable “lack of literature specifically focusing on the complex relational ties involved in caring for and thinking responsibly about international students” (p. 35). Indeed, certainly in policy literatures but also
in many academic texts, the meaning of “international” in discussions of international education are rarely if ever explored. The postcolonial analysis deployed by Madge et al. (2009) when thinking about international students is applied to international students in the UK, where in some ways the underlying power dynamics might be easier to render explicit (although, in no way easy). It is even more challenging to think about what a postcolonial or decolonial perspective might bring to discussions of international student mobilities when TNE is involved. Why? Because, as research carried out by myself and Maggi Leung on TNE in Hong Kong has indicated, UK HEIs have a particular relationship with TNE students that evokes distance and apartness. For various structural, institutional, and ideological reasons (including the rather simplistic “out of sight, out of mind”), they take little responsibility for their TNE students. Ethical frameworks or discussions of ethics around TNE would seem to be largely absent. I return to this now, as I seek to demonstrate why I think there is a vital need for a discussion around the “politics” of transnational higher education.

THE (ABSENT) POLITICS OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION: A MODEL OF DISENGAGEMENT?

I want to draw, here, on a recent project (mentioned above) that I completed on UK transnational higher education in Hong Kong, with colleague Maggi Leung (Utrecht University) (funded by the ESRC and RGC). In a series of publications (Leung & Waters 2013, 2017; Waters & Leung 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2017), we have explored the unexpected and unintended implications of undertaking TNE qualifications for local students in Hong Kong. These implications were especially acute for students studying so-called “top-up” (undergraduate) qualifications. In the last section of this article, I want to extract some of the more pressing issues that arose for us that are, I believe, symptomatic of the absence of a “politics” of TNE. Whilst space precludes me from illustrating all of these in detail, I will first provide an overview of these concerns before preceding selectively to illustrate them where possible. In short, these concerns are with: 1) what is being taught (and the problematic concept of “knowledge transfer”); 2) the lack of recognition afforded to both the degree and the students/graduates; and 3) the lack of “control”/“responsibility” associated with sub-contracting or franchising a degree program.

1 “Top up” refers to the fact that these programs require a student to have done an Associate Degree or Higher Diploma first, which they will then “top-up” to “degree level” over the next 1 to 2 years.
Neo-Colonial Models of Knowledge Transfer

In terms of what is being taught, we were not overly concerned with the pedagogical content of degree programs. We were more interested, however, in the model of “transference” that relies heavily upon colonial notions of Western knowledge and superiority. Because of the way in which TNE degrees operate (they necessitate this form of “knowledge transfer” from one country to another), the need for a frank consideration of how these programs might be “decolonised,” as discussed above, would seem to be pressing. In reality, of course, knowledge transfer is never perfect or unfettered (as we have discussed in Leung & Waters 2013 and Waters & Leung 2017). But the principle of unproblematic knowledge transfer requires interrogation. The vast majority of TNE programs are set up at the instigation of the UK university “provider” who will make contact with a “host” for the program overseas (in this case, in Hong Kong) and establish a working relationship and some kind of agreement about how the program, and responsibilities for the program, will be administrated. Also, importantly, a deal is struck about how the funding received through student fees is divided. Official ownership of the program remains with the UK university—in all cases they retain charge for moderating and examining students’ work (usually using an appointed external examiner) and issuing degree certificates. Usually, they provide all the teaching materials and suggest the course structure.

As we will see below, admissions are usually delegated and courses use a high percentage of “local lecturers” to deliver the teaching. It is required by the Hong Kong government that the program must be “on the books” at the same time at the UK “parent” university, making it very unlikely that the course content will have been tailored to its local audience and will instead involve a high degree of transplanting of knowledge. We found no evidence, in our research, that institutions were engaging in any way with discussions around the decolonizing of curricula or the problems that might attach themselves to the importing of British/Western ideas. Some of our UK staff interviewees did, however, acknowledge that in some cases use of local “case studies” or “examples” to illustrate theories or concepts might be more appropriate.

Absent Recognition

Students on, and graduates of, TNE programs complained consistently of a lack of recognition—both in terms of their actual qualifications and a subtler but nevertheless real absence of “social” recognition (recognition was denied to them by friends and family, the “host” university, employers, and government). This lack of recognition was
obviously problematic and this was most clearly manifest in the difficulties graduates faced obtaining graduate-level jobs in Hong Kong (especially in the civil service where a degree was a requirement). Overseas qualifications were not recognized as degree-level qualifications. When some graduates sought recognition for their qualifications by paying for an independent assessment by a Hong Kong accreditation body (Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications), they were invariably told that their qualifications were “equivalent” to a higher diploma or Associate Degree.

I will take a few moments, now, to discuss the issue of engagement between domestic and international students on “campus,” that relates directly to the problem of non-recognition. TNE qualifications in Hong Kong are taught in various ways and at different sites—most commonly in private facilities “attached” to the continuing education arms of domestic universities, or delivered out of vocational education institutes. Many of the students we interviewed for our project were ostensibly attending one of several domestic universities for their program, and yet they received markedly different treatment from the students on “local” degree courses (i.e., those that had managed to secure a place at a domestic institution—a challenging feat as only 18% of young people leaving school are able to do so). The following example, taken from Waters and Leung (2013b), describes the “on-campus” issues faced by TNE students studying for a British undergraduate degree in Hong Kong:

Several students discussed this sense of “separation” between “real” university students attending the local HEI and themselves and other individuals on TNE programmes. As Angel indicates, the feeling of separation is reinforced by a physical segregation, as some TNE students attend lessons outside the main university campus, in an off-shoot building within Hong Kong’s commercial district. Students’ access to university facilities and resources is also, consequently, curtailed (“There is no library in Admiralty”). Even on the main university campus, however, TNE students do not have access to the same resources as local university students, as Peter Chan here notes:

Local students could borrow 10 books from the library, but we could only borrow 5 books. Local students could borrow for 20 days; we could only borrow for 10 days....The resources they

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2 All names are pseudonyms.
gave us were obviously less than the local degree students. (Peter Chan, UK graduate, Hong Kong)

*TNE students also reported differential access to: computing facilities, sports facilities, student discount shops, and halls of residence. All of these restrictions served to separate off TNE students from domestic students, inhibiting the development of institutionalised social capital.* (p. 163)

Other students that we interviewed, like Leonie, received the teaching for their “British” degree on the campus of the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE). Even in that situation, transnational degree students were made to feel “unwelcome” and “inferior,” as the following extract from an interview transcript describes:

*I think the program/course is not rubbish, we do learn things from it. I think the arrangements of it could be improved, as I said, the study environment, as now there is no sense of belonging to the campus. I felt a bit [like] I was not being respected. I did not use much of their resources. I would at least have a proper computer room in my higher diploma in IVE [previous qualification]. In my top-up degree, I had to share resources with the IVE students in that campus. The computer room was very small, only got two computers. I felt being ignored.*

Interviewer: Do you go there often?

*No, not often, because it is annoying, I ought to fill in forms, etc., to get in. So I felt they were just forcing us not to use the room. We just had a feeling that we did not want to stay in the campus longer. It made us feel that we wanted to leave the campus after class. I would not feel like staying in the campus to do my assignments nor revision. Unless it is necessary, or else I would not want to be there.* (Leonie Cheung, age 23, was studying for a one-year British “top-up” degree).

Through our research we also found that for many students, the large teaching groups prevented important bonding between classmates:

*They split us 110 plus students into two lecture classes, so one is about 50-60 in each lecture class. For tutorial classes there are 10-20 students...the bonding with those 10-20 friends is relatively strong, but the bonding amongst the 65 students is not strong. And now I only keep in touch with 3-4 friends from the*
program. I might not recognize the others if I see them on the street. (George Law, Hong-Kong based UK TNE graduate)

This lack of opportunity for “bonding” has a significant impact upon the type and quality of institutional social capital that students on TNE programs are able to develop. It meant that very few students built robust and meaningful social connections with classmates and alumni (Waters, 2007). Furthermore, TNE programs lacked any “student activities,” leaving some individuals feeling that “we had a weak sense of belonging.” In the following interview extract, these problems are highlighted:

I think this program was unable to give me a university life...As a student of the “top-up” program in X [Hong Kong] University, I was unable to enjoy the facilities in the university fully... I felt the good things of those local degree students...I could see that they had many functions in the concourse [of the university]—there were forums, singing contests, and many different activities. [Interviewer: Did you join those activities?] No, I could not have those benefits. Students of non-local programs were not recognized to be the students of X University [in Hong Kong]. Therefore I had a feeling of being isolated. (Chloe Lee, graduated with a UK TNE degree, Hong Kong)

As noted above, the host institution in Hong Kong also fails to recognize TNE students, leaving them with a sense that they are “not real students.” One further aspect of TNE that prevents the possibility of any “integration” between home and “host” students is the spatial separation on an international scale—almost all of the programs that we looked at involved no international mobility on the part of the student. Consequently, the student found it impossible to feel part of their overseas host institution, just as the overseas host institution for the most part did not consider TNE students in the same terms as students resident in the UK.

Institutional Disengagement

Also significant, and largely unexplored within research on TNE, is the use of local, part-time, and precarious lecturers to deliver these programs. This is evident on both “franchised” programs (where the UK institution sells the whole degree to an overseas institution to deliver) and those that employ a “flying faculty” model (where the UK institution retains a degree of control over the program, including teaching some of the course). What was apparent from our research was that where flying faculty were used, they were generally used for a very small proportion of the
overall contact hours. I asked one UK university to clarify who does the teaching on their degree programs in Hong Kong:

Local teachers. Originally, when the course started, there would have been probably full-time staff at XX [local Hong Kong university hosting the UK program], but because of changes there over the years, it’s harder for their staff. These are now almost professional part-time lecturers. Often our lecturers [those that teach on the UK TNE program] also teach at Hong Kong University, Hong Kong Poly U, etc.

In other words, it is very common for universities in Hong Kong to contract out the teaching to part-time or agency staff, who will teach on more than one TNE program owned by more than one UK university. The reason he gave for this was also interesting: “[because] they’re looking at students who aren’t sort of full-time students….so they won’t use their full-time staff on it.” He went on to describe how one particular TNE course has in excess of 300 students on it (up from around 40 originally). Others, we were told, had more than 600. Large class sizes and student numbers also make the UK institution less likely to take full responsibility for students on their TNE programs.

Leonie, a student introduced above, expressed concerns about the lack of UK teaching staff on her UK degree program. We asked her what was “British” about her program:

I could not feel anything, absolutely nothing, except the certificate had printed the UK university. But...the lecturers were from XX [the Hong Kong institution at which the program was “based”]...I am not sure whether the lecturers, whether they taught IVE day school, for higher diploma...I think that throughout this top-up degree program, the professor would come to Hong Kong [from the UK], for only once, which I think that time is a bit meaningless.

Interviewer: How long do they come for “once”?

They come for one lecture, only one lecture. Maybe about three hours. Then that’s it.

Just as UK universities have little (or no) control over who teaches on their courses in Hong Kong, similarly the admission processes are also delegated to the Hong Kong institution. I asked another UK university, “do you have any hand in the recruitment process?” and they replied:
No, we delegate that. I am not sure whether this was the case from day one...I suspect that right from the outset we did scrutinize the applications. But over the years we’ve delegated the recruitment to colleagues in Hong Kong, to the point that we don’t really look at the application forms of students [at all]. We don’t really scrutinize applications any more.

What we see in all these examples is a clear sense of “separation” between the UK university that “owns” and awards the TNE qualification, the Hong Kong institution that houses the degree program, and the staff that teach on the program.

CONCLUSIONS

International students draw universities into global webs of responsibility, whether they like it or not (Massey, 2004). They increase their global reach and influence in more ways than are presently acknowledged. It is, therefore, unacceptable for institutions solely to view international students in pecuniary terms. They need to be seen as individuals, firstly, then as members of a global community. In the context of the UK, “Brexit” (the UK’s imminent exit from the European Union) presents an opportunity to reassess how it sees its place in the world. Indeed, a great deal of soul searching has already been undertaken. Moving forward, institutions (and the UK as a whole) must be willing to confront: a sense of responsibility for (international) students; and a sense of responsibility for the spaces with which UK HEIs are intimately connected through internationalization. This inevitably involves coming to terms with the politics of international education.

In this article, some of the problems attendant with transnational educational programs have been highlighted. However, it might also be possible to see some liberating, decolonizing potential in TNE. Might TNE offer the chance to develop a curriculum that explicitly “decentres the nation-state” (Stein and Andreotti, 2017, p. 138)? In its own way, might it not already be doing this, but in an unstated, underrated sense? Through the use of local untenured lecturers, for example: UK institutions have no real grasp on what, exactly, they are teaching, or how. We have evidence from students that they invariably teach in Cantonese (even though the course is “supposed” to be taught in English). This might be seen as a subtle “political” intervention of sorts (Cheng, 2016); a way of recapturing the program and making it more local. If UK universities were to engage more with their TNE student body, might that engagement not enrich the student body as a whole? In one (exceptional) interview with a UK university, this
idea was even mooted. I asked how he (a UK lecturer in charge of a set of TNE programs) viewed these courses:

Basically, I see them as broadening the base of this university. Let’s face it, a university at X [city in Wales] is, by its nature, small. Unfortunately, most of the local students are extremely parochial, they won’t go anywhere, won’t do anything….Anything we can do either to bring foreign students here or to wake people up….Wales is a small country and it needs to deal with the outside world, it does not need to be totally inward looking...If we can get outside contacts now…My mission in life is to keep all the international stuff going, keep the international contacts going. One day it will break through; one day it will happen.

He was the only staff member of a UK university interviewed (out of 18 institutions) to make any mention of the potential of TNE students to the diversity of the student body. It is a very interesting claim and stands out for its exceptional nature. It is suggestive, however, of a different way to view TNE; of a more progressive, less pecuniary perspective on the growth of these programs. Nearly all the UK universities we interviewed were open about the monetary importance of TNE for either subsidizing domestic programs or paying UK staff wages. Sadly, this emphasis on finances comes at the expense of an ethical and connected “world view” within which TNE programs and students become a part of domestic programs and student bodies. This might not simply be ethical but also fundamentally enriching and necessary.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Maggi Leung for her work on the joint project referred to in this article, and Yutin Ki for his research assistance and the ESRC and RCG Hong Kong for their financial support (RES-000-22-3000). CindyAnn Rose-Redwood has been extremely patient with me—thank you. And two anonymous referees provided very helpful comments on the first (very rough!) draft of this article.

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*Manuscript submitted: January 11, 2018*

*Manuscript revised: March 29, 2018*

*Accepted for publication: April 17, 2018*
The *Journal of International Students* is an open access publication thanks to the institutional sponsorship of Old Dominion University.
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