

Roundtable Discussion: “Sharing diverse values, beliefs, and practices: Fostering social and academic integration of international students with domestic students and culture”

Abstract

International students join our institutions excited to learn at a new university and in a new culture; how can we help? Join in this Roundtable Discussion that will be a sharing of techniques that the presenters have used in their teaching, advising, and directing roles with international students. These techniques not only helped our international students feel welcome, ready to complete coursework, and thrive in the new culture but also encouraged them to share their own culture. Participants will have the opportunity to share their techniques with the presenters and, hopefully, all will leave this session with ideas to implement at their respective institutions.

Keywords: Sharing diverse cultures, Social and academic integration, International students

Introduction

This *Roundtable Discussion* session proposes to create an active learning environment in which participants will share the techniques they use to encourage international students to share their diverse values, beliefs, and practices. This sharing fosters both social and academic integration of international students with domestic students and their respective cultures. This panel includes both instructors and the international program director of the College of Management at Metropolitan State University (MN); our intention is to share and reflect on the actual examples we have utilized. These examples include (but are not limited to): APA exercise to introduce university expectations on citing sources and plagiarism, hosting a Thanksgiving dinner and explaining the cultural background of this holiday, field trips, mock interviews to help

international students acquire and practice interviewing skills, carefully selecting business cases that could be relatable to both international and domestic students. In return, we look forward to learning from participants in our session. This session is targeted at anyone who interacts with international students and wants to foster mutual exchanges of ideas – such as faculty, advisors, and program directors. Participants will have a better understanding of how to help international students learn about the new culture (social and academic) and share their own cultures within their new surroundings.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Many U.S. schools are aggressively recruiting international students as a means to counteract their declining enrollment of domestic students and elevate their institutional reputation. According to the latest annual Open Doors Report (sponsored by the State Department), 914,095 international students were studying at U.S. universities in 2020-2021, despite the COVID pandemic. International students provide economic benefits as well as bring their cultural perspectives to provide a more diverse campus culture. U.S. research universities also attracted outstanding, well-prepared students from around the world. The presence and engagement of international students on campus reflect and reinforce the importance of embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The extant literature suggests that there are typically four stages of international students' life cycle namely: pre-arrival, arrival, during stay, and re-integration (Perez-Encinas & Rodriguez-Pomeda, 2018). For the purpose of this roundtable and based on our collective experiences, we would be more specifically speaking to the first three stages. Additionally, this roundtable is guided by Student Development Theories (SDT) as its underlying theoretical

framework which would increase our understanding of how international students integrate academically, culturally, and socially in a foreign country (Jones & Abes, 2016).

There is no denying the fact that international students face difficulties in their quest to gain an education in a foreign country. Upon arrival, international students have to face many obstacles such as language barriers, homesickness, identity issues, changes in diet and life habits, and financial setbacks (e.g., tuition, living cost, the high cost of health insurance premiums) (Gautam et al., 2016). Challenges for international students also stem from socio-cultural adjustments (Beasley & Pearson, 1999) and adjustment to new academic cultures (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005). A student's sense of belonging, defined as "the feeling of being a member of one or more communities at university and feeling support for being present at the university," is a crucial determinant of the student's satisfaction level, academic success, and retention (Merola et al, 2019, p.538). Understanding the challenges that international students face will contribute to effective teaching, advising, and administering of international student programs.

Faculty and institutions, therefore, should develop effective practices to understand and address the challenges. Institutions should offer both academic and social support services for international students (Martirosyan et al., 2019). To minimize or eliminate the challenges, it is important to build trusted, inclusive relationships between faculty and students (Macgregor & Folinazzo, 2018). Experiencing positive social interactions contributes to psychological well-being and sociocultural adjustment of international college students (Ye, 2006). In addition, institutions should pay attention to the daily life of international students to integrate them into the new environment and help them feel welcome. Social connectedness, "the subjective awareness of being in close relation with the social world" (Lee & Robbins, 1998, p. 338) is

found to be negatively related to the level of psychological and physical discomfort an international student experienced in a new cultural environment (Duru & Poyrazli, 2007).

Scholars and practitioners have offered many recommendations (e.g., Jean-Francois, 2019) and various examples/practices (e.g., Martirosyan et al., 2019) intended to facilitate and foster social and academic integration of international students with domestic students and culture. Still, it is highly necessary and beneficial for faculty, advisors, and program directors with hands-on experiences to share and exchange their insights and reflections. Such communications will be a great opportunity to find out how to improve the impact and effectiveness of what we already know/utilize and to stimulate the development of new ideas and techniques, with the ultimate objective to better serve our international students.

Session Description

In our 60-minute session, we will complete the discussion in four phases.

- 1) Introductions (10 min): Participants will introduce themselves, provide background on international students within their courses, and their role(s) with international students.
- 2) How to Foster Social & Academic Integration of International Students into the Domestic Culture. (15 min): Next, we will share integration techniques/practices we have utilized in our own courses/roles and our reflections.
- 3) Addressing International Student Difficulties (25 min): During this phase, we will ask participants to share practices they have employed and their evaluations/comments.
- 4) Wrap-up (10 min): We will take some time to reflect on how we can take ideas back to our respective institutions.

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