

## **(IJ-05) International Student Services Management in Higher Education**

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### **ABSTRACT**

International student services management is a very important issue. It pointedly underscores the economic importance of international students to institutions and the failure of institutions to provide the kinds of support that would be most helpful to international student success. Thus, international student services management will become a popular topic in contemporary educational systems globally for recent decades, so this paper will briefly discuss some insights and thoughts about how to support international students and how to manage international student services, which include (1) communication, (2) multicultural understanding, and (3) academic performances comprehension. However, due to the limitation of the literature review and research in the market, this paper has some limitations in the research. The goal of this paper is to lead leaders to rethink, speculate, practice, and effectively manage international student services.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The international student is defined as a student who is not an immigrant, refugee, or citizen of the United States enrolled in an institution of higher education, holding an F-1 student visa with temporary status in the United States, who will return to their own countries or lands, upon this completion of their study (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) asserted that higher educational institutions in the United States host more international students than any other country, with around a 22% share of the global student market. In response, a higher educational institution in the United States is considered a valuable investment for international

students worldwide because of the multicultural environment, high-quality academics, and a famous “brand” of visibility in the global market.

In this situation, student services for international students are of tremendous significant concern in the higher educational institutions in the United States. Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, and Lucas (2004) remarked that international students are similar to domestic students on the United States campuses because they may experience social, academic, and emotional difficulties as they advance into higher education. A better understanding of the student services’ counseling center in addressing the concerns of international students is necessary for this special population in today’s higher educational system.

This paper aims to highlight the need for student services in higher educational institutions to pay more attention to international students because such students lack friends and family members here. This paper will present research on international student services in higher education in the following three aspects: (1) how to provide better communication between local students and international students, (2) how student services personnel can demonstrate cultural understanding and multicultural counseling competence, and (3) how international higher education students can use student services to help them improve academic performance.

## **COMMUNICATION**

In search for better communication between domestic and international students, student services staff may employ two methods: peer friendship programs and online blog communications. Moreover, when the researcher was a high school student in China, she joined a peer partner program that included a girl from Tibet. The program was an excellent one-on-one activity for making friends across different nationalities because this activity provided better understanding through communicating differences and similarities between cultures.

Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) stated that settled international students could effectively teach incoming international students about learning styles and skills and the resources needed to succeed in the United States. Pairing students with similar academic interests could improve the

academic achievement of international students. Peer program administrators could recruit participants for a service project aimed at campus improvement.

Peer programs positively influence the development of academic skills between domestic and international students. Strategies also can be applied to raise the international students' academic level connection with the institution. Peer pairing programs could help international students become familiar with valuable contacts on the campus or in the community, adding to their sense of belonging.

Zhai (2004) asserted that international students encounter many troubles like language and communication difficulties and challenges while adjusting to the United States' higher educational system. Studying in the U.S. is more stressful for international students because the academic cultures are different. Faculty use unfamiliar education techniques, including fast-paced class sessions, communication between professors and students, classroom participation, group activities, reading and writing assignments, presentation and speech requirements, and different attitudes about assignments.

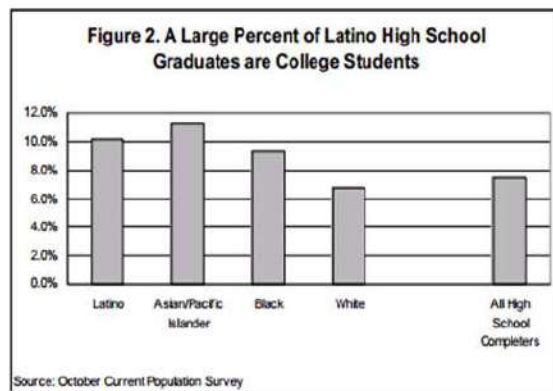
Williams and Jacobs (2004) stated that blogs are the scope for interactivity over a period of time, and the course of writing entries and responding to feedback reflects the personal character of the blog's creator. Blogs are perhaps the most prominent tools for academic conversation that achieves beyond the scope of a university theme and augments. Knowledge creation occurs throughout student enrollment in a higher education program. Significantly, students have long-term learning from each other more than from instructors or textbooks. Blogs are becoming useful tools for facilitating learning.

Andrade (2006) asserted that international students responded with negative behaviors such as embarrassment, frustration, disappointment, and boredom when arriving in a foreign country. Underlying many of the problems experienced by international students is a need for more language proficiency and cultural knowledge in a different country. However, some evidence suggests that 'language problems' may be culturally based ways of seeing the world.

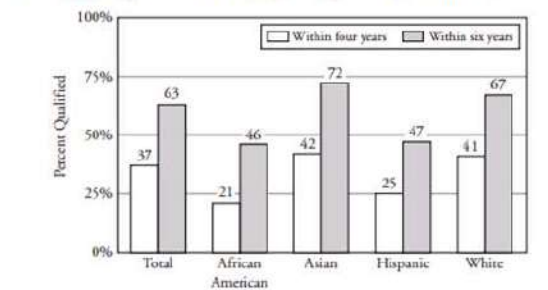
Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) stated that many campuses had initiated computer-based advising systems. Although these systems are cost-effective, higher educational institutions allow for the development of professional relationships or interactions between advisers and students that may differ from the relationships or interactions between advisers and students in other academic cultures. The central goal for communicating with the students is about students' development, allowing higher education institutions to mirror societal transformations and encourage pluralism.

## MULTICULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

The issue of race and attainment of degrees in higher education has not and cannot be ignored. Figure 2 extracted from Fry (2002) shows that Caucasian high school students were not the majority student population right now attending higher education institutions in 1999. Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) also indicated that a significant number of Asian students attained their bachelor's degrees within six years rather than four years in 1995-1996 than Caucasians, Hispanic, and African Americans.



**FIGURE 9**  
Bachelor's Degree Attainment Rates for Students Who First Enrolled in a Four-Year Institution in 1995-96 with the Goal of Completing a Bachelor's Degree, by Race or Ethnicity



SOURCE: Berkner and Chavez, 1997.

California is a state where the minority has become the majority population. Still, its flagship public institutions of higher education have embarrassing small amounts of participation rates among African American and Hispanic-American students. Moreover, African American, Hispanic, and Native American students continue to earn degrees at substantially lower rates than Caucasians and Asians. Texas, Florida, and several other states also face hosting comparable dilemmas. If such issues are not resolved in fewer decades, today's retention and diversity problems will seem like child's play. Educational opportunity and success are uneven in the United States by income, race and/or ethnicity (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003).

Andrade (2006) pointed out that international students contribute valuable educational and economic benefits to higher educational institutions. Yet, domestic and international students face similar academic and social transition issues in their first year of higher education with distinct differences. International students need more help adapting and engaging in educational activities than domestic students. Universities should become knowledgeable about international students' concerns about issues and appropriate support services put into practice for their continued benefit. Trice (2003) asserted that more than 540,000 international students study in the United States annually. Educators should realize the differences between international and domestic students in school preparation, goals, career paths, or academic performance. Faculty members observe how difficult it can be for international students to acculturate into American culture. However, Hellstén (2002) explained that coming to a foreign country can often be embarrassing because of the uncertainty and disorientation of finding your way around new cultures and social expectations. The resulting confusion seems to lead to less harmonious change among incoming international students between old and new study environments.

Zhai (2004) recommended that higher educational institutions provide more intensive orientation programs for international students that deal with cultural and academic differences regarding student services and help-seeking behaviors. Because many international students do not anticipate academic differences before they come to the United States, they are tremendously overwhelmed during the early adjustment period. Additionally, international students have to deal with the psychological effects of handling a different culture and social isolation, loneliness, academic stress, and financial crisis that may not be recognized or accounted for.

Thomas, Quinn, Slack, and Casey (2002) asserted that it has not been easy to reveal a quantifiable and direct relationship between student services and student maintenance because of several factors that Pritchard and Wilson (2003) noted influenced change in meeting the higher education needs of international students. For example, the social and emotional factors involved with the academic performance and retention of international students require higher education institutions to address problems and conflicts that may exist with their student populations.

First, student services are responsible for international students' campus life and academic and future career advice. Second, reviewing and measuring the impact of any involvement is complicated due to the many factors that influence students' decisions. Third, there is a lack of evaluation and research into the effects of student services (Thomas, Quinn, Slack & Casey 2002); therefore, critical information is needed about the types of concerns that many international students may face (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores & Lucas, 2004). Although it may be hard to provide services to international students, it does not mean that delivery of such services should be ignored in higher education even though there is not an agreed way of calculating the cost of delivering student services to international students (Thomas, Quinn, Slack & Casey 2002).

### **ACADEMIC PERFORMANCES COMPREHENSION**

The significant strengths for diversity expansion in higher education on campus include the growing proportion of diversification and the rising encouragement being supplied by governments globally for students to have equivalent rights of entry to higher education. The expansion of education, escalating skill levels and competencies, and continual professional upgrading require new possibilities to meet the growing and complex demands of the globally-competitive modern world (Johnstone, 1998). Understanding international students' adjustment challenges has global implications for intercultural education, mainly attributable to their English language proficiency and cross-cultural knowledge. In essence, academic achievement is affected by language proficiency, academic skills, and prior educational background (Andrade, 2006).

Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, and Lucas (2004) stated that earning superior scores was another concern among international students. Furthermore, it is significant to remember that even though the number of international students is small, most international students require counseling services at university counseling centers during their first year of study in America. Zhai (2004) suggested that interactions between international and domestic students could improve the variety of student activities, such as differences in celebrating holidays.

Student service staff should be aware that international students often fail to take advantage of social support services because of different cultural backgrounds, academic pressure, and isolation

from the campus community for international students living off campus. Therefore, higher education institutions should continually provide social support to help international students adjust to American higher education (Zhai, 2004). Moreover, institutions that successfully support minority access and achievement focus on the learning environment rather than race or ethnicity. In other words, they maintain diverse learning experiences emphasizing excellence in instruction and providing social opportunities for students to build new friendships and forge trust with classmates (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003).

International students were collapsed into one group, ignoring the diversity of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and cultural background. Efforts need to be made by university counseling center staff to reach out to ensure that they have the tools to manage the change and succeed academically (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores & Lucas, 2004). Additionally, Andrade (2006) asserted that understanding cultural adjustment and implementing measures that ensure the benefits of cultural diversity are recognized by other host institutions of higher education worldwide.

International students are often less prepared to study abroad than domestic students participating in foreign exchange programs. Educators should consider the adjustment issues that arise in cross-cultural exchanges to enhance the mutually rewarding experiences for international study (Andrade, 2006). Helping students connect with current issues and higher education organizations deals with the manifestation of determination, functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention plans, and protection for students and those eligible for higher education (Skiba, 2002). The high academic quality of international students can benefit every department in higher education according to Trice (2003). Newly enrolled international students could not find an advisor to take them into their research group, even though funding was available. Moreover, faculty members lacked awareness of international students' desire to integrate with their American counterparts in academic research (Trice, 2003); this may be an area in which faculty, staff, and the student services department may want to consider changing.

Moreover, Hellstén (2002) further pointed out the academic concern about reduced academic learning achievement and opportunities for international students. In addition, international students' perspective on educational offerings available in higher education and the student

services available to them is one way to help educators enlarge pathways towards improving the content and focus of international curriculum offerings to highlight the responsibility.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the United States, there are more than four thousand accredited institutions of higher education competing for the international student market. Approximately 565,000 international students from nearly every nation in the world travelled to the United States for higher education, which include approximately 14,000 students from Mexico, more than 28,000 students from Canada region, and 327,785 students from Asia and more than 30 different countries. This means that international students population accounted for 3% of students enrolled in institutions of higher education in 2006 (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007).

During the past several years, the Asian international student population in higher education represented 40% of total number of international students studying in institutions in the United States. Moreover, the highest percentages of the Asian international students come from China, India, South Korea, and Japan, according to Verbik and Lasanowski (2007). Therefore, modern higher education involves more challenges than before because competition and students' population have changed tremendously.

Successfully servicing international students in the same setting as non-international students is an essential goal and eventually the target for diversity educators, educational administrators, faculty, and staff. Additionally, comfortable, and friendly learning environments should be a part of the international culture provided by administrators of higher education on campus for international students. Moreover, Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin, (2002) mentioned that it is vital that a variety of individual, institutional, and societal benefits are associated with diversity experiences and dissimilarity in educational results between students from diverse cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Diversity may endorse a wide range of learning outcomes which include dynamic judgment skills, scholarly commitment and enthusiasm, and a variety of intellectual abilities, particularly significant during the higher educational years because students are at a critical developmental period which opens understanding to endorse future improvement (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin,



2002). Recognition of differences enables the university to suitably customize student services which could facilitate excellence in education for all students and to maintain the international student population (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2007).

Student services dedicated to students include social activities such as clubs, associations, cafeterias, sport facilities, academic support, housing facilities, religious facilities, and public transportation are reasonably provided, and given that those services are also utilized by international students studying away from their homeland. Particular attention is focused on student services differently by domestic and overseas students. International students have rated the need for such services higher than domestic students. However, the uses of these services are rated lower by international students compared to domestic students (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2007).

This indicates that there are some obstacles for international students. For one thing they may have a problem to understanding the universities catalog and the educational culture in a different society successfully. The student services may not be aware of the difficulties of international students and unprepared to service them in specific ways, such as asking them if they need help intentionally or communicating enough with them. Except for all of above, student service should not forget the importance of emotional support more than study assistance. They might need to gain the trust of international students and communicate with them about the potential of psychological and emotional issues experienced in a different culture and society.

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