Exploring a Particular Student Subpopulation More Thoroughly

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As of 2019, the United States hosted a total number of 1,095,299 international graduate and undergraduate students which accounts for 5.5% of the total U.S. higher education population and reflects a 0.05% increase in international students in the last year (IIE, 2019). Preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, the increase in international students was expected to continue steadily growing. Instead, situations are uncertain for upcoming enrollment numbers. The tragedy of September 11, 2001, (9-11) also had a negative impact on the demographics and the number of international students choosing to study in the U.S. (Gohn, 270). As of 2003, international students contributed “approximately $12 billion to the U.S. economy, and education is now recognized as the fifth largest export of services in the U.S. (Lee, 384). International students are an integral part of the higher education community because along with fiscal contributions, they also bring cultural diversity, ethnic diversity, and new perspectives to their institution.

Unfortunately, international students also experience growing concerns regarding language barriers, rising tuition costs, and increased feelings of isolation often finding a lack of empathy from staff and peers when seeks help (Lee, 387). Following 9-11, international students reported more instances of neo-racism which is a conceptual framework utilized to identify instances of discrimination that are rationalized based on cultural differences rather than biological differences (Lee, 389). Additionally, following 9-11, the U.S. government tightened restrictions on student visas and increased application fees, further decreasing international interest to study in America. Other countries such as England and Australia have taken great interest in the potential for revenue through hosting international higher education students, and in the last decade or so have become “strong competitors for the financial benefits that international students bring” (Lee, 384).

Due to these challenges, it is more important than ever for higher education professionals to create a sustainable and supportive environment for international students. Students who discussed situations where local peers were racially hostile towards them also consistently mentioned confusion of who to talk to so they can get help. Students also experience culture shock and struggle with cultural adaptation (Anderson, 1994). There is both a psychological and sociological need to cope with new cultural situations, and it is important that the university is willing to provide resources to assist in these changes. Non-native speakers also experience a different rate of learning in comparison to native speakers, which could reflect in international student’s grades as well as in the opportunities they are able to pursue (Brown, 41).

Clark and Kalionzes outline many strategies student advisors can employ to assist international students, and they are largely centered around internationalizing the campus, increasing cross-cultural awareness, and increasing cultural sensitivity (220-221). Following COVID-19, international students are facing displacement from their universities and their home countries, loss of visa status, unexpected expenses, and increased neo-racism. Understanding this subpopulation is increasingly important so institutions in the U.S. are able to retain and recruit international students in the future.

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