

## Capstone Draft 1

[Original Title: IEO Model: International Student Engagement as an Outcome]

Emily L. Lane

Department of Higher Education, The Penn State University

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Dr. Karen Paulson

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**Note:** [an exert from my paper selection paper regarding where I want this paper to go as I develop it into my capstone paper]

I want this paper to identify research questions surrounding the what, why, and how administrators can increase meaningful student engagement in a heterogeneous population like international students. Hopefully, these questions can be answered in further studies by utilizing available data from databases like NSSE or IPEDS. I also hope to identify and summarize actions that institutions have taken in the past that could be adapted to suit the student populations at other institutions.

I'd like to identify and investigate some of the maladaptive outcomes from students who struggled to adapt. I enjoyed HIED 849 because it connected the theoretical applications of the IEO model and the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) to litigations involving international students. Most of the time the litigations stemmed from instances of perceived discrimination, sexual harassment, academic integrity, or cultural misunderstandings. Students who are more engaged in campus activities often have stronger social groups and connections to more faculty members, so it is possible that more engaged students could avoid common legal problems through being more integrated into the campus culture.

## **IEO Model: International Student Engagement as an Outcome**

**Thesis:** This paper analyzes the correlation between international student engagement and persistence to graduation through the lens of the IEO model with special attention to barriers that international students face and strategies administrators can use to overcome such barriers.

Engaging meaningfully in a campus environment is directly correlated to the likelihood of student persistence to graduation and attainment of university outcomes (PSU, 2020). For international students, the act of survival, let alone adaptation, to a novel environment is stressful and could lead to maladaptive outcomes that impede significant personal growth and achieving these outcomes. However, if educators shift from a perspective focusing on maladaptive characteristics to one focusing on holistic strengths, then they can view international students as a subpopulation capable of meaningful campus engagement. An individual's adjustment must be driven by motive and goal-oriented movement resulting from encountering an obstacle (Anderson, 1994). Higher education institutions must be aware of the major obstacles international students encounter and establish support structures to assist students' adaptation and integration to the university. This paper strives to analyze and suggest future initiatives to increase international student engagement through evaluating the input characteristics of international students, the American institutional environment as a whole, and initiatives within these institutional environments that have a direct effect on international student engagement.

### **Input Characteristics of International Students**

#### **Overgeneralization of International Students**

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) in the 2019/2020 academic year, 227 countries were represented among the 1,075,496 international students studying in the United States (2020). Institutional research often reflects studies that compare local students who

are native to or permanent residents of the U.S. to international students who are foreign nationals who possess a non-permanent U.S. visa (Lee, 2015). However, international students are not a homogenous group, but rather an extremely diverse one whose members possess varying cultural beliefs, past experiences, future goals, financial support, family educational history, and motivations for studying in America.

The diversity among international students is steadily increasing as many universities and colleges now utilize third-party agents in recruitment. This effort to increase full-tuition paying international student enrollments is resulting "in the recruitment of younger students with lower high school rankings and parents with less than a college education" (Glass et al., 2014, p. 92). Loosening academic admission requirements increases the variability of types of students overall meaning that institutional support systems that were sufficient in the past may no longer be adequate. Furthermore, expanding the admissions range could mean accepting students with less exposure to foreign cultures who will likely be vulnerable to extreme culture shock upon arriving in America. Educators should be aware that many international students experience culture shock, a "frustration reaction syndrome", and will be less willing to plunge into the unknowns of university environments when experiencing this crisis (Anderson, 1994, p. 293).

### **Similarities Among International Students**

On a positive note, upon arrival to their U.S. college or university, international students possess globalized forms of non-economic capital including, "knowledge about and experiences in diverse cultures, economies, politics, social issues, and languages" (Lee, 2015, p. 133). These students also have the potential to provide peers and educators access to global perspectives, globalized collaboration with contacts in their home countries, and a wealth of other connections. Some common shared experiences among international students include, "issues regarding

mastering the local language, cultural norms, food tastes, and social shock" (Lee, 2015, p. 134). With time, successful international students transition from simply adjusting to these and other temporary novelties of moving abroad and begin adapting to the long-term changes that living in a new country requires (Anderson, 1994).

Naturally, not all sojourners, that is individuals who experience cross-cultural adjustment, fully adapt. Embracing these major life adjustments imply an individual's personal development. Anderson (1994) explains that the sojourners must conquer obstacles that challenge

[identity] defining values, attitudes, and beliefs between the home and host cultures ...  
 [adjust to] loss of the familiar and/or loved objects of home cultures ... [sojourners must also] experience social incompetence because newcomers to a social group have neither the perceptual sensitivity nor the behavioral flexibility to respond to the new setting. (p. 304)

Each of these obstacles correlates directly to the key elements of the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) which include, "the core, multiple social identities, relationship of the social identities to the core and identity salience, and contextual influences" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 77). Incorporating identity developing obstacles into the input characteristic scaffolding of an international student allows educators to both analyze input characteristics and acknowledge the rapid changes to this previous identity students experience upon arrival to the institution.

### **The Institutional Environment**

#### **International Student's Engagement in the Classroom**

Student-faculty interaction is more strongly correlated to student satisfaction than any other variable (Astin, 1993). Often, the American curriculum requires students to meaningfully

engage in debate and collaboration. This model of learning is drastically different from a more traditional lecture-based curriculum, meaning international students must adapt to be successful. Surprisingly, international students can adapt to this new style of learning quickly and show an increased sense of belonging within the classroom environment and the institutional environment as a whole. The interpersonal interaction observed and practiced within the confines of a classroom are transferrable skills international students can utilize in co-curricular and social situations (Glass et al., 2014).

To quantitatively evaluate the connection of particular experiences to student cognitive, affective, and civic outcomes a large dataset with a sample of 25,146 junior and senior undergraduate students was statistically evaluated (Kim et al., 2017). International students were assumed to be a homogenous group and were compared to local students. The study found that student engagement with faculty in class, after class, or through email positively affected all three outcomes of interest specifically showing, "higher levels of cognitive skills ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .001$ ), interpersonal skills ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and civic attitudes ( $\beta = .08$ ,  $p < .01$ )" (Kim et al., 2017, p. 407). Thus, there is a positive trend between the amount of academic engagement with faculty and international students' levels of cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, and civic attitudes in comparison to local student's response to faculty engagement (Kim et al., 2017). It is reasonable to assume that an increase in these skills also increases the likelihood to engage meaningfully within their college environment.

### **Environmental Barriers to International Student Engagement**

#### **Curricular Barriers to International Student Engagement**

Furthering the analysis of curricular experiences, a significant increase in engagement has been observed in international students who actively engage in-class debates, discussions, and

other critical reasoning activities in comparison to students who do not actively participate or who largely take courses that are lecture based (Kim et al., 2017) (Glass et al., 2014).

Unfortunately, international students are often viewed as being purposefully disengaged or lacking intellectual ability as a result of pre-existing assumptions that all students show engagement in the same way. There are, however, huge differences in classroom cultures that could be the underlying factor for these miscommunications (Glass et al., 2014). In Asia, for example, it is common for students to stand and bow when their teachers enter the classroom. In Africa, the thought of eating or drinking in a classroom is highly offensive (Lee, 2015). Even something as simple as eye contact can cause internal conflict in an international student. Lee (2015) explains, "avoiding eye contact can be perceived as a signal of respect and reverence in one culture but the same gesture might also be perceived as being untrustworthy in another" (p. 135).

### **Financial Barriers to International Student Engagement**

International students are largely required to pay out of state tuition in full because foreign nationals have "little or no access to loans or scholarships" and do not qualify for federal financial aid (Lee, 2015, p. 136). Additionally, the U.S. visa and immigration processes are costly and the regulations accompanying maintaining a student's F1 visa are strict. International students are allowed to work on-campus "up to 20 hours per week while school is in session. [They] can work full-time on campus during holidays and vacation periods if [they] intend to register for the next academic semester" (International Student, n.d, para. 6). Funding for a student's education has various sources, but often international students are expected to be self-reliant regarding their living and educational expenses (Glass et al., 2014) (Lee, 2015).

The limitation in working hours combines financial and academic stress for some international students by disqualifying them from pursuing paid research or teaching assistant positions which often require more than twenty hours of work per week. Regrettably, these limitations can result in the exploitation of students. For example, an Indian international student described a research position where she was offered "fourth time funding" which is 10 paid hours a week, but asked for half time funding and got it. She soon lost the position "by speaking out" and lost favor with faculty (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 402). Situations like this make international students wary of asking for hours and wages that they see local students getting because on-campus jobs and faculty favor are already difficult to attain.

### **Neo-racism and Personal Safety**

"Studies have found that students attending institutions that have higher levels of structural diversity reported higher levels of learning and cognitive development compared to ... [those with] more homogenous student demographics" (Kim et al., p. 397). So, the value of a diverse university community is known, but international students do regrettably encounter neo-racism, also known as cultural racism. Students report instances of students being told to go back to their countries, getting things thrown at them, or getting asked sexually harassing questions regarding cultural stereotypes (Lee and Rice, 2007). Coupled with U.S. national tragedies such as school shootings or acts of terror, concern regarding personal safety is growing among potential and current international students. A 2011 survey reflected "30% of over 9,000 respondents indicated that the U.S. does not welcome international students" (Lee, 2015, p. 139).

### **Reliance on International Affairs Office**

International affairs staff are largely responsible for providing any logistical support that international students may need. This requires detailed knowledge of visa and immigration

policies for students' countries of origin and countless other duties. Often, prioritizing the students' legal status does not leave ample time to provide personal support to students struggling to find transportation, understand local supermarkets, learn how to pay their bills or other daily tasks that local residents find mundane. Often, delays in the student visa process cause delays which introduce issues in planning for "travel arrangements, securing university housing, signing up for classes, and other time-sensitive tasks" (Lee, 2015, p. 136). Naturally, the lack of support in any of these non-visa related issues could result in the student feeling unsupported by the university and therefore, less interested in participating in high-impact activities that increase engagement.

### **Unaware of Campus Resources**

International students often do not understand, utilize, or know about the additional resources available on campus. For instance, utilizing mental health services are often taboo or seen as showing weakness in African and Asian cultures. Likely, students from these cultures do not understand that utilizing these services could help them learn coping mechanisms for difficult situations meant to mitigate the risk of their problems developing into extreme stress or depression increase and to increase their overall success. Lee (2015) suggests, "Beyond providing a written directory of support programs, student affairs staff should reach out to international students, educating them on ways that students can seek out support...and how to participate" (p. 145).

### **Environmental Initiatives with Direct Positive Effect on International Student Engagement**

#### **International House Living Arrangements**

Successfully integrating into a social network with local peers is a barrier that many international students face. The international house (I-House) is one example of a purposeful



initiative that universities can put into place to connect local students to international students in a way that highlights both students' strengths. The five-year, dual-dual degree, Global Science and Engineering program at the Northern Arizona University (NAU) is one successful example of an I-House benefitting both international students and local students. This program requires students to spend a year abroad interning in a country that complements their degree focus. The local NAU students are paired with international NAU students from the countries they will intern in and the students live together in the year preceding the local student's internship. This provides both students the opportunity to engage in language and cultural exchange with a peer who is deeply invested in learning about the other's country of origin (Glass et al, 2014). I-houses are not a new initiative, but utilizing them to enhance non-language based programs are fairly novel. Implementing this type of program more frequently could help connect more international students to their local communities and increase meaningful engagement and collaboration between local students and international students.

### **Campus Involvement**

Encouraging international students to participate in leadership positions within student government to become directly involved in dealing with campus issues can increase student engagement on campus (Glass et al., 2014). "Student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college", and leadership positions in co-curricular activities certainly demand time and effort (Kuh, 2009, p. 683). Furthermore, students are more likely to be personally connected to the campus and its initiatives when they feel autonomous when relating to policies of interest. Co-curricular involvement also increases peer interactions and the chances of collaborating with students that would be unlikely acquaintances without engaging in the leadership activities. These small-world

connections are valuable forms of non-economic capital which not only increase immediate engagement on campus but also increase the chances for favorable outcomes and persistence to graduation in the future (Glass et al., 2014).

### **Community Involvement and Exploration**

Encouraging international students to become involved in clubs and community volunteering will also likely deepen their roots in the community and expose them to off-campus networking opportunities. For example, Elon College has a local exploration program where international students and local students spend a few weeks living in a new area such as a small mining town in Virginia or a neighborhood in New York City. Here they are tasked with interviewing local people, exploring shops and sites, and trying to understand the niche culture of the area. The program seems to break down barriers between international students and local students by putting them both in situations that are out of their elements. In addition, international students get to explore unique parts of America while learning about it from their instructors, peers, and interpersonal engagement with the locals (Glass et al., 2014). Facilitating personal connection to the institutional and community environments will help international students feel less disrupted by culture shock and safe to engage meaningfully with their environment.

### **What Educators Can Do to Increase International Student Engagement**

#### **Professional Development**

Valparaiso University (Valpo) is a school deeply invested in creating an environment that encourages international student engagement. One way they do this is by actually sending their faculty on trips to common student sending countries to experience the countries culture first-hand (Glass et al., 2014). Of course, this is not a viable solution for most faculty due to budget

and time restrictions, but university encouragement to inquire about students' countries of origin can increase student-faculty interaction and enhance both parties' cultural awareness. Learning more about an international student's country of origin could reveal cultural divides that could be hindering effective communication. Sharing these findings between departments could help educators throughout the institution collaborate to increase international student engagement and local students' global awareness.

### **Faculty Mentality**

Educators must resist the urge to accept negative assumptions regarding international student engagement in the classroom because there is likely an alternate explanation. Perhaps, the seemingly incompetent student has concerns regarding their deficient English ability or the student is simply taking time to observe the social dynamics of the classroom to participate in a later class. Instructors who choose to be patient and publically affirming in class will likely increase student engagement in class discussions and debates. If students are not adequately engaging in curricular discourse, educators can talk to them casually outside of class to assess their comfort regarding language and communication skills. If possible, educators should be flexible with engagement opportunities. For example, if possible, alter the layout of the chairs in the classroom to reflect learning pods so students must engage with peers they are not comfortable with. Although time-consuming, slowly building trust and rapport through curricular and co-curricular interactions will likely yield better engagement results than simply assuming international students are simply not interested in engaging.

### **Conclusion**

Regardless of country of origin, all international students must embrace the challenges of the American higher education system in parallel to the identity developing obstacles of a

sojourner. Successfully embracing these challenges to adapt and truly adjust to life in the U.S. requires skills that satisfy institutional initiatives including Dr. Derek Bok's outcomes of: "the ability to communicate, living with diversity, living in a more global society, and critical thinking" (PSU, 2020, p. 13). The potential for growth within a population of university students who have acquired these skills before beginning their higher education journey is huge. Increasing international student engagement will increase their persistence to graduation and hopefully their professional success as well.

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