

**Capstone Draft 2**

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

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

This paper analyzes the relationship between international student engagement and persistence to graduation through the lens of Alexander Astin's (1984) Input, Environment, Output (IEO) model with special attention to barriers that international students encounter and strategies administrators can use to understand and support students as they face such barriers. In accordance with Astin's (1984) definition, this paper analyzes student engagement and "student involvement [to] refer to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). This allows for student effort to be analyzed through a framework of active verbs and behaviors rather than relying on an abstract analysis of interior motives (Astin, 1984).

### **Importance of Student Engagement**

#### **Identifying Obstacles to Environmental Engagement**

Engaging meaningfully in a campus environment is directly correlated to the likelihood of student persistence to graduation and attainment of university outcomes (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993). For many international students, living, much less succeeding, in a novel environment is challenging. International students enter higher education with input qualities that are incredibly varied but are expected to succeed in an environment that is built to serve local students with input qualities that are likely more familiar to local staff. If students' input qualities are not compatible with the environment, desirable outcomes will not be achieved (Astin, 1984). However, if educators shift from focusing on international students' maladaptive input qualities to focusing on their holistic strengths, then international students will be treated as a subpopulation capable of meaningful campus involvement (Astin, 1984; Chrysikos et al., 2017).

Of course, an individual's adjustment must be driven by motive and goal-oriented movement resulting from encountering an obstacle (Anderson, 1994). Meaning that adapting

to the challenges of this novel higher education environment is the international student's responsibility. If institutional staff are aware of the major obstacles international students encounter, support structures can be established to assist students through their adaptation and integration to the university environment. This paper will analyze and suggest future initiatives to increase international student engagement by evaluating the input characteristics of international students, the American institutional environment and strategies to better understand international students that may 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) (2020) in the 2019/2020 academic year, 227 countries were represented among the 1,075,496 international students studying in the United States. Institutional research studies often 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, socioeconomic status, family educational history, and motivations for studying in America. These various identities, referred to as intersectionality, are "interconnected...[and] interact in important ways and shape individuals' identities and experiences" (Pfeifer et al., p. 3). Intersectionality can be used as a framework to gain a nuanced understanding of student needs. Once needs are identified, actions can be taken to address those needs (846 textbook pg. 64).

#### **Challenges and Benefits of Intersectionality**

Lee and Rice (2007) found that Black, African students do not feel welcomed or homogenous among the African American community nor among their white, American

peers. Rather, they found the African American students' customs, perspectives, language, and subculture differed greatly from their own creating substantial cultural differences (Lee & Rice, 2007). Most often, the African students formed close connections with the other international students who also felt like they did not belong among their local peers. Having a sense of belonging within one's institutional environment has a positive affect on minority student satisfaction and retention (Strayhorn, 2012). Bok (2006) argues that colleges have a duty to students to pursue both academic and non-academic outcomes including, "foster[ing] generally accepted values and behaviors, such as honesty and racial tolerance" (p. 974). Perhaps, intersectionality can be used to understand barriers to intercultural cooperation and in turn support global learning as an outcome (Peifer et al., 2017).

### **Increased Input Diversity with Increased Third-party Recruitment**

In addition to the general diversity and varying instances of intersectionality among international students, many institutions have been expanding recruitment through loosening academic admission requirements and utilizing third-party recruitment agencies (Glass et al., 2014). National data reflects that international student enrollment has increased from 2.1 million students in 2001 to 5.3 million students in 2019 (CNBC, 2020). Increasing the number of international students enrolled could support a variety of positive cognitive and learning outcomes including intercultural competencies, global perspectives, and preparation for success in an "increasingly diverse workforce" (Peifer et al., 2017, p. 2). Additionally, international students typically are required to pay out-of-state tuition. If institutions can recruit more students willing to pay out-of-state tuition without scholarships or federal aid, then institutional finances will be positively impacted.

On the other hand, loosening academic admission requirements and widening recruitment efforts will increase the variability and intersectionality of international students enrolled. Additionally, expanding the admissions range could mean accepting students with

less exposure to foreign cultures who will be vulnerable to extreme culture shock upon arriving in America. Culture shock is a "frustration reaction syndrome" international students might encounter when trying to adapt to a new environment (Anderson, 1994, p. 293). This frustration can become extreme and inhibit a student's willingness to plunge into the unknowns of their university environment (Anderson, 1994; Astin, 1984). Indeed, loosening admission requirements and expanding recruitment efforts could negatively impact meaningful involvement, but the more pressing concern is that institutional support systems that have been successful in the past may no longer be sufficient in supporting increasingly diverse international students. Systems must then be developed to support students and prevent maladaptive outcomes such as social withdraw, culture shock, or not persisting to graduation (Anderson, 1994). These new systems must be constructed with an understanding on international students' input qualities and how those qualities might influence their response to environmental changes.

### **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).

## **Adaptation Through Reconciling MMDI Elements with Intersectionality**

Naturally, not all sojourners, that is individuals who experience cross-cultural adjustment, fully adapt. Embracing these major life adjustments impact 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 correlate 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). In short, familiar variabilities and intersectionalities that local students display are different in international students. Therefore, international student's response to social, romantic, or academic challenges, to name a few, will be different than the expected response of a local student.

### **The Institutional Environment**

#### **Evaluating Cross-Cultural Adaptation to Influence Environmental Factors**

Faculty and staff must strive to understand international students' unique points of view to further foster an environment that is welcoming and encouraging. First, faculty and staff should acknowledge that first-year international students might need additional support compared to other first-year students because they are simultaneously attempting to meet the demands of their new environment and reconciling their previous social, core, and cultural identity saliences to be compatible with this new environment (Anderson, 1994; Jones &

Abes, 2013). Second, faculty should strive to understand and communicate with students as they address the demands of their new environment.

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

Student-faculty interaction is more strongly correlated to student satisfaction than any other variable (Astin, 1993). To quantitatively identify the connection of experiences to student cognitive, affective, and civic outcomes a large dataset with a sample of 25,146 junior and senior undergraduate students was 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 at a statistically significant level showing, "higher levels of cognitive skills...interpersonal skills...and civic attitudes" (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 therefore reasonable to assume that an increase in these skills will also increase an international student's likelihood of engaging meaningfully with their college environment.

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

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

Furthering the analysis of curricular experiences, a substantial 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 (Glass et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2017). Unfortunately, there can be pre-existing assumptions that all students show engagement in the same way. Because of this, international students are often perceived as being purposefully disengaged or lacking intellectual ability (Lee & Rice, 2007). There are,

however, differences in classroom cultures that could be the underlying factor for these preconceptions (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). Institutional faculty and staff should avoid making assumptions about the intent of an international student's behavior and instead engage the student in conversations to gain an understanding of their perspective. Hopefully this can turn an instance of perceived disrespect into an intercultural exchange of ideas.

### **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). As with any student, financial uncertainty could emphasize environmental stress factors, so financial barriers should be acknowledged and addressed.



### *Class Action Lawsuit v. Yale 2005*

The *Class Action Lawsuit v. Yale* in 2005 illustrates that international students are a vulnerable subpopulation because they may be misinformed or hold false assumptions of what their rights are regarding work and compensation for their work (Marklein, 2015). In extreme cases, litigation may be necessary to protect these rights. For example the Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO) at Yale began a class action lawsuit to encourage the university to stop overworking and neglecting Chinese graduate students who “likely wouldn’t object for fear of losing funding and their visa eligibility” (Marklein, 2015, p. 20). Faculty members know that these students are desperate to maintain their visa eligibility and complete their degree. Some members of faculty were abusing this knowledge either through overworking their graduate students or simply through refusing to advise Chinese students because it is more time consuming. Following the GESO’s protests and lawsuit, the students have been informed that they cannot lose their fellowship or her visa eligibility due to protesting their treatment (Marklein, 2015).

Violation of an international student’s working rights might occur on an individual scale as well. 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. 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 was approved. She soon found out that the increase in paid hours per week also included a substantial increase in required work. After some time, she learned that local students who were working in similar time and funding structures were not required to manage such an intense work schedule. Not willing to be unjustly overworked, she “spoke out” and promptly lost the position and fell in favor with faculty (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 402). Although she was

able to remain enrolled in the institution, she no longer had an opportunity to legally work under her student visa constraints in turn increasing her financial stress. Instances of mistreatment make international students wary of asking for increased workloads or pursuing wages that they see local students receiving because on-campus jobs and faculty favor are already difficult to attain (Lee & Rice, 2007).

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

In addition to financial concerns, international students experience concerns regarding neo-racism, also known as cultural racism, that creates fear for their personal safety. Students report instances of being told to go back to their countries, getting things thrown at them, or being asked sexually harassing questions regarding cultural stereotypes (Lee & Rice, 2007). Coupled with U.S. national tragedies such as school shootings or acts of terror, concerns regarding personal safety are 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). So, if the U.S. does not welcome international students, why should institutions continue recruiting them? The answer lies in other studies that have found that "institutions with a more diverse student body composition – a feature also referred to as structural diversity – [are] correlated with higher levels of student intercultural competence" (Peifer et al., 2017, p. 2). This intercultural competence is seen when comparing institutions with high amounts of structural diversity to those with lower structural diversity. Higher levels of learning and cognitive development are consistently observed at more diverse institutions thus supporting the value of a diverse university community (Kim et al., 2017).

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

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

immigration policies for students' countries of origin and countless other duties. Often, as these offices must prioritize confirming students' legal status there is little time to provide personal support to students who are also struggling to find transportation, understand local supermarkets, learn how to pay their bills or other daily tasks that local residents find mundane. Some international affairs offices may not have the resources or time to prioritize their support services which likely results in struggling students remaining unnoticed. After all, maintaining legal residency in America while studying must be the first priority for both the international students and the international affairs officers.

### **Legal Status for Studying Disrupted Resulting in Jail Time**

In the case of *Bird v. Regents of New Mexico State University, et al.* (2011) Zimbabwe graduate student, Freedom Cheteni, “received in-state tuition at New Mexico State University (NMSU) while his petition for political asylum with the United States government was pending” (Bista & Dagley, n.d., p. 6). His petition for asylum was granted so his visa status immediately switched and he was now charged out-of-state tuition which he could not afford. In a whirlwind of events, Cheteni received a financial hold on his account so was unable to enroll in classes which cost him his status as a student at the university and his “student” status in the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS) international student database. This change in his SEVIS status alerted the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency who responded by detaining him for about five months. “Cheteni sued the university and its officials claiming the school retaliated against him by denying him his graduate assistantship, revoking his in-state tuition, filing a misconduct charge against him, and terminating his status in SEVIS” (Bista & Dagley, n.d., p. 6). Ultimately, the Court denied summary judgement based on supporting evidence of the misconduct charge the university filed against him. This extreme example serves as a cautionary tale for international students

and international officers. Mishandling any immigration legalities has severe penalties that can be damaging for the student as well as the institution.

This being said, delays in the student visa process can be common and often create rippling issues in planning for "travel arrangements, securing university housing, signing up for classes, and other time-sensitive tasks" (Lee, 2015, p. 136). International student affairs officers must prioritize legal needs before addressing the wholistic needs of a student in adjustment. Unfortunately, a student who is not able to find guidance regarding cultural or other non-legal issues could feel unsupported by the university and therefore, less interested in participating in high-impact activities that increase engagement (Astin, 1984).

### **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 (Lee & Rice, 2007). Likely, students from these cultures do not understand that utilizing these services could help them learn coping mechanisms meant to mitigate their problems leading to extreme stress or depression to help 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). If student affairs personnel are unable to utilize their time or resources to provide direct support, peer groups could be established to encourage local students in similar residence halls, courses of study, or extracurricular clubs to work with international students to become more involved on campus (Astin, 1984).

## **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 and local students. This program requires local 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 university 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 addressing 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 are directly involved in campus clubs, sports, or

organizations. Co-curricular involvement, meaning involvement in any non-curriculum program or activity, also increases peer interactions and the chances of collaborating with students that would be unlikely acquaintances without engaging in these activities (NSSE, 2021). 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 including persistence to graduation (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 in North Carolina 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 is a school deeply invested in creating an environment that encourages international student engagement. Valparaiso encourages their faculty to travel to common student sending countries to experience each country's culture first-hand (Glass et

al., 2014). 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 or any implicit biases they may have regarding international student engagement in the classroom because there is likely an alternate explanation. Perhaps, the hesitant international 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 with whom they are not acquainted. 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 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. International students also must reconcile multiple dimensions of their identity while identifying how intersectionality affects how others perceive them. Successfully embracing these challenges to adapt and truly adjust to life in the U.S. requires support from

the institutional environment. This support should come from varying types of faculty and staff as "the ability to communicate, liv[e] with diversity, liv[e] in a more global society, and [think critically]" are desirable non-academic college outcomes (Bok, 2006, p. 974). If barriers to meaningful international student engagement are identified, they can be addressed. Increasing international student engagement will increase their persistence to graduation and hopefully their professional success as well.



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