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Advantages & Challenges: An Assessment of SUNY Oneonta's Current Approach to International Student Services

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ADVANTAGES & CHALLENGES:

An Assessment of SUNY Oneonta's Current Approach to International Student Services

Sarah J. Busche

Program in Intercultural Management Group 75

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of
International Education at the SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

November 2017

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

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List of Abbreviations

CADE: Center for Academic Development & Enrichment

CITI: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

COIL: Collaborative Online International Learning

EOP: Educational Opportunity Program

ESL: English as a Second Language

FL2: Foreign Language Requirement

ISSS: International Student and Scholar Services

OIE: Office of International Education

OPT: Optional Practical Training

SEVIS: Student and Exchange Visitor Information System

StAR: The Strategic Allocation of Resources

SUNY: State University of New York

Abstract

The decision to become an international student is a choice that is as challenging as it is rewarding, and is one that I am familiar with from both a professional and personal standpoint. Per a recent Open Doors' account, 1,043,839 students from around the world have made the decision to study in the United States in 2016. These individuals make up 9% of New York State's student population, and 10.1% of the State University of New York system (SUNY, 2016). Currently SUNY Oneonta is host to 56 of these international students, whom I was excited to work with through my practicum at SUNY Oneonta's Office of International Education (OIE).

Fostering intercultural relationships, gaining a new perspective and broadening one's world view are among the many benefits that are valued as an international student, yet encounters with cultural, academic and social barriers present challenges that can lead to confusion or isolation. As a result of my work and experience with this practicum, and interactions with the international students who are supported through the OIE and other campus resources, I have concluded that SUNY Oneonta greatly values these individuals.

There are many offices, programs and support systems that are designed to benefit international students on campus and I hypothesized that these specialized resources are readily available to this population, but I question the frequency in which they are used. To test this observation, I designed a study that would help me understand how international students felt they were being supported. I submitted a voluntary and anonymous survey for international students to comment on what they consider to be both beneficial and challenging aspects of life at SUNY Oneonta for the month of September 2017. Upon analysis of responses, I realized the data verified my initial observations but also made me aware of the larger context of international observation and how campus policy plays a role in international student satisfaction.

As SUNY Oneonta continues to make great strides toward Strategic Plan goals, introducing and applying definite internationalization policy that promote greater global integration on campus would not only benefit international students but domestic students as well. The purpose of this capstone is to better understand the methods that SUNY Oneonta employs as a host to create a satisfactory experience for their international students through resources and advising, and propose policies that can augment these efforts while facilitating progression towards greater internationalization on campus.

Introduction

The decision to become an international student is a choice that is as challenging as it is rewarding. Removing oneself from a familiar environment to become immersed in a new culture, language, climate, time zone and way of thinking offer significant benefits in personal growth for the participant as well as those whom they encounter. As of the 2015-2016 school year, 1,043,839 international students were enrolled at institutions across the U.S. (Open Doors, 2016) representing 5.2% of the national student population. International students make up 9% of New York State's student population, and 10.1% of the State University of New York system (SUNY, 2016). Currently SUNY Oneonta is host to 56 of these international students, accounting for nearly 1% of its population of 6,056 students overall (SUNY Oneonta, 2017). I can say from my experience working at SUNY Oneonta that I engaged with students from (but not limited to) China, Korea, Japan, Colombia, Germany, The Netherlands, and Kenya.

SUNY Oneonta continues to strive towards its goal of increasing diversity on campus by increasing opportunities for cross-cultural connectivity between domestic and international students, and is implementing strategies to bring more international students to campus as a long-term goal as part of its continuous internationalization progress. The definition of internationalization has multiple meanings, and I believe the definition suggested by Jane Knight most closely relates to what SUNY Oneonta has been working towards based on my experience in its Office of International Education and preliminary research for this paper:

“Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.” (2003)

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Integrating these dimensions of internationalization has long been a treasured value of SUNY Oneonta. Educators are remembered for their welcoming and mindful contributions to the international community on and off-campus in long-standing study abroad scholarships and fellowships; the Philosophy department owes its existence and legacy to its two founders who happen to hail from India and Italy; Community outreach extends from the local sphere with international students volunteering as language teachers off-campus to the global realm with drives and projects to help build schools in developing countries. These are but a few examples of how internationalization has fortified the character and mission of this institution.

By coming to know the international events, multicultural organizations and clubs, diverse faculty, staff, student body and other indicators, I believe internationalization concepts are important to SUNY Oneonta. Global Connectedness is a value listed in this institution's mission statement that indicates willingness to "integrat[e] an international, intercultural or global dimension" into this campus, and specific goals are included as part of the current Strategic Plan to increase intercultural and globally-related opportunities for students. The objectives seek to encourage enhancement in international events, service-learning, internships, scholarships, and foreign language study, but do not relay anything specific regarding international students themselves. As SUNY Oneonta continues to make great strides toward the goals in their Strategic Plan, they could greatly benefit by introducing and applying a definite internationalization policy that promotes greater global integration on campus. Not only to the greater benefit of international students but domestic students as well.

There is a uniqueness to this school that is emphasized by a warm and enthusiastic atmosphere embraced by students, faculty and staff alike. The rural setting, and smaller population enriched with a collective passion for knowledge and experience, have fostered a community of eager

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learners and compassionate individuals. This not only reflects my own beliefs, but many of the international students that came to be a part of this community.

As a former international student who studied in Japan, I can empathize with individuals who may need greater support when it comes to language, culture and life experiences in an environment different from my own. I remember struggling with comprehension of another language, feeling lonely when I was not able to make friends and integrate with my classmates as quickly as I expected to, and feeling unable to share my culture with my peers beyond what was already familiar to them. Through the OIE I have had conversations with students who are frustrated by similar linguistic, social and cultural challenges, and was reminded of my work as a District Representative for my fellow international teachers as a participant of the JET Programme in southern Japan. My aim in this position was to help my colleagues acclimate to life in their new home through workshops, events, mediation and advising, though sometimes it was just as important to be someone who would listen. Though I was not aware of it at the time, by considering my own experience as an international student in Japan, I was offering guidance to my colleagues through the ups and downs of the W-Curve, a model depicting the phases experienced in culture shock. (Please see Figure 1 in Appendix A) Because of these previous experiences I became more sensitive to how the exciting initial “Honeymoon” period can shift into the oftentimes confusing “Culture Shock” phase. I have witnessed parallels between my international colleagues and international students in acclimating to cultural norms and values, such as encountering challenges that arise from interacting with peers from different cultures, encountering cultural values that are different from one’s own, and experiencing feelings of isolation. These experiences drive me to gain a better understanding of how to support others who dare to embrace another culture, and help them pull through the initial adjustment and subsequent mental isolation to make progress towards integration. This

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is why I was eager to be involved in the acclimation process during international student orientation and the American Discovery acclimation course.

My immersive experiences as a both high school exchange student and JET Programme participant differ from that of undergraduate international students in many ways, such as expectations associated with residing with a host family as opposed to living with a roommate in a residence hall, and the fact that undergraduates are faced with a more aggressive level of course work. Yet frustration with language comprehension, difficulty distinguishing between high and low context components of culture, and challenges associated with developing and strengthening personal and professional relationships are experiences that I share with many who immerse themselves in a culture different from their own. Through these experiences and my graduate training, I have further developed my knowledge, skills and awareness of best practices that help students navigate cultural variables, and I will attempt to demonstrate these competencies in this study to identify resources and draw theoretical parallels that may enhance the international student experience in a higher education setting.

Cultural, social and academic barriers faced by international students are challenges that can be extremely demanding both physically and mentally, and emphasize the importance of available resources that are helpful in navigating these barriers. These can range from a comprehensive insurance workshop during orientation to a fellow student trained to listen and advise. As far as my experience working at SUNY Oneonta has lead me to believe, the OIE has continued to be proactive in its internationalization efforts, and in partnership with multiple departments, offices and organizations throughout campus has been effective in its efforts to develop and identify resources and programs that operate in a cooperative and ethical manner to bring the world to Oneonta. I hypothesize that the cultivated well of specialized resources

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and support systems that are designed to benefit international students are readily available, but question the frequency in which these systems are used. The purpose of this capstone is to better understand the methods that SUNY Oneonta employs as a host to create a satisfactory experience for their international students, connect them with these resources, and propose policies that can aid in this and its progression towards greater internationalization on campus.

Profile of Practicum Site

The State University of New York at Oneonta

Though urban settings tend to offer more choices in the ways of food, entertainment and activities (Bookin-Weiner 2003), rural campuses generally have the benefit of having less issues with traffic, air pollution and noise, and more opportunities to interact with instructors, classmates and nature (Cunningham 2003). The State University of New York at Oneonta is a moderately-sized campus set in the hills of rural upstate New York. It is part of a thriving small-town community rich with art, history and local culture. Students can experience local lore in agriculture, sports and art at the Farmer's Museum, Baseball Hall of Fame, Glimmerglass Opera and Fenimore Art Museum in nearby Cooperstown. They can anticipate multiple opportunities to interact with the community through performances and lectures at the Foothills Performing Arts Center, annual events such as OH-Fest or simply visiting the many shops and cafés in and around Main Street that call Oneonta their home. For students who may miss the busier environment of a city such as Boston, Buffalo or New York City, they are no more than four hours away by car or bus, ideal for a weekend getaway. But Oneonta's rural identity is appealing in that it offers a slower pace to students and an opportunity to connect

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with the natural environment of this region, a location teeming with areas to hike, swim, kayak and explore.

SUNY Oneonta has a total population of nearly 6000 students who benefit from a diverse faculty of over 400, resulting in a student/faculty ratio of 18:1. (SUNY Oneonta, 2017) A competitive institution, sought-after for its programs in communication, business, and education (U.S. News & World Report, 2016), is in high demand for students pursuing degrees through its unique fashion and music industry programs. Presently, the campus is host to a population of 56 international students and 8 international scholars.

The Office of International Education

I applied for and accepted a practicum position working with the Office of International Education (OIE) from August 2016 to May 2017. The Office of International Education is responsible for the recruitment and retention of international students, providing guidance in areas including student life, scholarships, employment on campus and Optional Practical Training (OPT) following degree completion, visa requirements and upkeep therein, health insurance and advisement, and are the first point of contact for the international community at this campus. The Director of the OIE supervises a team of three; the Assistant Director who oversees Study Abroad and Exchange Initiatives, the International Advisor who also organizes International Development for Faculty, and the Administrative Assistant who manages logistics as well as a perceptive staff of domestic and international student workers who take on roles as peer study abroad advisors, event planners and developers of promotional materials. The OIE also employs other students who support its mission through the roles of Study

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Abroad Ambassador, International Student Peer Mentor, and American Discovery Teaching Assistant.

Over a 9-month period I took every opportunity to assist the OIE with organization and implementation of operations, starting with orientation for new international students who I became better acquainted with through the American Discovery acclimation course which I co-taught with the Director, International Student Advisor and our domestic student teaching assistant. I planned trips to Niagara Falls, Albany and Boston, helped organize events like the Global Movement Festival, International Discovery Night and Study Abroad Fair, created marketing and survey tools for members of my team and faculty and did my best to support those who relied on the OIE. Sometimes this meant taking on smaller tasks like taking a student to the local social security office to get their card for on-campus work, or holding another's hand during a trip to the dentist. Through my interactions with our students I was able to gain their trust and learn more about their personal stories, goals and decisions to study here. If there is one aspect of SUNY Oneonta that I am most thankful for, it is the small campus population that afforded me the opportunity to get to know many of my students.

Though it is unrealistic to judge a campus in the span of less than a year, my time working at SUNY Oneonta has given me a chance to better understand the support systems and resources the campus has in place to welcome international students and help them grow and succeed during their time there. Through this practicum I became more focused on international student well-being, and the best practices in helping each student maintain a healthy lifestyle, excel in their academics, experience the local culture and develop skills that will benefit them in their future studies or career.

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Current Internationalization Efforts at SUNY Oneonta

As previously mentioned, SUNY Oneonta's mission addresses global connectedness as one of the core values of the institution (and 2010 Strategic Plan), along with diversity and inclusiveness, and its commitment to incorporate "excellence in teaching, scholarship, civic engagement and stewardship to create a student-centered learning community." As SUNY Oneonta continues its progression towards internationalization, I have decided to use the 12 Pillars of Internationalization (Brustein, 2009) as an instrument to measure current efforts and policy.

1) Internationalization is included in the strategic plans of all departments, colleges and schools within the university.

Of the 25 academic departments listed on the website, 13 explicitly include international aspects in their mission/vision statements, welcome messages and/or about pages. Though this does indicate that there is still progress to be made, I found the following excerpts to be a positive affirmation that most departments continue to make progress towards this goal:

- The Professional Education Unit is devoted to developing teachers who will "transform their individual communities within the context of a global society." (SUNY Oneonta, 1998)
- The Dean of the School of Business and Economics promotes the "international experience" that his business and marketing faculty brings to the classroom (Wade L. Thomas, 2017)
- The Geography Department states its mission "to prepare students with a well-rounded perspective of geographic knowledge and skills that will permit them to interpret social,

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physical, and environmental influences at local, regional, and global scales,” (SUNY Oneonta, 2017)

- The History department emphasizes employing study abroad as a method of field research (SUNY Oneonta, 2017)
- The Philosophy Department communicates the importance of considering both Eastern and Western disciplines of the subject, as well as a department-sponsored service-learning program in India (SUNY Oneonta, 2017)
- The Fine Arts Department is committed to “encouraging cultural inquisitiveness and providing cultural enrichment to students and audiences.” (SUNY Oneonta, 2017)

2) International aspects are integrated into all majors

Similar to the previous pillar, though most do, not every major states explicit international course offerings and/or globally focused goals. However, it is important to note that in disciplines related to the Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM), course related ideas such as formulas and calculations, and audio and visual expressions such as music, dance and fashion are like universal languages in themselves, and may be more easily communicated among cohorts consisting of multiple cultures.

3) Financial, curricular and other barriers are overcome

International degree-seeking students are automatically considered for the NYS Advantage Award, available only to non-residents and international students. This scholarship is worth \$6,000 to \$8,000 per year resulting in a \$24,000 to \$32,000 value overall if the student remains at SUNY Oneonta for the entirety of their degree program.

4) Foreign language proficiency

All students must satisfy a Foreign Language Requirement (FL2), and the Foreign Language Department offers instruction in a wide range of languages to choose from: ASL, Arabic, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Russian, Spanish and Latin. Students must either complete

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a 101 course in any of these languages, test out of the requirement with a placement or proficiency exam, or in the case of an international student fluent in a language other than English, may consult the OIE to obtain a waiver. Although the following do not satisfy the FL2, the Self-Instructional Language Program (SLIP) gives students the option to study other languages such as Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Polish and Swahili.

5) Student International Internships

Partnerships with the Academic Internship Council (AIC) and Connect-123: International Internship and Volunteer Programs have been established and offer fourteen locations in which students may find internship opportunities: three in the United States, and eleven more around the world, seven of which are in English-speaking regions (SUNY Oneonta, 2017).

6) Faculty searches are international

While I have witnessed growing diversity in campus faculty and staff during my time on campus (including being invited to play a role in a hiring committee), I can attest that efforts are being made to make the hiring process more inclusive. As part of SUNY Oneonta's current Strategic Diversity Inclusion Plan, Goal #2 pledges to "increase the diversity of faculty, staff, and administrators to optimize conditions for all employees and provide students access to a plurality of diverse perspectives." (SUNY Oneonta, 2017)

7) Faculty reward and tenure include research and teaching abroad

Strategic planning has taken place over the past year to develop COIL partnerships with institutions in Colombia where faculty trips were taken to Columbia for the purposes of curriculum enhancement and career development. Another current project promotes faculty exchange between SUNY Oneonta and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea, with its first faculty member preparing for departure at the end of 2017.

8) Senior international officers report directly to chief academic or executive officer

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The Director of the OIE reports to members of the President's Cabinet the activities and progress of programs, collaborations and initiatives within on a regular basis. In witnessing these interactions, I feel assured of the high level of support that higher administration provides the OIE in its efforts.

9) Senior international officers are positioned to interact with deans and other councils and committees. All staff members of the OIE are regularly engaged with individuals from multiple departments for the purposes of increasing global engagement throughout the campus. Such collaborations include faculty-led program development workshops for instructors, the planning programming such as the Global Movement event with the music and fashion departments and Sodexo (the resident food-service management establishment), developing ESL tutoring solutions with the Center for Academic Development & Enrichment (CADE), and coordinating service-learning opportunities for American Discovery course participants with the Center for Social Responsibility & Community.

10) Barriers to the recruitment of international students are eliminated

The admissions office is committed to ethical recruitment strategies which are focused on helping potential students find a program and environment that is the best fit. Their international recruiter researches education values and trends in each country visited and tailors recruitment sessions per student needs.

11) American immigrant and heritage communities are drawn upon

Visits to local museums such as the Iroquois Indian Museum in Schoharie County and Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown are included as part of the American Discovery acclimation course for new international students.

12) Global partnerships as an institutional priority

Partnerships have been forged between SUNY Oneonta and the Japan College of Foreign Languages and the Human International University & Colleges Consortium as well as several



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domestic institutions (SUNY Oneonta, 2017), and exchange partnerships have and continue to be established between institutions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East (SUNY Oneonta, 2017). As evidenced by this analysis, SUNY Oneonta continues to emphasize the importance of global connectedness through these representations of internationalization. There is always room for progression, and with recent examples of hiring an international student recruiter, expanding utilization of COIL on campus and developing an international faculty exchange with South Korea, I do not see this institution sitting on its laurels.

Stakeholder Analysis

In discussing stakeholder analysis in higher education, Juha Kettunen has touted the importance of recognizing the relationships in administrations who are most vested in the success of their institution (2014) For the purposes of identifying individuals and groups that are most likely to be invested in international student satisfaction and have the power to improve it, I have created the following stakeholder diagram:

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 Power	Latents	Promoters
	SUNY Administration Upper Administration Local Government Law Enforcement StAR, Grants Allocation Trustees Sodexo Faculty	OIE Provost Faculty Admissions Families Students Partner Institutions Study Away
	Apathetics	Defenders
	Local Region (Businesses, Services) Employers	Staff Community
	 Interest	

The **Promoters** of international student satisfaction are the ones with the power and concern to make the most changes, such as OIE staff who organize orientation, Admissions staff who are eager to recruit, organizations on campus who coordinate international events such as the Global Movement Festival and International Discovery Night, students and their families who ultimately make the choice to enroll at SUNY Oneonta and Partner Institutions who entrust SUNY Oneonta to take care of their students. Staff and concerned members of the local community are **Defenders** who have less power to make those changes but are no less devoted. The goal is to convey the importance of improvement to **Latents** in higher administration and faculty if they are not already invested, and to prove the positive connection that international students secure in the campus community, a powerful connection which continues to draw students to SUNY Oneonta.

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International Student Background

Students decide to study in the U.S. for different reasons; To pursue a quality education, to immerse themselves in a new culture, to prepare themselves for their future careers, and sometimes to fulfill a dream (Urban & Palmer, 2014). Through advising and speaking with students, I have learned that they have been drawn to Oneonta for various reasons. Some exchange students or have heard about the campus from classmates who had recently returned, or are even former exchange students who have decided to transfer in order to pursue a degree. Other degree seekers decided to enroll at SUNY Oneonta based on the programs they were interested in (including Fashion, Music Industry, Business, Education, Philosophy, Communications Biology and other STEM programs, from my experience), some were excited to study in a location in the U.S. near major cities such as New York and Boston, and others made their decisions based on the resources, residence halls, programs, smaller population and other aspects of campus that were a good fit for them. International individuals at SUNY Oneonta can be categorized into several academic backgrounds; Degree seeking students who enroll at SUNY Oneonta to complete a degree, exchange students who join the community for one or two semesters, and scholars/professors hosted by their respective departments. (Due to the limitations of my study, I was unable to connect with international scholars.)

Resources

While there are many valuable programs and resources that are similar to offerings from other institutions, I feel that there are several that are truly unique to SUNY Oneonta. See below a chart that identifies specific examples that are either similar or unique, and impact international students either directly or indirectly.

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	Similar	Unique
Direct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OIE and ISS • International Student Orientation • Exchange programs • ESL programs • Internationally focused events • Internationally focused clubs and organizations • International student computer lab • Excursions • Scholarships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Mentors • American Discovery (GEOG 194) • My Kitchen • Korean Culture Club
Indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study abroad • Language department • CADE • International professors and staff • Center for Community Outreach • Milne Library • Student Health and Wellness Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COIL • Study Abroad Ambassadors • Corq event app • Mills Distinguished Lecture Series

Some resources of note include:

ESL programs – ESL courses are made available to students in fall and spring semesters along with peer tutors. There is also an intensive summer semester available to newly enrolled international students.

American Discovery (GEOG 194) – A 3-credit course designed to assist new international students with the transition to SUNY Oneonta and to provide relevant background regarding US higher education, US culture and New York State.

Peer Mentors – This group of students is carefully chosen each semester to mentor the incoming group of international students. Their duties include greeting students at the airport, seeing them through orientation, introducing them to academic and social life on campus, acting as a support system and an avenue through which new students can understand how to take responsibility in meeting their own needs.

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My Kitchen – A dining option connected to Mills Dining Hall which students may reserve for cooking their own dishes, arrange food-related events or enjoy the culinary talents of guest chefs from around the world.

Korean Culture Club – An organization devoted to sharing the culture and language of Korea with the community on and off-campus, and is a leading campus club that works directly with the OIE to help acclimate Korean students to life at SUNY Oneonta. Also, holds language classes with members of the Oneonta community.

Center for Academic Development and Enrichment (CADE) – The campus writing and tutoring resource center which serves students seeking assistance in language and other areas to improve their academic success.

COIL – Collaborative Online International Learning, an online learning module pioneered by the State University of New York System which connects SUNY schools with the world. SUNY Oneonta is one of 28 SUNY campuses that employs COIL in communication coursework and ideas with classrooms around the U.S. and the rest of the world.

Corq – a free app for mobile devices that keeps students up to date on scheduled events throughout the year.

Study Abroad Ambassadors are study abroad returnees who staff study abroad fairs and international campus events, facilitate panels discussing the study abroad experience and help coordinate pre-departure orientation for new study abroad participants.

Mills Distinguished Lecture Series (Common Read) – A multifaceted endowment to SUNY Oneonta; The campus is encouraged to explore topics of diversity by examining a book chosen as the “Common Read” and how it relates to the many disciplines and dimensions of SUNY Oneonta. The book's author is also invited as a guest speaker to offer their knowledge to and interact with students. Past participants have included Marjan Satrapi (*Persepolis*), Janet Mock (*Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and So Much More*) and

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Margot Lee Shetterly (*Hidden Figures: The Story of the African-American Women Who Helped Win the Space Race*). This resource is especially unique as it brings accounts of identity, struggle and humanity to life through interaction with the author, as well as the opportunity to relate topics within to any program.

All international students are made aware of campus resources during international orientation and again at the plenary orientation for all new students. Due to linguistic barriers or lack of immediate need, some may forget what is available to them or perhaps not have fully understood to begin with. Alternatively, faculty or staff with the best intentions of providing these resources may not be aware of rate of use or what impact they are having on the students, whether they are in fact being utilized by those who need them or whether certain needs are being met in the process. By surveying students and interviewing faculty and staff on campus regarding experience with these resources and their efficacy as well as awareness of issues and challenges specific to international students, I hope to uncover suggestions that may enhance knowledge and use of these resources to the benefit of international students, and help increase communication between students and staff regarding their needs.

Development of Study

The reason that I chose this topic is because through my experiences as both an international student and advisor I have come to understand the importance of being uncomfortable in order to influence change, but that it takes a supportive environment to foster that change. I decided to assess the advantages and challenges of SUNY Oneonta's current approach to working with international students to better understand its overall effect on students academically, personally, socially and professionally, and where there might be room for improvement.

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Research Goals and Objectives:

- Determine advantages and disadvantages of living and learning at a smaller rural institution for international students.
- Identify resources and facilities available to the international student population and determine their impact on their academic, social, personal and professional growth.
- Assess unmet needs in the international student community and identify potential solutions to fulfill those needs through available resources
- Identify appropriate means of support for international students on campus and increase overall satisfaction

Literature Review

International student experiences in a higher education environment was my focus. In procuring literature and other materials for this study, and through my own experiences as an international student in high school, and as advisor and teacher of undergraduate international students at SUNY Oneonta I had the passion to pursue the “what” of this topic, but recognized that I needed more significant grounding in the “how” and “why.”

Barriers

I found initial inspiration in a workshop presented at the Forum on Education Abroad. “The New F-Word(s): Rethinking access in the 21st century” (Eduardo Contreras, 2017) highlighted types of barriers relevant to students in study abroad programs, and brought its participants into roundtable discussions where we looked at the relevance of these barriers and the effect these

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ideas have on modern international education. Facilitators of this workshop introduced Faculty, Fear, Finances and Family, the original four “F-words” coined by Johnnetta Betsch Cole in 1991, and continued by adding on Future, Finish (school on time), and Fit. The following is my understanding of the benefits and challenges of each in regards to international students:

Faculty provide guidance and advice, however cultural miscommunication through an academic lens and power distance can sometimes come into play. Students may **fear** the unknown; second language competency, cultural misunderstandings, adapting to a new academic system, developing a new support system, and more recently facing administrative decisions that directly affect the futures of many students across the country. But these fears can potentially lead to the opening of communication channels exploring these situations to learn how to engage them. **Finances** such as tuition, housing, insurance, and extra costs are unavoidable when choosing a school, but increasing familiarization with scholarships, on-campus work options and budgeting can help students build invaluable skills related to fiscal responsibility and academic and work experience. **Family** are considered a primary source of support and finances, and can help influence a student’s decision of where to study. Students envision their **future** beyond current studies, whether it is to further that education by pursuing higher degrees or a career instead by developing connections through networking, consulting on-campus career resource centers and/or gaining experience through work opportunities such as OPT. Students are concerned about ability to **finish** on time, and consider how a degree or program’s content will affect one’s education whether in the US or their home country, whether the workload is feasible, and if the US academic calendar will have an impact on the home country academic/career opportunity cycle. Determining the **fit** of a program takes into consideration fields of study, a congruent academic and social environment, and cost among other factors. An eighth word emerged by the end of the session: **Friends**. Peers comprise a

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massive part of international students support networks who are asking questions or requesting recommendations, and act as peer guides in a culture different from their own.

Cultural Variables

The themes of power distance and uncertainty avoidance led to a review of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2011), in which the author explores theories preceding the model that aim to define elements of culture. Though I believe that factors that affect how barriers such as the "F-words" described above are perceived can be attributed to an individual's personal and psychological traits, I understand that this is not necessarily the essence of this article and that those traits are substantially affected by the culture in which the individual lives. Hofstede addresses this notion by noting the relationship of individuals to facets of culture and how the subtle nuances of culture vary from one society to another (p. 3), that layers of culture develop out of transitional life stages, specifically youth to school to career.

To supplement this literature, I referred to an infographic set of maps (Geert Hofstede, 2017) demonstrating Hofstede's six dimensions of culture on a global scale which helped me better understand the dichotomous nature of this theory, copies of which may be found under Appendix A.

Power Distance - That one individual may feel more or less equal to another depending on status, and this perception has the potential to set the tone for interactions within this relationship. An example of this could be a professor who asks to be addressed by their honorific may be perceived as maintaining a higher power distance than a professor who insists that students call them by their first name. (Refer to Figure 2)

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Uncertainty Avoidance – I thought this to related to structure of societal risk management, however learning that this dimension “has to do with anxiety and distrust in the face of the unknown, and conversely, with a wish to have fixed habits and rituals, and to know the truth,” (Hofstede, 2017) with an example of the US as fairly tolerant of uncertainty brought me closer to understanding the frustration of an individual from a culture that is less uncertainty tolerant who may view American society as being unhinged or careless in some ways. Hofstede also offers the example of whether it’s normal for a professor to be unsure versus professors being expected to know all the answers (p. 10) (Refer to Figure 3)

Individualism vs. Collectivism – Comparing values related to the self with values related to the whole or group, a dimension that is certainly reflected in classrooms where critical thinking and participation can conflict with rote learning and lectures. Individualism is deeply rooted in US society, where benefitting the self tends to outweigh that of the whole. (Refer to Figure 4)

Masculinity vs. Femininity – At first confusing this dimension with machismo, I learned that it has more to do with expectation in gender roles. “In a masculine society, men are supposed to be tough. In a feminine society, the genders are emotionally closer.” (Hofstede, 2017) Per the infographic, ambiguity and definitions of societal gender roles in the US are at more of a middle ground, as compared to the more feminine UK and the more masculine Japan. (Refer to Figure 5)

Long Term vs. Short Term Orientation – Whether a society chooses to accept change and actively prepare for the future or look to past traditions as a precedent for present order, this dimension also relates to the openness of a society to transition. (Refer to Figure 6)

Indulgence vs. Restraint – Perhaps one of the most defining dimensions of US culture; this alludes to a society’s relation to its impulses. The infographic notes that in an indulgent society, fulfilling your impulses is encouraged, whereas a more restrictive society adheres to fulfilling obligations and practicing more self-control. Similar to Individualism vs. Collectivism, but

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differs as it applies more to social constructs such as freedoms and what is perceived to be good rather than personal choice. (Refer to Figure 7)

Challenges and Strategies in Context

I sought more context to increase my knowledge of personal and cultural variables and supplement my awareness of challenges that international students face through a study at a higher education institution in Russia. Though the setting of Baklashova and Kazakov's article is not set in the U.S., (Tatiana A. Baklashova, 2016), it demonstrates patterns of challenges that affect international students exist wherever they may choose to study. They begin by addressing the academic, cultural and fiscal benefits of hosting international students. It is determined that international students tend to work longer and harder than their domestic counterparts, are diligent and tenacious, add to the local diversity of their campus and community and create opportunities of cross-cultural collaboration and understanding while all tuition and subsequent spending by international students contributes a great sum to the national economy (p. 1823). Yet the range of challenges these students face is broad and compounded by their non-native surroundings.

“They face obstacles such as different food, unfamiliar living conditions, financial problems, finding balance between studies and work. They have to fit themselves to the schedule of classes, learning styles, other possible difficulties related to language, culture, personal barriers.” (p. 1823)

In this study, the dual goals are to uncover the specific challenges that international students encounter and what is being done to support them. I was hooked by the highly qualitative methodology of the study, as researchers strove to establish a relationship of trust with a sample group of ten participants by joining them during events and holidays before conducting data collection through interviews. This resulted in responses that were organized into four categories:

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Academic barriers included observances of classroom conduct, examples of power distance confusion in interactions with professors, othering, isolation from domestic classmates, language barriers and family expectations. The last was one I was not as familiar with: the participant described a family discussion with parents, and the anxiety experienced when asked about grades and having to explain the need for more time in order to graduate.

Social Barriers discussed challenges in communicating with domestic peers, adapting to unfamiliar social etiquette, and dealing with loneliness. In the case of one participant who spoke about domestic classmates, it was mentioned that though meetings are frequent, discussions rarely run deep, and do not display signs of close friendship.

Cultural Barriers gave examples of higher context aspects of the domestic society that can lead to culture shock. “When entering into a new culture, they had to deal with different systems of values, models of communication, signs and symbols of social communication and patterns of interpersonal relations.” (p. 1828) Several examples are offered that paint a picture of the frustration that international students encounter when punctuality is not observed in their host culture, and attention is also called to the persistence of bias toward international students. Though in two cases participants displayed a great interest in sharing their culture, it is implied that these offers are for the most part ignored.

The last category offers some **Adaption Strategies** which are categorized under the themes of Educational Support Resources, Dormitory and Student Activities, Language Support, Psychological Support and Students’ Organization. (p. 1830) Participants discuss seeking resources both on and off campus that are useful in coping with difficulties. One admitted to spending time with the owner of a local hostel to avoid stresses of the academic environment. Others talk about joining clubs and events for social opportunities, a chance to exchange culture and “build a cultural bridge between Russia and other countries.” (p. 1829) These social

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activities can also help mitigate language barriers, exposing international students to slang and gradually building their confidence in their language abilities over time. The researchers point out that only one participant engaged with the university's mental health services to help ease stress and loneliness, and reported that the therapy and other specialized support received facilitated positive progress in subsequent studies and social interactions. Baklashova and Kazakov conclude that universities should place extra importance on language proficiency courses and efforts for international students, and increase opportunities in which they may exercise their oral and listening skills and increase their awareness of aspects of domestic culture such as norms and slang. They also advise the creation of forums in which international students are encouraged to share their culture and perspective of their host country, a more consistent academic support matrix and acclimation courses that go beyond their initial orientation –similar to SUNY Oneonta's American Discovery course.

I saw similarities in issues that I expect many of my students at SUNY Oneonta have experienced, but the qualitative responses of participants in this study taught me that as adaptive, persistent and creative as international students are, the accumulative stress that arises from these challenges takes its toll on these students personally and academically over time. It highlights the importance of having a specific hub for international students to rely on like the OIE. I have heard it said that in a previous administration, the OIE was close to being dissolved because some thought that they were just acting as a redirection service for students rendering the Office redundant. Thankfully this was a sentiment not shared by many and the Office received support from many departments commending them for the work they do to guide students in their academic journey to resources that they need.

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Advocacy

With a greater awareness of the resources available and more specifically, existing needs that must be satisfied, I needed to understand the best ways to advocate for international students. Arthur (Arthur, 2017) echoes many of the points that Baklashova and Kazakov make in regards to the benefit of international students to higher education institutions, including the desire to attract global talent. (p. 887) Recalling the previously mentioned dimensions of culture, she also makes sure to point out that though international students tend to be grouped together, they come from all different walks of life and should be treated as such. She proposes a three-point strategy to involve faculty, counselors and support staff and domestic students in transforming the campus into a more sustainable and welcoming environment for international students.

Arthur notes that one of the reasons that students decide to enroll in an international institution is “the [interest] in learning theories and practices within another country context” and how this experience may give them a perspective edge in future academic and professional endeavors. It is noted however that the perspective they encounter may be that of ethnocentrism and racism, intended or not, and that this can lead to issues related to othering, tokenism and isolation in the international student community. Students may also not be entirely aware of pedagogical practices in their host nation, and not be aware of what professors expect from their students and the converse. The suggestion to encourage faculty to be active mentors of their international students is a way to help identify issues early on and become another reliable resource for students to turn to.

Though issues such as language and other cultural differences tend to come to the forefront when it comes to challenges as evidenced in the above study, counselors and advisors play a

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sizable role in encouraging stability as well. Campuses are well equipped with mental health, career and financial resources, but stigma, embarrassment and lack of awareness of these resources can prevent them from reaching those who need them. Understanding these barriers and reaching out through established relationships with peers and faculty is an important step towards building trust with individuals who would benefit from these and other resources.

Speaking of peers, many campuses are fortunate to have a notable population of students who are interested in cross cultural communication and other areas relating to international education. They may be individuals who have studied abroad previously, come from a diverse background, or even share interests in language or international pop culture, and it is likely that these individuals contribute positively to the international community by participating in events and clubs and the operations of their local international office and make a special effort to get to know their international peers. This unfortunately does not represent the entire cohort of most campuses. Again as discussed in the above study, Arthur maintains that international students are more likely to reach out than their domestic peers (p. 891), which can result in international students drawing closer to groups comprised of either other international peers or members of their own culture. Domestic students owe it to themselves to understand the importance of being open to developing themselves as a global citizen and Arthur advocates for instruction and guidance to help domestic and international students to engage with each other. “All students are international learners when they actively seek opportunities to learn from the diversity found in educational contexts.” (p. 892)

What I take away from these texts is a set of frameworks through which I feel more comfortable learning to identify recurring themes both apparent and hidden. For example, I would wager that one reason that domestic students do not specifically reach out to international peers is that

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they may not even realize that they are international, and would feel embarrassed and ashamed to have othered someone who is in fact a US resident. And though none of my students at SUNY Oneonta ever requested information regarding the career center or wellness clinic, that does not indicate awareness of this resource or barriers that may prevent them from reaching out.

At the conclusion of the “F-Words” workshop, the facilitators shared the acronym “PAL”: Partnership, Advocacy and Leadership. A solid reminder of the duties and purposes related to the field of internationalization, a reminder that we must act as diplomats and ambassadors to facilitate connections, disseminate information and educate on the best practices that make an impact on not only our international students, but the entire campus community. “International students are a relatively untapped sources of learning about an increasingly connected and global society,” Arthur concludes. “To some degree, we are all international learners, but the challenge remains about how open we really are to engaging with learners from other countries.” (p. 893)

Research Methodology

Working with international degree seeking and exchange students during my time at the SUNY Oneonta OIE, I have become more aware of the resources made available to these students and the overwhelming support extended to them. I have increased my understanding of some of the barriers associated with being an international student at a school in the US, and steps that can be taken through advising to minimize them. I decided to develop a qualitative study to help me identify specific benefits and challenges international individuals encounter on the SUNY

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Oneonta campus. In creating this study, it was important for me to consider an aspect of my character that has the potential to modify the results. As an Optimist, I am encouraged to seek the positive even if it means finding it in the negative. I recognize that unintentionally focusing on what could be considered benign and idealistic has the potential to skew my objectivity in collecting data. Even though I do not think that this will have a large effect on my findings, it is something I have continued to remind myself to be aware of through this project.

Survey Development

The international student population of SUNY Oneonta were the focus of this study, and I wanted to reach as many individuals as possible. Noy asserts that collection of “unique social knowledge of an interactional quality” is a benefit of utilizing sampling methods in qualitative research (2008). So, I decided to reach out to international students through their email listserv as my sampling method in order to find participants to respond to a qualitative electronic survey, and analyze responses by focusing on benefits and challenges encountered by participants. I have also decided to make the results available to SUNY Oneonta professional staff for review following this study.

I surveyed participants on the following topics:

- If the rural setting of SUNY Oneonta influenced their choice in university
- Prime concerns before attending SUNY Oneonta
- Benefits and challenges within and outside of the academic environment
- Tools and resources that benefited students academically and in daily life
- Acclimation course experience (If student took course. If not, an explanation why, such as “not offered my first year”)

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- Advice for future international students

With these topics, I built a short survey of ten questions using the online tool SurveyMonkey as it facilitates access to potential participants while ensuring their anonymity. Because I sincerely respect the trust that has developed between myself and these students, I was adamant about protecting their privacy in this study. By making sure it was understood that responses would be anonymous, I anticipated that participants would be more comfortable about answering my questions honestly, and disclosed that I would harbor the results of the survey on a secure separate hard disk drive which would be formatted upon the completion of my study and capstone. The survey included a disclaimer statement highlighting the voluntary nature of the survey with an electronic consent option and was sent to potential participants via the international student email listserv. Please find a copy of the survey Introduction and Consent Form in Appendix B, and a copy of the Survey Instrument in Appendix C. Logistically, the survey was administered shortly after the school semester had begun.

I anticipated responses to reflect the following:

- Small class size, proximity to locations such as Boston and NYC, lower tuition and scholarship opportunities will be an influencer for choosing SUNY Oneonta
- Cultural differences and English language competency to be prime concerns
- Academic culture and lack of transportation will be a challenge while faculty assistance and the American Discovery acclimation course to be a benefit
- CADE Writing lab, tutors, the OIE, and Peer Mentors to be considered valuable tools and resources
- Mixed reviews about American Discovery course leaning towards valuable
- Advice ranging from developing relationships to US-specific academic practices

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Ethics

To prepare for research, I completed a Human Subjects Research application for SIT Graduate Institute as well as an application to the Institutional Review Board of SUNY Oneonta, as their students will be the focus of my research. To prepare, I was required by SUNY Oneonta to take an online course in Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research through Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program, which addressed some of my concerns regarding unintentional bias and collecting reliable data.

In the section pertaining to issues arising from conflict of interest in research, the following impacts were explored:

- Increasing the possibility that the results or the presentation of the research will be called into question
- Introducing bias or the appearance of bias
- Damaging professional or organizational reputation

(Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program), 2017)

My decision to conduct largely qualitative research (with the exception of question #2) is due to the diverse experiences I expected to encounter from each individual. It is possible that data I collected could be biased on accounts that participants want to represent their school in the best light, for fear of repercussions, which is why it was important to reiterate that improving international student satisfaction is the goal of this study. There is also the possibility that a student with serious concerns would opt out of taking the survey altogether which would be a loss of valuable information. On the other hand, it was not my aim to dig for detrimental opinions. It was expected that most answers collected from participants will show that the

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school is doing well by its students, already providing them with tools and resources that they are using to succeed.

Other considerations in preparation for collecting data included:

- Which data should be collected?
- By what means should data be collected to ensure reliability and validity?
- How much data should be collected - that is, how many subjects or events are required for adequate statistical power?
- Which collection methods will be used and how will those methods reduce the likelihood of error or bias?
- Who will supervise the work and how will the quality and integrity of the study be ensured?

(CITI 2017)

As previously noted, the data I sought was focused on personal experience rather than identifying information such as year, major or nationality. As far as ensuring reliability and validity, I trust that the relationship I have built with the international student community over this year and the disclosure statement I will include, that they will recognize that I am collecting this data to help the OIE improve the international student experience. The data I sought would be limited to ten questions designed to prompt specific responses; for example, asking about challenges within academia vs. challenges outside of academia. Using SurveyMonkey ensured anonymity, also decreasing likelihood of bias as I did not know which students participated. The Director of the OIE has been a valuable mentor in helping me develop this survey, helping to maintain quality and integrity.

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As aforementioned, I have been witness to the positive light in which SUNY Oneonta and the OIE value international students, and have seen how faculty and staff, and even students go above and beyond for these individuals. I realize that this bias reflects the positivity that I am apt to seek, but I didn't want this predisposition to blur my results. This was the most difficult aspect of my project on a personal level, but I have done my best to approach this study from a neutral and diplomatic standpoint, understanding that above all the purpose of this research is for the benefit of SUNY Oneonta and its students.

Survey Results

The survey was forwarded to potential participants via the international student listserv within the first week of the start of the 2017 Fall semester and was open until September 30th. This time chosen because of the interlude between start of semester events such as orientation, and the end of month when students are likely to be heavily engaged in studies, projects, work and other responsibilities. At the start of the Fall 2017 semester there were 56 international students. 12 participants, less than 25%, submitted responses. The following results are summaries of qualitative responses to each question, and the complete results may be found in Appendix E.

1. SUNY Oneonta is located in a small rural town in Upstate New York. Did this affect your choice in coming here? Why or why not?

I began by asking if Oneonta being a smaller rural town in Upstate New York had any effect on the participants' choice of school. Of the twelve that answered, two said no and stated that they came here because "it has [their] major" and that they enjoyed the fact that "there aren't many people." Of those that replied "yes", three described Oneonta as "peaceful", "comfy", "relaxing" and "beautiful." Two deemed that "it looks safe", and is "more safe than [a] city."

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Others noted the appeal of a smaller town for those who grew up in a city, and Oneonta's proximity to other Northeastern US cities being a plus because of their desire to travel. One participant replying in the affirmative illustrated a more detailed personal experience: "Being a black person in a white town, you tend to expect the worst. While I experienced some macroaggressions regularly, I wasn't harmed or insulted directly." Only one participant mentioned that they "[didn't] really have a lot of choices."

2. What were your concerns before attending SUNY Oneonta?

For the next question, I wanted to test the veracity of themes discussed during The F-Word workshop along with topics covered in the American Discovery course. I asked participants to choose from the following in regards to concerns prior to attending SUNY Oneonta: Academic differences, cultural differences, social life, housing, insurance, acceptance into program, transcript evaluation, finances (including tuition and other expenses), work experience (including on-campus work and Optional Practical Training following graduation), language ability, family support, faculty and staff support and their future after completing their programs at Oneonta.

Hypothetically, I expected both academic and cultural differences to be among the primary concerns of students' pre-arrival, along with family, faculty and staff support and English language ability, based on my experiences with international students over the course of the year. Cultural (11 responses) and academic differences (10) as well as language ability (8) were in the top three based on participant choice, however only one participant chose faculty and staff support, and none chose family support as a concern. Instead students came to SUNY Oneonta with their future beyond graduation (8) and social life (7) rounding out their top five concerns. Please see Figures 8 & 9 in Appendix A.

3. What is/was helpful to you in the SUNY Oneonta academic environment?

Next I wanted to ask participants about academic resources they have encountered and utilized to their benefit. Eight responded in the affirmative that the Library has been a great help. “The Library has a great amount of resources,” replies one, another mentions how it “is opening until (sic) really late at night, so it was helpful for me to study especially for the finals.” Six commended the guidance of their professors. “Most of my professors were amazing” wrote one, others described them as “helpful and understanding,” would “eagerly answer [questions],” “passed a lot of valuable information into [their] life,” and that “some of professor support me to learn cultural differences because I am an international student.” Tutors, ESL and otherwise, were also said to be helpful and friendly, as were the resources of the Center for Academic Development and Enrichment (CADE) academic advisors, and “well equipped” classrooms.

4. What is/was a challenge for you in the SUNY Oneonta academic environment?

Participants yielded a variety of responses to this question. Some pointed out frustrations that may be shared with their domestic peers such as lack of a lab space specific to their major, or frustration in some professors’ inconsistent use of Blackboard, SUNY Oneonta’s virtual learning environment and course management system. Yet much of this may be attributed to language proficiency and/or confidence in their own English ability. Though one pointed out that this was a rare occurrence, more than half of the participants cited language barriers. Two specifically stated that listening to lectures are “sometimes difficult,” and that in a big classroom it can be “a little hard to listen to what the professors said.” Another mentioned essay writing as a challenge, and that speaking up in class was difficult as well. Similarly, another participant expressed that in a tutoring session with their American peers, it was difficult for them to ask their tutor questions. In the last two cases, it is important to consider that the issue

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may not have only been due to a language barrier, but also acclimation to differences in academic culture. In the above examples, there is a possibility that the participants are accustomed to an academic culture where asking questions or speaking up is either not encouraged or in some cases seen as an act of disrespect to the instructor and their class.

Other examples of differences in academic culture that participants pointed out include the classroom environment itself. A participant identifying as a transfer student described professor and student personalities as “totally different” and “more strict” at SUNY Oneonta than at their previous school, and that “it was [a] huge challenge to adapt to environment in here.” Another participant elaborated on differences in evaluation standards through quizzes. “I have done more multiple choice questions than I ever thought I would do, but I got used to it.” The same participant continues and addresses a concerning issue: “I also did not like how most classes are focused on American issues instead of international issues, yet we are clearly in a time of globalization. I fear this kind of instruction will lead students to become as US-centric as their professors, resulting in a generation that undermines the rest of the world.” I feel it important to note that this was the only participant who identified what they feel is a lack of global perspective, and that it is one experience out of many, and unfortunately I do not have further input regarding this one student’s experience. It is unknown how many share this perception, and adversely how many feel that they are experiencing multiple global perspectives.

5. What is/was helpful for you at SUNY Oneonta outside of the academic environment?

Most participants identified staff as helpful, especially those associated with the OIE. Several mentioned their Peer Mentors and the ability to ask them questions, others included peers and friends from their own and other backgrounds in their response. “My friends helped me a lot to accommodate in the school life in the US because they taught me so many things.” Other

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helpful contributions include the convenience of a dining hall in a participant's dorm (most international students are housed in this residence hall), campus events and trips that encourage immersion in American life, the ability to concentrate on studies and the pleasant campus setting.

Though they did not go into detail, one participant identified a professor from a prior school as being helpful, and another participant couldn't specify anything helpful or unhelpful.

6. What is/was a challenge for you at SUNY Oneonta outside of the academic environment?

Some participants noted that it can be difficult to travel from campus to downtown or another city. Oneonta students ride Oneonta Public Transportation for free, and there are several stops around campus. But frequency of busses, transfers and length of routes can be frustrating time-wise. And as most international students do not drive, one of the only modes of transportation to other cities is via Greyhound or another intercity bus line. Just over a mile away from campus, the nearest bus station is about seven minutes by car and nearly a half-hour on foot.

Making friends and maintaining those relationships are a challenge according to some. "Cultural differences affected my friendships a lot." Another lamented that "The limited knowledge of students here about different cultures and nationalities impeded my growth as a student." Other social circumstances that participants pointed out was coping with neighbors that play loud music, tolerating the smell of cigarettes and marijuana, and just acclimating to life in a smaller town.

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Food also plays an important role as one participant claimed that they missed food from home. Another took a more direct stance in regards to their opinion of meals served on campus. Relaying their dislike of the food, the participant recommends that changes be made. “I don’t think that any student should spend their money on food outside of campus in order to escape the daily dining hall food.” Referring to a study of daily wasted food at one of the dining halls, they add that “there is a reason why people throw that food away.” They also point out the difficulty of finding on-campus jobs for international students, as they are not permitted to work off-campus.

7. What tools and resources support your learning at SUNY Oneonta?

Responses show that many participants highly value their relationships with others who help support them academically. Three mention their professors, one of whom is said to be very understanding of international students, and the office hours they keep. Others value the support of their residence director, their boss, tutors at CADE, and the OIE. One felt that their ESL class gave them the opportunity to strengthen their English and speak more, as does Google Translate, and television shows. One participant values the books they use in class, but voices concern about their affordability. The library is also mentioned, as is a computer room in Alumni Hall which serves the International and Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) students specifically. Some feel supported by the various clubs on campus, several of which are devoted to culture and language.

8. What tools and resources support your daily life at SUNY Oneonta?

There is some overlap with responses from previous questions, notably the appreciation of professors, Peer Mentors, friends and residence directors, as well as the benefits of internet and

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translation. Some participants reiterated the convenience of having a dining hall in their dorms, as well as multiple other dining options throughout campus.

9. If you were a participant of the “American Discovery” course (GEOG 194) offered by the OIE, please comment on your experience. If you were not a participant, please comment why not.

Those that participated evaluated positive and negative aspects of the course. Some commented that they felt it was a good opportunity to visit places and were notably impressed by some of the places and museums they visited. Learning more about their classmates through cultural presentations was informative, as was interacting with various guest speakers. Complaints included shortening and cancelling some field trips and lack of discussion in class.

Remarks from non-participants of the course revealed lack of awareness of the course for many, and one participant’s advisor deeming it unnecessary. One reported not joining due to disinterest but thinks that it would be a great class for international freshmen.

10. What advice would you give to future students of SUNY Oneonta?

The majority of responses to this question urge their successors to be bold, be confident and socialize. Several encourage students to step outside their comfort zone and interact more with individuals who are not from their home culture, especially Americans. Understanding that both international and domestic students may be shy, one participant advises that “It’s ok to be shy too, but make [an] effort to say hello!” “Talk more to Americans in order to understand the culture and compare it with your own culture - it is great for personal development. If anybody comes to this school and talk to people only from your own culture, it seems to me like a waste of time and money.” Others recommend participating in as many events and club activities as

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possible, and to “grab all the opportunities that this school offers to you. There is definitely a lot of them.” Another adds flat-out that “we can do anything we want unless it’s illegal.”

Recognizing that some international students may not know where to start when they are in need, one participant advises that “you are the person that [needs] to act first, but when you ask for help, there’s so many resources and people that support you, so don’t hesitate to ask!!”

“Don’t be afraid to get involved and to speak your mind,” advises another. “You deserve to be here so don’t ever let anyone make you feel like this is not your place. People will ask stupid questions but don’t take it personally. They just don’t know any better. They are Americans.”

At the survey’s conclusion, I included a space for participants who wanted to discuss their experiences in greater detail to provide their email as a means of contact to arrange a brief meeting. None of the participants chose to pursue this option.

Analysis

After reviewing the results of the survey, I have decided to arrange discussion by three outstanding themes: The advantages of support for international students, perceptions of current international student support, and recommendations from students.

Advantages in Support

General perceptions of Oneonta are that it is considered a safe location, relatively near to other larger cities, and pleasant despite the existence of microaggressions. Participants describe

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faculty as supportive, helpful, understanding, eager to answer questions, and advocate for students in their learning about cultural differences. Other helpful resources mentioned by participants include the Milne Library, tutors, ESL programs, CADE, academic advisors, and classrooms.

Perceptions of Current Support

Participants mentioned that concerns prior to coming to SUNY Oneonta included cultural, academic and linguistic support, as well as consideration of the future beyond SUNY Oneonta and integrating into U.S. social life.

Cultural challenges related to academics include inconsistency in the use of online teaching modules by instructors, differences in academic rigor and strictness, methods of quizzing and evaluation and perception of U.S.-centric values in education. Books are considered a great resource, but their affordability is questioned. There is also mention of linguistic difficulties in listening to and understanding lectures and classmates. Participants expressed shock at life in a smaller town, mentioning that travel is difficult, and that finding a job on-campus can be difficult. Some participants find cultural differences a barrier in making friends and maintaining relationships, including those with neighbors. Perceptions of beneficial support mention that staff (including members of the OIE) are very helpful, that Peer Mentors are approachable and resourceful and friends are extremely valuable for helping with acclimation. Though opinions on the food served vary, dining halls are considered convenient and students find support in many around them including residence life directors, supervisors and tutors. Participants also find the campus conducive to studying; The Milne Library being a prime resource and open at convenient hours, ESL classes and tutors helpful in enhancing language

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skills, and the American Discovery course and trips a good resource for immersion and acclimation to life in the U.S. despite a call for improvement.

Participant Recommendations

The main recommendations that participants offer for their peers is to increase interaction with individuals outside of one's own home culture, seek out and try all opportunities that are available, learn to advocate for yourself to gain access to resources and opportunities and to get involved, bring your culture to the mix and be yourself.

Discussion

Partiality to small, rural campus identity has come through in responses to the survey, as the question prompted a positive response from nearly all participants, many of whom regard the school and surrounding community as peaceful, beautiful, and safe. It was my assumption that international students in such an area would benefit from smaller class sizes and subsequently more opportunities to form relationships with their professors and cohort members. Because of the disconnect from larger cultural networks in places such as New York City, they have a better chance to integration into the local community by connecting with locals through culture events and everyday life. Despite that, smaller cultural pockets tend to form which can still lead to isolation, and as evidenced by Baklashoka and Kazakov's participants, integration with domestic students does not come easily to all. Isolation is one of many issues that the OIE addresses through its Peer Mentor program and American Discovery course. Fellow students who have either studied abroad or are international students themselves welcome their new international peers and act as their guides from orientation and throughout the semester.

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Outhred and Chester (2014) allude to Furnam and Bochner's suggestion that those who are introduced to a local culture by compassionate peers are more likely to make a smoother transition than if left alone (p. 314). This supports my belief in why the Peer Mentor program is widely considered by faculty and students alike to be one of the OIE's best initiatives to welcome international students. It was developed to fill a gap in their transition to life on campus in the U.S. Domestic freshmen typically rely on those close to them for logistical and emotional support when they first arrive on campus; families and friends transporting domestic students and their possessions to campus, helping them move in, create a pleasant space out of an empty dorm room and making sure that they are settled in and have begun acclimating to their new surroundings are a recurring motif each school year. These are comforts that can be taken for granted as international students usually make their own way from the airport to campus where they encounter an empty room and an uncertain schedule. Under the guidance of the OIE, a team of six Peer Mentors undergo cultural and organizational training, assemble welcome packets (complete with maps, schedules and insurance cards, swag bags stocked with food, water and gifts from the bookstore) and make their mentees beds with bedclothes lent by residence life.

They work with OIE staff to coordinate airport pickups, activities and events during international student orientation. Their mission for the semester is to ease their mentees into American campus life and act as a first contact for questions and concerns. They field questions, organize pizza parties and outings, and check in with mentees on a regular basis, channeling heavier queries to the International Student Advisor who can advise the student and direct them towards appropriate resources.

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This program dovetails with the American Discovery course, which is an extension of student orientation, and engages students in current and pertinent topics relating to U.S. life such as politics, culture/racial/heritage identity and the environment. Guest speakers and American peers visit to encourage cross-cultural exchange of ideas and concepts. Students also take part in field trips to locations relevant to the content of this course, and reflect on their impressions of these visits in a short paper. The semester concludes with presentations from students in which they share their own culture. Because of all the new experiences international students can expect during their first semester, American Discovery represents a lab in which they learn about cultural and academic norms in the U.S., explore why they are woven into the fabric of this culture and approach these expectations while preserving their own cultural values. Because this course is a recent endeavor and not all current students have been participants, I expected mixed responses related to this course. There was a call for more discussion, and this was addressed by introducing multiple means through which students could add to the conversation: speaking up in class, submitting anonymous notes and voting anonymously on topics. However, I admit that meeting once a week for an hour and fifteen minutes is insufficient for covering topics in depth, so I hope that this time can be extended to at least two hours in the future.

Responses from the study indicate that the library is a well-used resource, yet I still wonder if familiarity with available resources is a bigger issue. There is a desire that not only international students, but all students become more aware of the resources their library offers and that they will become more active in making use of them. As a member of the SUNY system which also partners with Cornell University, the Milne Library at SUNY Oneonta has an extended collection of works to draw from. The entire collection is available online and it also holds

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memberships with prominent publication databases in case a student feels more comfortable accessing what they need from their dorm room.

The Milne Library employs full-time staff, many of them student peers. International members of staff in particular are likely to be aware of the challenges that an international student faces while becoming accustomed to a research process that may be new to them. And for those who do not know where to begin, personal reference sessions can be scheduled for groups or individuals. Students may even request a personal librarian be assigned to them so that they may develop a relationship with someone who may help them feel more supported.

Schaffer notes that “Many American students look on the library as a foreign domain, which is why library orientation is required by many freshman professors.” (p.3) A library representative always provides a specialized explanation of what is available at international student orientation, which is repeated for the general freshman orientation. Though professors sometimes bring their freshmen students to the library to help them become more familiar with the resources they are expected and urged to use, but this is not required. Also not a requirement but useful for learning to navigate these resources is the Basic Information Literacy course that is offered. However, this is a credit bearing course which may cause some international students to weigh the value of the information it lends against credits that may need to be taken elsewhere.

Schaffer’s suggests that developing cultural diversity workshops is an idea that can provide both the library and international students with stronger tools that can help each become more proactive in literacy and use of library resources, developing relationships between students and faculty and staff members. It also has the potential to mitigate language and other social

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and cultural barriers that may be preventing student use while raising awareness of the indispensability of library resources. Perhaps inviting a representative to speak with American Discover participants early on may help grow that relationship between librarian and student. Topics such as citing sources and defining and avoiding plagiarism are already a key component when discussing U.S. academic standards with new international students, but there is always the possibility of related topics that are not being addressed including awareness of library resources.

Because they are less likely to reach out to international students (Baklashova and Kazakov), it is important to explore methods that can ignite domestic students' interest in other cultures and highlight the valuable applications of increasing cross-cultural competency. COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) is one such method; a SUNY-wide initiative launched in 2010 to increase internationalization on campus by providing students with an opportunity to transcend the walls of their classrooms to interact and engage with their peers in countries around the world. (SUNY, 2017) I had a chance to learn one example of COIL promoting cross-cultural interaction through its enhancement of language study through a partnership developed with instructors overseas, with students in both classrooms linked via video conferencing and VoiceThread, and online educational communication application.

Depending on the individual, fulfilling a language requirement can either feel like a welcome challenge with many benefits, or one of the most frustrating and least valuable tasks that a student must undergo. The latter sentiment can be considered a symptom of ethnocentric reliance on English, questioning the value of learning something that they may never use. A recent study by the Modern Languages Association even shows that there has been a decline in higher education language enrollment by 6.7% between 2009 and 2013 (MLA, 2013)

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Whether one will use a foreign language after having undergone university-level instruction is up to the student. However, second language acquisition goes beyond learning words or phrases. Languages exist to facilitate communication of information, ideas and culture, and the learning process can help develop discipline and a deeper understanding of cultures and societies in which the language is used. In the case of this COIL-enhanced course, both instructors from the SUNY and international institution work in tandem in the classroom, and students are made aware that while they are pursuing competency in another language, their international peers are also pursuing competency in English. This allows for opportunities for students from both sides to mentor the other and become leaders through interaction.

I believe that the process that participants in this COIL enhanced course experience will not only benefit their burgeoning bilingual skill set, but also further develop their awareness of individuals from cultures different from their own by integrating international perspectives in their class (Urban & Palmer, 2014). It is not always easy to make the first move, but in the classroom environment that is designated as a space where they can discuss sensitive subject matters in an honest and respectful way, they are interacting with students their age that care about similar topics and who are invested in similar goals and dreams. The students in overseas are no longer unknowns a few thousands of miles away, they are now classmates, even friends. And through the support of their instructors each student is raising their intercultural competency and becoming stronger as a global citizen. This will benefit not only the students in this course, but also international students on campus. Because these language students now own an intercultural experience, they are more likely to develop empathy for and greater interest in international peers. This is one example of how students can potentially be more likely to be the first to engage with an individual from another culture, but there is a need for more opportunities for domestic students to take initiative in bridging the gap.

Conclusion

Future Development

Reflecting back to my process in this study, I have a better understanding of how my bias and my optimism can present themselves as barriers in analyzing data. As someone that worked at SUNY Oneonta, I expected and desired to find data that supported my positive hypotheses, but as a researcher I felt the need to find a balance of both “good” and “bad”. I feel that there could be areas of strengthening the study so that I could meet all research objectives. The approach I chose in gathering data supported me in working towards my goals and objectives in this study, but would strengthen the results would have been utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. For example, I would research methods to procure a higher response rate, such as incentivizing the survey or resending it once a week, and include faculty, staff and domestic students in qualitative interviews and create a quantitative survey to get a better feel for academic, cultural and social perceptions of the campus international community.

Revisiting my research objectives, there are some that I have met more successfully than others. My study as it stands had to be scaled down from a much larger and more encompassing endeavor. For example, the goal to research advantages and disadvantages of attending smaller rural institutions included plans to identify and contact international offices at universities like SUNY Oneonta and conduct a quantitative interview to understand an overview of how international communities thrive and face challenges in these environments. I actively encourage more students to explore the benefits of these institutions in lieu of larger and more well-known state and private institutions, and would have liked this to be a part of my research.

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I realize that it would have diverted from my core study and satisfied a fringe question more than adding to the overall process. Despite this, I do feel that utilizing surveys to reach out to the intended group are of great value, and that the data garnered from my study has helped me enormously.

Policy Implementation Suggestions

I have great faith in the responsiveness of the SUNY Oneonta campus in regards to international student challenges, especially that of the OIE. Based on the research I have conducted, I present the following suggestions as enhancements to current policy.

- Explore use of COIL in more departments, and work towards establishing completion of at least one COIL-enhanced course as a general requirement
- Establish American Discovery as a requirement for all new international students
- Develop a forum-style event for international and domestic students to convene and explore cultural themes, navigation of barriers and development of global citizenship
- Incorporate an international student satisfaction survey into each semester to evaluate perceptions of support and encourage suggestions for enhancement

As previously mentioned, I feel that COIL must become a more integral part of campus for all students. This practical and accessible method enables interaction with students from other cultures, and has the potential to influence those same students to reach out to their international counterparts on campus, facilitating integration and fulfills a response to the challenges international students face building and maintaining relationships with their U.S. peers. American Discovery has undergone many revisions over the past few semesters, evolving from

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a pilot program to an essential course that equips participants with the tools needed to develop language, critical thinking and cultural skills to successfully navigate their campus experience. It continues to represent a space apart from other courses for international students to exercise and improve these skills, responding to cultural challenges encountered in U.S. academia. There are limitations to implementing these suggestions as these courses could be challenged by administration, faculty and students on how essential they are to the core values of the institution. However, considering how the purposes of both COIL and American Discovery align with these core values, I feel that many would advocate for these as policy.

Developing a forum for international and domestic students is one way of facilitation integration. It would be enlightening to learn from discussions that arise at an “Ask Me Anything” style forum of both domestic and international students where peers can explore themes and topics ranging from gender roles in different cultural contexts to questions about slang or habits others deem curious (Why *do* Americans tend to put their feet up on desks?). Similar to situations where domestic students are invited on trips to integrate with international students, the facilitators must make icebreakers and mixed group activities a part of the process. Facilitators should challenge all involved to confront cultural differences and create a comfortable time and space for all participants to congregate afterwards to reflect, such as a lounge with coffee and snacks. Other considerations for successful integration include a commitment to engagement, inclusion and valuing the contributions of all in order to deepen the enrichment of the program (U of Minnesota, 2014) The biggest limitation I perceive is encouraging students from diverse backgrounds to attend. Though I believe that individuals from the international student and study abroad student communities are very likely to join, it will be important to identify populations who may not be as likely to attend and invite them specifically (U of Minnesota, 2014). Collaboration with the Student Association may be a good

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place to start to reach out to clubs and organizations, and partnering with the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) office will extend that reach to non-traditional and first-generation students.

Finally, as aforementioned, I believe the survey I developed can be improved upon, and recognize that if I were to reach out to students again, responses are likely to vary based on group, semester and changes implemented since the last survey. The study abroad office has already implemented a returnee survey to evaluate orientation, facilities, and other aspects of their students' journeys to continue progress on improvement, and I think that a similar survey would be a good indicator of international student perception. It is important to consider limitations similar to those encountered in my study, especially sample size. Potential participants may be more eager to respond if the survey were incentivized, perhaps with a gift card to the bookstore.

The level of trust that the OIE has developed within the international student community is sure to yield honest and insightful results. These could be translated into a report to offer members of higher administration, departments and offices an astute glimpse into the successes and experience that these students are having and how this relates to the successes and experience of the domestic student population; An outcome that will continue to guide progress in internationalization, as it is not that the benefits outweigh the challenges, but that the challenges encountered on this are beneficial to the academic, professional and personal growth of all.

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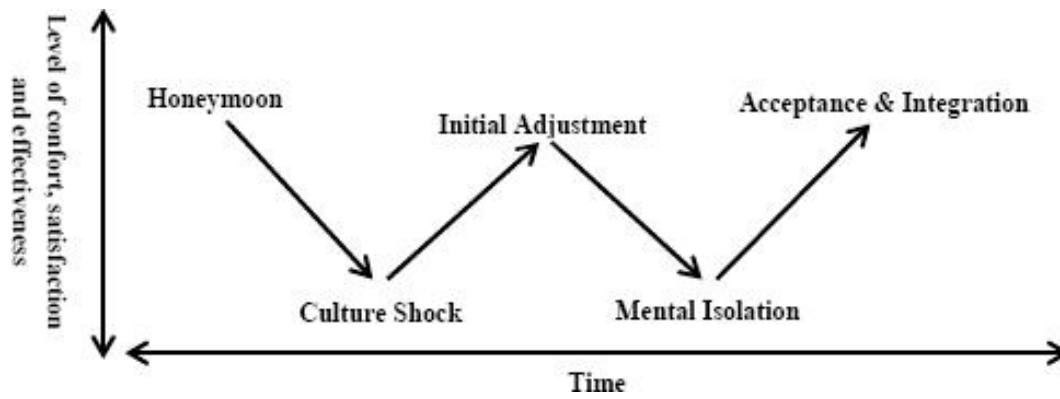
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Appendices

Appendix A – Diagrams and Tables

Figure 1: W-Curve Diagram of Culture Shock



(Source: Bonghez, S. & Aziz, E. E. (2014). West meets East: Culture shock! — Cultural intelligence in projects. Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2014—North America, Phoenix, AZ. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.)

Figure 2: Power Distance World map

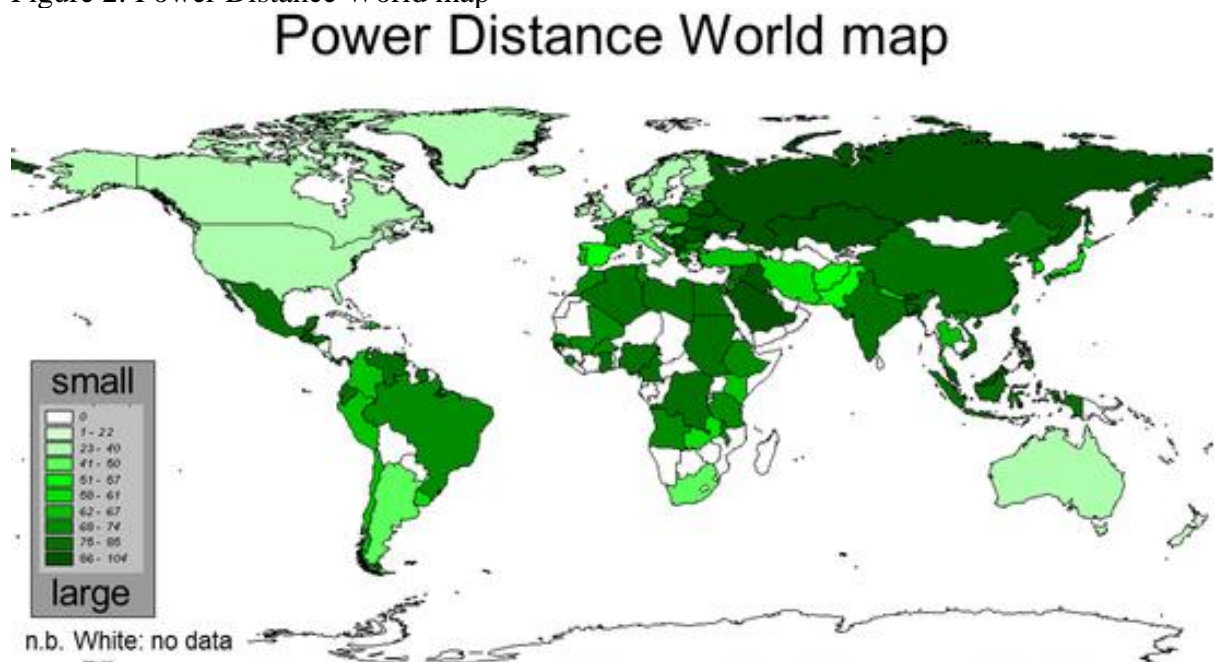


Figure 3: Uncertainty Avoidance World map

Uncertainty Avoidance World map

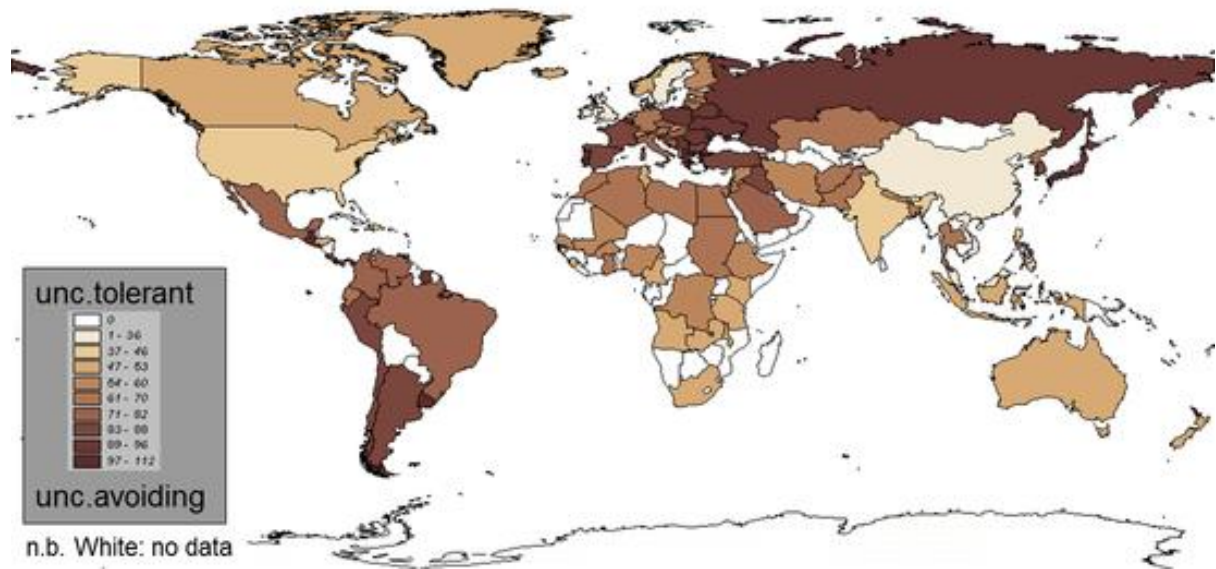


Figure 4: Collectivism World map

Collectivism – Individualism World map

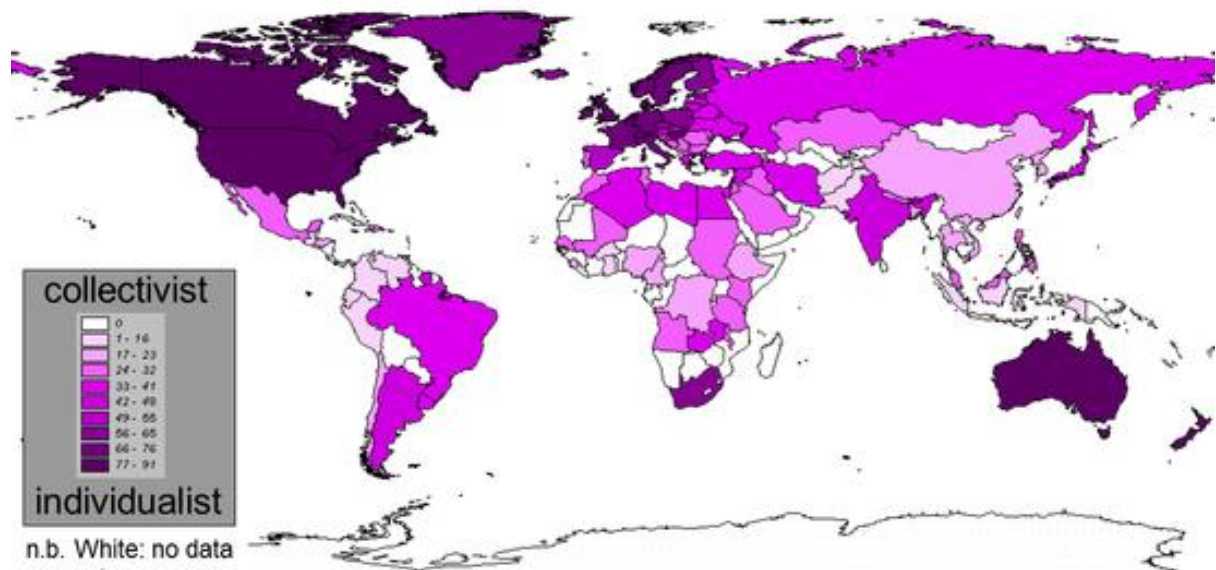


Figure 5: Femininity/Masculinity World map

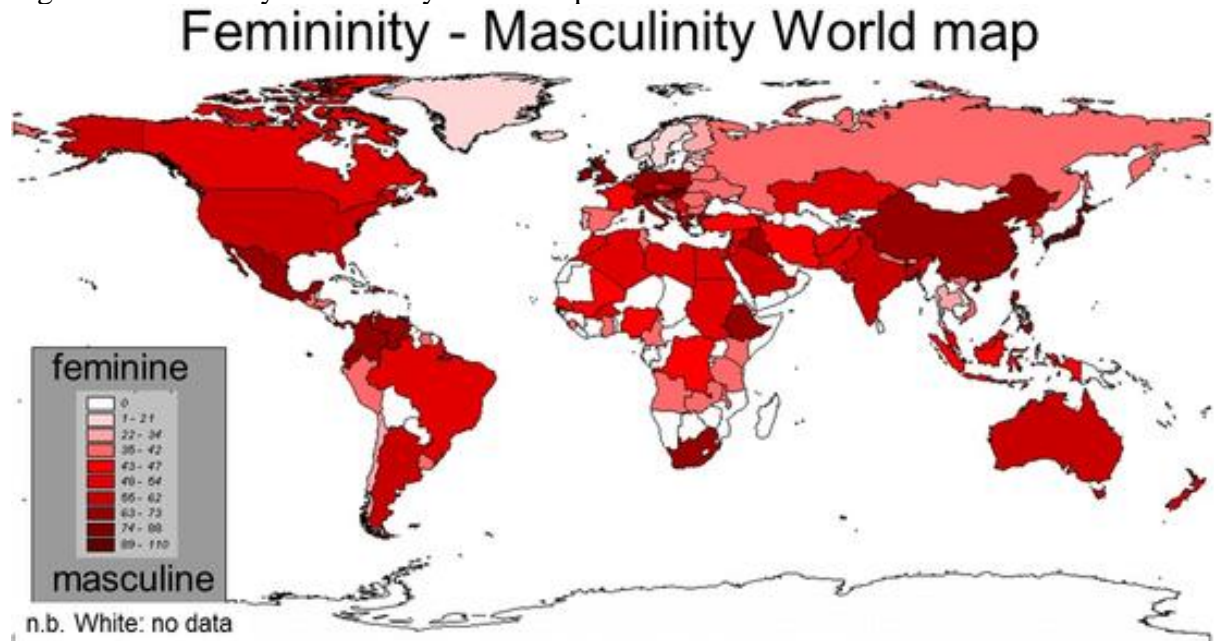
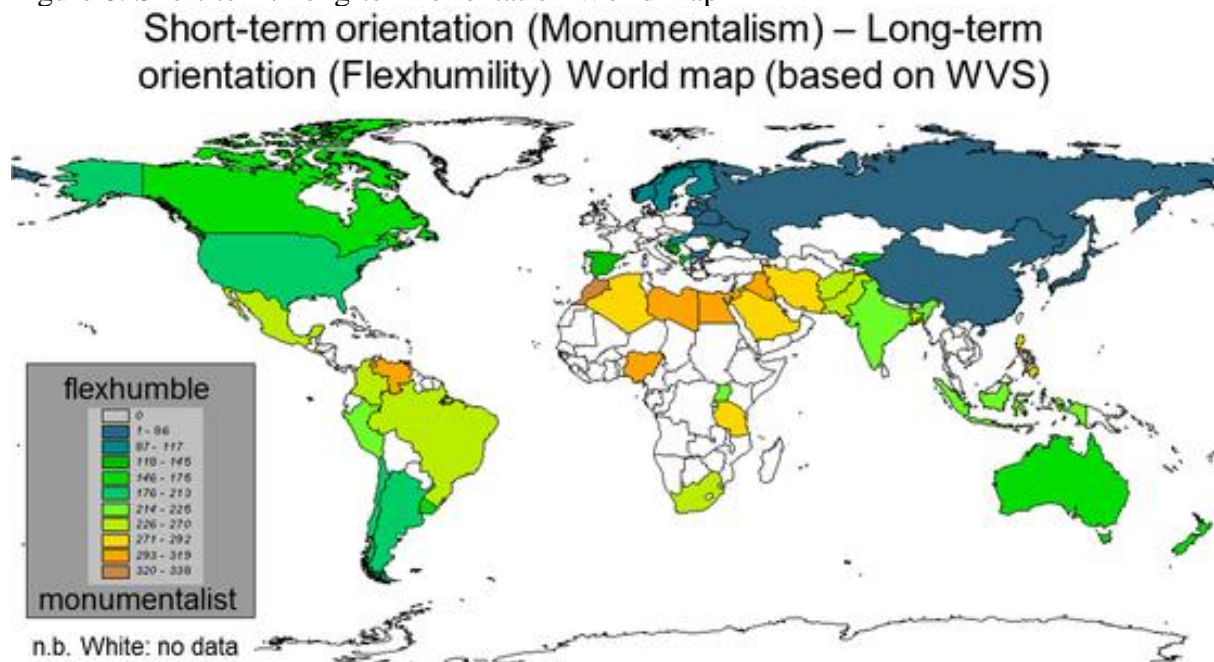


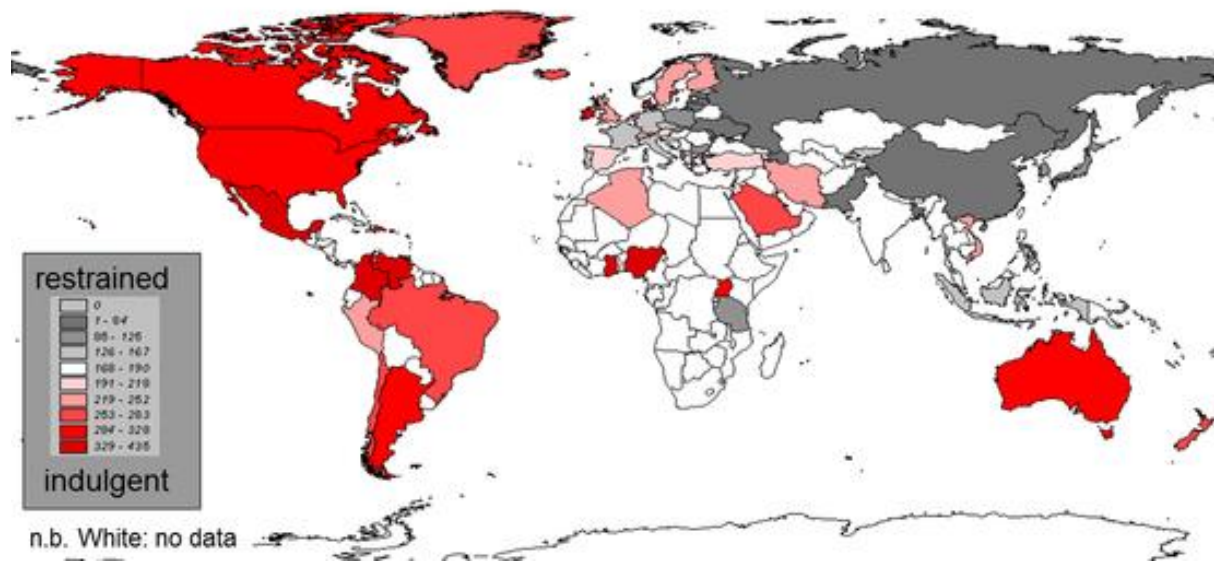
Figure 6: Short-term/Long-term orientation World map



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Figure 7: Indulgence/Restraint World Map

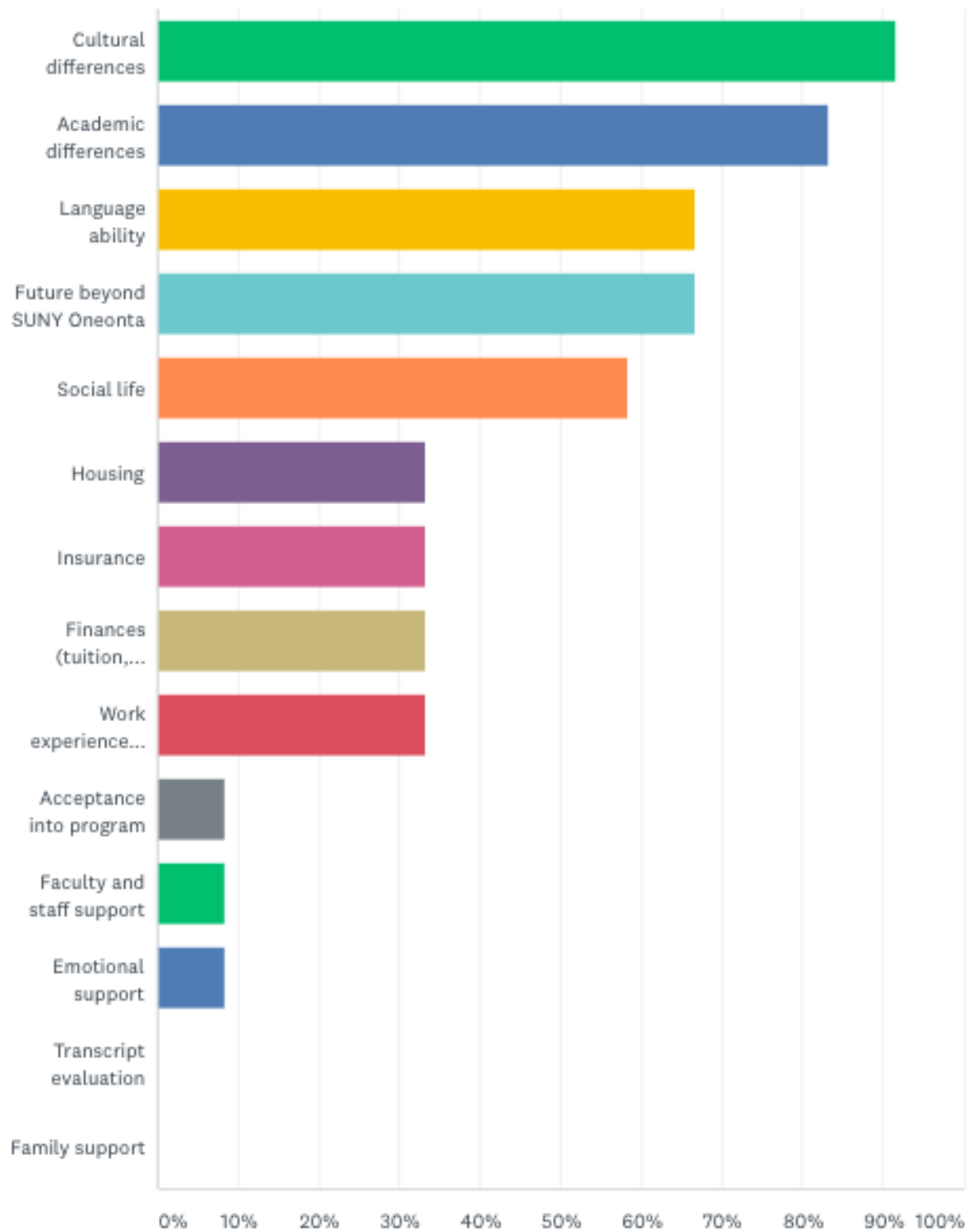
Indulgence - Restraint World map (based on WVS)



(Source for Figures 2-7: Geert Hofstede, e. a. (2017, 8 23). *The 6 dimensions model of national culture*. Retrieved from Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede on culture: <http://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/>)

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Figure 8: Bar graph depicting concerns before attending SUNY Oneonta ranked from most to least concerning:



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Figure 9: List of percentages of participants' responses related to concerns before attending SUNY Oneonta ranked from greatest to least

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Cultural differences	91.67%	11
▼ Academic differences	83.33%	10
▼ Language ability	66.67%	8
▼ Future beyond SUNY Oneonta	66.67%	8
▼ Social life	58.33%	7
▼ Housing	33.33%	4
▼ Insurance	33.33%	4
▼ Finances (tuition, budgeting, other expenses)	33.33%	4
▼ Work experience (on-campus job, OPT and so on)	33.33%	4
▼ Acceptance into program	8.33%	1
▼ Faculty and staff support	8.33%	1
▼ Emotional support	8.33%	1
▼ Transcript evaluation	0.00%	0
▼ Family support	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 12		

Comments (0)

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Appendix B – Survey Introduction and Consent Form

Welcome to the SUNY Oneonta International Student Satisfaction Survey

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by the Sarah Busche of the Office of International Education. You were selected as a possible participant in this survey because you are currently a non-US international student with SUNY Oneonta.

This survey will be utilized to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of SUNY Oneonta international student services and to identify areas that can be improved. Sarah Busche is the sole reviewer of this survey, and data collected will be analyzed and included in her graduate thesis as a reflection of experiences of international students during your time at SUNY Oneonta.

The risk involved in participating in this study is minimal, and no greater than what is ordinarily encountered in everyday life. Individual responses will have no impact on participant's academic, professional or personal standing with SUNY Oneonta faculty and staff. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, no personal information to identify individuals will be collected, and responses are completely anonymous.

There is no compensation for this survey, but the results obtained will be used to guide faculty and staff towards improvements in service to the SUNY Oneonta international student community in the future. Reviewers of the subsequent graduate thesis may include international education staff members within SUNY Oneonta's Office of International Education (OIE).

This survey is made up of 10 questions regarding your personal experience here during your time at SUNY Oneonta. Allow yourself 10-15 minutes to complete. Following this survey, please check a box to indicate interest in a one-time follow up interview of 30 minutes or less via Skype. This interview will be recorded to facilitate collection of data, and will be stored on a secure password-protected external hard disk drive until completion and submission of graduate thesis. This follow up interview is individual and voluntary, and may be arranged to take place at a time convenient to the participant.

Participants in this survey will remain anonymous. Reference to any individual participant from this survey in will not reveal name, age, country of origin or gender. Any information that is obtained from you and that can identify you will remain confidential, and will be

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secured on a password-protected external hard disk drive. Once collected, analyzed, included in graduate thesis and submitted by July 10th, 2017, this drive will be formatted and erased.

You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. Participation in this study is fully voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can choose not to answer particular questions. If you agree and then change your mind, you may drop out at any time without penalty or consequence. There are no right or wrong answers. Your honest and thoughtful input is appreciated. Thank you for your participation.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study you are encouraged to contact the Director of the Office of International Education: Dr. Vernon Larson (phone: 607-436-3369, or email: vernon.larson@oneonta.edu) or the chair of the Institutional Review Board at SUNY Oneonta: Dr. Craig Bielert (phone: 607-436-3219 or email: craig.bielert@oneonta.edu)

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below and click “Next”.

Clicking on the “agree” button below indicates that:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate

If you do not wish to participate in this study, please decline participation by clicking on the disagree button.

- Agree
- Disagree

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Appendix C - Survey Instrument

- 1) SUNY Oneonta is located in a small town in rural Upstate NY. Did this effect your choice in coming here? Why or why not?
- 2) What were your concerns before attending SUNY Oneonta? (Please check all that apply)
 - Academic differences
 - Cultural differences
 - Social life
 - Housing
 - Insurance
 - Acceptance into the program
 - Transcript evaluation
 - Finances (tuition, budgeting
 - Work experience (Examples, on-campus job, OPT, and so on)
 - Language ability
 - Family support
 - Faculty support
 - Emotional support
 - Future beyond SUNY Oneonta
 - Other (please explain) _____
- 3) What was helpful to you in the SUNY Oneonta academic environment? (To clarify, “academic environment” refers to classroom, professors, tutors, academic resources, library, and so on.)
- 4) What was a challenge for you in the SUNY Oneonta academic environment?
- 5) What tools and resources at SUNY Oneonta supported your learning?
- 6) What was helpful to you at SUNY Oneonta outside of the academic environment?
- 7) What was a challenge for you at SUNY Oneonta outside of the academic environment?
- 8) What tools and resources supported you in your daily life at SUNY Oneonta?
- 9) Were you a participant of the American Discovery course offered by the OIE? If yes, please comment on your experience. If no, please comment why not?
- 10) What advice would you give future international students of SUNY Oneonta?

If you are interested in participating in a brief follow up interview at your own convenience, please provide an email address at which you may be contacted here:

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You will receive a message from Sarah Busche (sarah.busche@mail.sit.edu) asking for a date and time of your choosing for follow up interview. Thank you very much for completing this survey. With your responses I hope to develop an accurate reflection of the international student experience, and help the faculty and staff of SUNY Oneonta continue improving this experience for generations of international students to come.

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Appendix D - Interview Consent Script

Hello, my name is Sarah Busche, and I am a graduate student at the SIT Graduate Institute. I was also the graduate assistant at the SUNY Oneonta Office of International Education for the 2016-2017 year. With the help of Dr. Vernon Larson, Director of the OIE, I am conducting interviews to better understand the international student experience here at SUNY Oneonta. If you decide to answer my questions, this interview will take about 20 to 30 minutes.

The purpose of this conversation is to give you information that will help you decide to be in this interview or not. Please feel free to ask questions about the purpose of this research, about the possible risks and benefits or anything else you would like to ask. When I have answered all of your questions you can decide if you want to be interviewed or not. This process is called informed consent.

This study is meant to understand the strengths and weaknesses of SUNY Oneonta International Student Services and related student services across campus that affect the personal and academic lives of international students, and how they may be improved.

The risk involved in participating in this study is minimal, and no greater than what is ordinarily encountered in everyday life. Your individual answers to my questions will have no impact on your academic, professional or personal standing with SUNY Oneonta faculty and staff. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, no personal information to identify individuals will be collected, and responses are completely anonymous. Meaning, I will not use your name in my research. I would like to use direct quotations from this interview, but will do so in a way that you are not identified.

There is no compensation for this survey, but the results obtained will be used to guide faculty and staff towards improvements in service to the SUNY Oneonta international student community in the future. Reviewers of the subsequent graduate thesis may include international education staff members within SUNY Oneonta's Office of International Education (OIE).

This interview will be recorded to facilitate collection of data, and will be stored on a secure password-protected external hard disk drive until completion and submission of graduate thesis. Once collected, analyzed, included in graduate thesis and submitted by July 10th, 2017, this drive will be formatted and erased.

I will ask you some questions about your experience at SUNY Oneonta. Some questions may be difficult to answer. Some questions may make you uncomfortable. If you want to skip a question, just tell me by saying "next question" and we will go on.

Do you have any questions for me before I ask for your consent?

May I have permission to interview you?

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May I have permission to tape this interview?

If I do not have permission to tape this interview, may I take notes?

May I have permission to use the information you give me in the paper I write?

Thank you for informing me of your consent. From here we will begin the interview.

Appendix E - Qualitative Data From Survey Categorized By Question

SUNY Oneonta is located in a small rural town in Upstate New York. Did this affect your choice in coming here? Why or why not?

- Yes. Because I wanted to travel, if here's near from the city, I could go to NYC or other cities more often.
- Yes, because I have grown up in a city so I wanted to experience something different.
- Yes, being a black person in a white town, you tend to expect the worst. While I experienced some microaggressions regularly, I wasn't harmed or insulted directly
- yes because it looks safe.
- Yes, because it was affordable and in a US city
- Yes it affected alot. I was concerned about to come here in Oneonta because Oneonta is located in very small town. However, it is relaxed and very comfy town.
- Yes, because I can relax with beautiful surroundings of the nature and I can concentrate on studying easily.
- Once I have seen the campus, it amazed me with its beautiful, peaceful, and nature connecting setting. The fact that the campus is outside of the city, made my decision easier.
- No, it has my major.
- It's more safe than city.
- No, I like here because there aren't many people
- By that time I don't really have a lot of choices.

What is/was helpful to you in the SUNY Oneonta academic environment? (To clarify,

"academic environment" refers to classrooms, professors, tutors, resources, library and so on.

- Asking questions to professor, library
- Most of my professors were amazing
- Professors were very helpful and understanding.
- CADE system, computer labs in the dorm,
- CADE writing lab, ESL tutor, library, my advisors
- First, tutor was very helpful to me to fix my paper for classes. And library, professor was helpful too. Some of professor support me to learn cultural differences because I am a international student.
- Whenever I had questions, the professors eagerly answered them and library is opening untill really late at night, so it was helpful for me to study especially for the finals.

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- The classrooms are very well equipped. Most of the professors I had were very useful and passed a lot of valuable information into my life. The Library has great amount of resources.
- People are friendly here and I like the library.
- library, classroom
- library

What is/was a challenge for you in the SUNY Oneonta academic environment?

- Listening lecture is sometimes difficult
- Very rarely i would come across language barrier.
- Americans are quizzed very differently. I have done more multiple choice questions than I ever thought I would do but I got used to it. I also did not like how most classes are focused on American issues instead of international issues yet we are clearly in a time of globalization. I fear that this kind of instruction will lead students to become as US-centric as their professors, resulting in a generation that undermines the rest of the world.
- lecture in the big classroom because it became a little hard for me to listen to what the professors said
- Essay writing, speaking up in class
- I was transfer student in Oneonta. So, compare to previous college, professor type and personality was totally different. Also, class environment, people's personality was different and actually more strict here. So it was huge challenge to adapt environment in here.
- When I took the tutoring with two American students, it was little bit hard to ask my own questions to the tutor.
- At the beginning, blackboard was a little bit chalanging, but nothing difficult to get used to. The only thing I dislike about it know is that not all of the professors use it. I think that all of the professors should use blackboard at least to put up grades.
- Language.
- language
- no
- There is no free time lab can be used for Fashion major

What is/was helpful for you at SUNY Oneonta outside of the academic environment?

- Peer mentors and my friends from the same country as me
- OIE, the people I met in general
- My peer mentor as a freshman was helpful and so were my peers and staff.
- I have a dining hall in my dorm
- Peer mentors (asking them questions) events and trips so I could experience the American life
- I cant say nothing helpful from outside of the academic environment, but actually it was not helpful alot.

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- My friends helped me a lot to accommodate in the school life in the US because they taught me so many things.
- The nice setting of the campus is definitely useful to keep peaceful mind.
- Friends.
- I can concentrate on my study.
- my professor from my prior school.

What is/was a challenge for you at SUNY Oneonta outside of the academic environment?

- Sometimes I miss food from home
- Keeping up the friendships; cultural differences affected my friendships a lot
- The limited knowledge of students here about different cultures and nationalities impeded my growth as a student
- sometimes my neighbor played loud music
- Getting places like walmart or other cities. Transportation is not good
- Just to be adapt myself to nee circumstance in small town.
- Not challenge, but I needed to endure the smell of weeds and some cigarettes.
- The food is mostly really difficult to consume. I think that there should be made a big change about it. I dont think that any student should spend their money on food outside of campus in order to escape the everyday dining hall food suffer. There is waste of food equal to about \$5,000 every day (based on the wilsbach dining hall research), but there is a reason why people throw that food away. Also I feel like it should be easier for the international students to find a job on campus since we cannot work off campus.
- Language.
- making friends
- Make me paid more money on transportation
- none

What tools and resources support your learning at SUNY Oneonta?

- ESL class is a good opportunity to speak more. I feel my english is become stronger!
- Watching tv series's
- Professors, OIE, my boss at Academic Advisement and my RD
- office hour and CADE tutoring
- Tutors at CADE helped me understand what format American professors wanted
- Variety of clubs and nice professor, who is really understanding about international students.
- People and facilities in Oneonta.
- Definitely books! But the price of the books are sometimes ridiculously expensive, so I cannot even afford them sometimes for my class. So, internet has been very valuable tool to me to gather information.
- Internet and Professor.
- Google translate
- library or other computer room

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What tools and resources support your daily life at SUNY Oneonta?

- Dining hall is in my dorm, is very convenient
- My RA is so kind and is always putting on events for us
- My friends can answer my questions because they have experienced some similar things. The OPT bus to go off campus.
- We have many different places to eat. The cafes are a great place to meet friends, like starbucks. I like going to various events on campus too
- Having the cafeteria inside the dorm in the winter is so nice!
- My friends for sure. And my RA! I know I can always go to them for help with an issue.
- Internet and Professor.
- peer mentors
- translator
- none

If you were a participant of the "American Discovery" course (GEOG 194) offered by the OIE, please comment on your experience. If you were not a participant, please comment why not.

- I could visit many places and understand American culture better.
- It was great opportunity for me to know about American culture and other countries' cultures.
- I never knew about it
- I was, and I think all fieldtrips were good experiences but I don't think the class was, but the presentation from other students gave me many interesting information
- Yes, I took the class. I liked the trips and the professors. The guest speakers were interesting and had a lot to say. Not too many people talked in class.
- I didnt participated because i even didnt know what was that.
- It was fun to learn American cultures, especially going to the museums of indigenous people was really impressing for me. I also liked apple picking. However, Boston and Philadelphia field trips were shorter and canceled, so that was really sad.
- I was not a participant of this course. The reason was just simple: not interested. But I think that it would be great class for every international freshman student.
- No, I don't know about it.
- it's good to know American culture.
- I like this class, it helps me know more about the US
- some advisor told me it is not necessary

What advice would you give future students of SUNY Oneonta?

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- American students are shy sometimes and wont say hello. It's ok to be shy too, but make effort to say hello to Americans!
- Try to mingle with everyone and not just stick with people who are from your country and speak your language.
- Don't be afraid to get involved and to speak your mind. You deserve to be here so don't ever let anyone make you feel like this is not your place. People will ask stupid questions but don't take it personally. They just don't know any better. They are Americans
- We can do anything we want unless it's illegal. But if we just wait for something new coming, they don't come.
- Be open to life in America, and learn some english slang
- Do participate club activity as many as you can. And do not hang out that much with people who came from the same country with you. If you will hang out only with your country people, you will waste time instead you meet various people came from different country.
- You are the person that need to act first, but when you ask for help, there's so many resources and people that support you, so don't hesitate to ask!!
- Grab all the opportunities that this school offers to you. There is definately a lot of them. Talk more to Americans in order to understand the culture and compare it with your own culture - it is great for personal development. If anybody comes to this school and talk to people only from your own culture, it seems to me like a waste of time and money.
- Be confidence and socialize.
- I will recommend international student take Geo194.
- none