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Successful Models for Enhancing International Students' Academic Success: Research and Recommendations

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Creativity Beyond Limits
Anna Laura Gomez, 2015

Successful Models for Enhancing International Students' Academic Success:

Research and Recommendations

Prepared by Joan Sweeney Marsh and Kathleen Oakey

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Created

Fall 2019 - Winter 2020

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Executive Summary

> *"International students are experiencing many barriers, implicit and explicit, inhibiting their ability to successfully settle, overcomer academic barriers, and successfully transition into skilled/well paid employment. .... A poor arrival and transition experience – without adequate and continued supports - can impact the entire educational experience, which can concomitantly influence international students' ability to persist academically, as well and successfully transition into the workforce and permanent residence."*
> *(Sullivan, 2017, p. 27-28)*

Based on the research, three different strategies for supporting International student academic success and retention are recommended:

1. **Transition programming or courses (pre- and post-arrival)** – to provide concrete strategies and instruction to support adaption from previous educational background to Sheridan's learning environment, equip students for long-term academic success and begin early the transition from school to work through early alignment of academic literacy to career skills development.
2. **Access to teaching faculty members, frequent career-related and community networking events and organized social activities throughout the student's journey** – to contribute to a sense of belonging and to encourage peer and community support, information sharing and regular networking opportunities with teaching faculty and industry representatives. Provide early guidance to career and employment landscape and link academic competencies to career skills development.
3. **Peer mentorship program** – to allow experienced International students to help new students navigate the academic environments; leverage first-language opportunities.

Combining all three strategies, to provide a multi-pronged approach, spanning from pre-departure and throughout a student's academic career, is recommended, including specialized programming to climatize International students to career and work integrated learning skills and resources. Finding ways to better integrate domestic students and international students in order

to support mutually beneficial intercultural communication and to enhance Sheridan's globalization strategy is strongly encouraged.

Practical recommendations for transition programming or courses include:

1. Build adjustment opportunities for incoming International students to adapt to their new learning environment.
2. Leverage the classroom environment (online and in-class) to promote international student supports; embed assistance directly in learning environment.
3. Work with Instructional Designers to enhance active learning activities; Utilize ESL specialists to support accessible programs, services and supports.
4. Include study skills as part of a larger series on leaderships skills, life skills, employability skills, etc.
5. Provide subject/discipline-based language training (e.g., English for Artists, English for Engineers) and academic jargon awareness (e.g., assignment, LSM, flipped classroom, elective) at arrival and throughout the first term of studies. Students, especially ESL Learners, need time to learn and understand specialized language that is not typically included in ESL instruction.
6. Provide incentives for participation – point system, certificates, awards, prizes, etc.
7. Involve domestic and 2nd Year above International students in delivering academic supports. Utilize first-language skills when possible in early stages of transition.
8. Encourage faculty to network and engage with International students outside of the classroom. Consider alternative networking facilitators (e.g., Industry and community experts, administrators) when faculty are unavailable. Collaborate cross-departmentally.
9. Consider scalability – how can we reach as many students as possible?

In addition, research emphasizes that International students truly benefit from a cultural shift at the institutional level, that faculty-student interactions are important in establishing a smooth transition, and that adequate training for faculty and staff alike to ensure international students receive the support they require at the course level. The need to move from a deficit narrative and to one of globalization and opportunity should be reinforced across the community. Interculturalizing the curriculum will allow all students to see themselves in their Learning and will act to promote a more inclusive experience for all students.

In support of this cultural shift, stakeholders across Sheridan emphasized a need to better understand International students' previous learning experiences in order to help prepare students for their new learning experience at Sheridan. To accomplish this, we need to explore and develop supports that will help to bridge populations of students from similar backgrounds (e.g., Indian education system) to Sheridan's learning environment.

Environmental and Research Scan

Approaches to international student retention and success are largely based on work by Astin (1984) and Tinto (2010) regarding retention and success strategies for general student populations. Andrade (2006), is often cited regarding adjustment factors specifically for international students.

In 2011, the University of Windsor completed one of the most comprehensive studies on international student retention in Canada. They identified a variety of retention risk factors, recommendations for action, and list several departmental strategies that have proved successful at UW. See http://www.uwindsor.ca/international-development/sites/uwindsor.ca.international-development/files/final_report_sisrp_july_26_2011_0.pdf

Peer Mentoring

PROGRAMS			
YorkU	Global Peer Program	Matches experienced International students with new International students. Includes participation in events and activities.	York International
Humber	Connect	Matches returning International students with new International students. Includes participation in bi-monthly events and other campu activities.	International Centre
MemorialU	MUN Mentors (also see research article)	Matches senior, domestic students with new International students. Includes participation in multi-cultural events.	Internationalization Office
URegina	UR International Peer Advisor Program	Matches current domestic and international students with new international students. Includes participation in a variety of events, workshops, etc.	Global Learning Centre
UAlberta	Peer Program	Matches UAlberta students with new international students. Includes participation in a variety of social events (eg. Coffee, sports, potlucks)	International Student Services
NAIT	International Student Peer Mentors	Matches current students with international and newcomer students. Includes a participation in a variety of on- and off-campus activities.	International Centre
UCalgary	International Student Mentorship Program	Matches current UCalgary students with new international students. Includes a meet and greet event.	International Student Services
UWaterloo	International Peer Community	Matches upper-year international students with new students. Includes monthly events and activities. Includes a meet and greet event.	Student Success Office
ULethbridge	International Student Mentorship Program	Matches continuing uLethbridge students with new international students. Includes a	International Student Services

		meet and greet event, and at least one other organized activity.	
Vancouver Island University	Peer Helper Program	Matches current students with international students. Includes training sessions, workshops and a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer service.	Faculty of International Education
BrockU	Mentorship Program	Matches upper year students with incoming international students. Includes a meet and greet event.	International Services
WesternU	International Peer Connection (IPC) Program	Matches upper-year students with new international students. Includes participation at various events and activities.	International & Exchange Student Centre
MacEwanU	Student Mentors	Matches a fellow student with a new international student.	MacEwan International
Wilfred Laurier	International Student Advisors (ISA)	Appointments can be scheduled, or arranged during drop-in hours	International Student Support
UToronto	Transition Advisors	Appointments must be booked online.	Centre for International Experience
UWindsor	Connecting4Success (see conference presentation)	Matches senior level students, professional staff and faculty members with new international students.	International Student Centre
Rutgers University	International Friendship Program	A cross-cultural social initiative that unites Rutgers international students and scholars with domestic Rutgers students and scholars and local community members in a comfortable environment that is conducive to friendship and learning.	Rutgers Global

RESEARCH STUDIES		
Effects of a peer program on International student adjustment.	Abe, J., Talbot, D. M., & Geelhoed, R. J. (1998). *Journal of College Student Development, 39*(6)	"The IPP participants scored significantly higher than the control group on the Social Adjustment subscale. This finding suggests that the ongoing, organized interactions created by the IPP enhanced the international students' interpersonal skills, which are crucial for success in the campus environment. Although not statistically significant, IPP participants scored higher than the control group on the SACQ full scale and subscales (see Table 4), indicating better self-assessed adjustment. The types of activities emphasized during the pilot IPP were mainly social events (e.g., tailgate parties, movies, homecoming events). The pilot program did not emphasize academics, group development, and university spirit, which may explain why the differences for the Academic Adjustment and Institutional Attachment subscales were not significant." (p. 545)

A qualitative investigation of U.S. students' experiences in an international peer program.	Geelhoed, R. J., Abe, J., & Talbot, D. M. (2003). *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(1)	"The evaluation of the International Peer Program in this study revealed that host students' experiences could be enhanced in key ways. First, a more accurate assessment of host students' expectations and inter-cultural competency must be implemented… Second, the pre-program training must address the needs of the participants revealed through this assessment. Based on the current study, potential topics may include: (a) assisting students in self-assessment of their own motivations and goals for participating in the program; (b) preparing students for the initial discomfort that often occurs when meeting their partners for the first time; and (c) helping students build better interpersonal skills, especially in intercultural relationships." (p. 15-16)
Helping the transition: Mentorship to support international students in Canada	Thomson, C., & Esses, V. M. (2016). *Journal of International Students, 6*(4), 873-886.	"The pattern of results obtained suggests that the mentorship program developed for this research was effective at facilitating positive changes for international students on the outcomes measured over time. The paired-samples comparisons for program participants suggest that they experienced increases on sociocultural and psychological adaptation, and a reduction in acculturative stress over time. The independent-samples comparisons suggest that in comparison to a control group, the program students, who had the opportunity to make a host-Canadian friend over the course of the semester, showed higher psychological adaptation and lower acculturative stress at the end of the semester." (p. 881)

Workshops & Courses

PROGRAMS			
YorkU	Global Connections	Student-led workshops. Held online, pre-departure.	York International
Humber	Passport to Success	Series of workshops. Students collect points for participation. Accumulated points result in prize achievement. Includes tutoring hours, etc.	International Centre
BrockU	Intercultural Awareness Program	A variety of options for intercultural training and development for both students and employees.	International Services
	Workshop Series	A variety of academic strategy workshops.	International Services
	Passport to Success	A variety of challenges to encourage students to discover new and creative ways to use English. Students submit their experiences for a chance to win a draw.	ESL Services

UWindsor (see conference presentation)	S.T.E.P.S. (Skills to Enhance Personal Success)	Sessions that introduce practical methods to help students improve learning and study skills	International Student Centre
	Bounce Back	8 week series during the Winter semester. Focus on effective learning strategies as well as social adjustments, stress, etc.	International Student Centre
URegina	Global Learning Centre Workshops	Series of workshops. Held weekly.	UR International
NAIT	Newcomer Booster See newsreport	Week-long program before the start of classes. Cost $100.	International Centre
Wilfred Laurier	Intercultural Certificate	A six-module program to support participants' development of intercultural skills, knowledge, and attitudes.	Global Engagement and Exchanges
WesternU	Canada Eh? Transition to Canada Series	A series of information sessions to help international students adjust to life in Canada.	International & Exchange Centre
	Start Strong – Strategies for Academic Success	An academic workshop series for new and returning international students. 3 workshops in series, scheduled for the start of term.	International & Exchange Centre
	Talking about Life in Canada (TALK)	Weekly discussion topics. (ex. making new friends, communicating across cultures, managing change and stress)	International & Exchange Centre

RESEARCH STUDIES		
The value of a first-year seminar: International students' insights in retrospect.	Andrade, M. S. (2009). *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*	"[Students] indicated that the seminar positively impacted their active learning behaviors although such behaviors are sometimes unfamiliar to those from different educational backgrounds. Students reported regular participation in curricular and cocurricular activities and involvement with diverse peers. Furthermore, these behaviors had generally increased in the first semester and continued to increase over time." (p. 500-501)
Reducing inequality in academic success for incoming college students: A randomized trial of growth mindset and belonging interventions. (citation only)	Broda, M., Yun, J., Schneider, B., Yeager, D. S., Walton, G. M., & Diemer, M. (2018). *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, 11*(3), 317.	"7,686 students, representing more than 90% of incoming first-year students at a large Midwestern public university, were randomly assigned to an online growth mindset intervention, social belonging intervention, or a comparison group. Results suggest that after the fall semester, the growth mindset intervention significantly improved grade point averages for Latino/a students by about 0.40 points. This represents a 72% reduction in the GPA gap between White and Latino/a students. Further, this effect was replicated for both spring semester GPA and cumulative GPA. These findings indicate that light-touch interventions may be a minimally invasive approach to

		improving academic outcomes for underrepresented students. Our findings also highlight the complexity of implementing customized belonging interventions in heterogeneous contexts." (Abstract)
An academic and cultural transition course for international students: Efficacy and socio-emotional outcomes	Brunsting, N. C., Smith, A. C., & Zachry, C. (2018). *Journal of International Students, 8*(4), 1497-1521.	"Results revealed significant increases in participants' (n = 42) perceived intercultural competence, perspective shifting, suspending judgment, self-advocacy, and interacting in class with students of other cultures; participants also reported significantly higher campus belonging and social support than a comparison group of students at the university who were not enrolled in the course (n = 32)." (p. 1497)
Improving the social, linguistic, and academic success of Chinese international students.	Dixon, B. A. (2014). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*	"This study showed that Summer Bridge did improve the transition process of Chinese students by acclimating them to the American classroom experience; by helping them to become comfortable both on campus and in the neighboring community; and by helping them to improve their English language proficiency through the practice of reading textbooks, writing academic papers, and speaking both inside and outside of class with fellow students and professors. This research suggests that institutions should develop international orientation programs that are longer in length and that help acclimate students to both the new academic and social setting." (p. 131)

Student Advisory Group

PROGRAMS			
UAlberta	International Student Advisory Committee (ISAC)	A student working group dedicated to sharing perspectives on international student programs and services and increasing international student engagement with the campus at large.	International Student Services
RESEARCH STUDIES			
Success programs for International students: A program initiative at New York University Silver School of Social Work	Cambell-Schifff, C., & O'Mealley, C. R. (2010). *Journal of Student Affairs at New York University, 6*	"The authors' findings indicate that international students at the SSSW are more engaged, contribute a great deal to the classroom and community, and succeed academically. As international student enrollments continue to grow, student and academic affairs professionals need to be prepared to adequately support the social and intellectual development of this student population. It is also evident that social capital or social and intellectual development may be achieved through providing support services to international	

		students that help them acclimate to the academic and social environments of their respective campus." (p. 6)

Academic Support and Programing Offered by Ontario Colleges

Algonquin	Provides series of workshops, as well as refers students to **Essential Study Skills website** (by Student Support Services).	Link
Humber	**Passport to Success**: Points-based series of workshops covering leadership skills, life skills, employability skills, and study skills.	Link
Mohawk	Provides a **Language & Culture Centre** (mostly social). Refers students to regular student services.	Link
George Brown	Provides **International Student Advising**. Refers students to regular student services.	Link
Seneca	Refers students to regular student services.	Link
Fanshawe	Refers students to regular student services.	Link
Conestoga	Refers students to regular student services.	Link
Canadore	Refers students to regular student services.	Link
Centennial	Refers students to regular student services. Provides International Student Advising.	Link
Fleming	Refers student to regular student services.	Link

(as of Jan 2020)

Sheridan Community Interviews

From January to March 2020, Joan Sweeney Marsh carried out a series of interviews with Administrators, Faculty and Staff from across Sheridan. List of participants:

- Danielle Palombi: Director, Learning Support and Early Alert Intervention Services
- Stephanie Samboo: Associate Dean in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences who oversees the ESL program
- Sara Cumming: Professor of Sociology with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Mark Orlando: Associate Dean, School of Applied Computing
- Mardy Fraser: Manager, Academic Initiatives, Office of the Provost
- Sheela Iyer: Professor & Program Coordinator, Sheridan Veterinary Technician Program
- Patrice Esson: Acting Associate Director, International Services
- Paula Ogg (May 2020): Educational Development Consultant, Centre for Teaching and Learning
- Kathleen Oakey: FHASS Liaison Librarian
- Mark Chapman: Executive Director, Integrated Planning and Analysis
- Janene Christiansen: Deputy Registrar, Enrolment Services

External Interviews - Phone Call Responses

NAIT

Call With: Freya Fu and Patrick Sullivan
Meeting Notes: Wednesday, July 31st, 2019

UAlberta

Call With: Kumarie Achaibar-Morrison
Meeting Notes: Tuesday, July 2, 2019

UAlberta

Call With: Kumarie Achaibar-Morrison
Meeting Notes: Tuesday, July 2, 2019

Further Reading

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