

A Training Model for Extended Orientation and Cross Cultural Training for International Students

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When international students arrive on a host US campus, they usually bring very little, if any, knowledge of the US education system from their home countries. While these students' knowledge of world politics and geography may be far superior to that of many US students, international students have little reality-based awareness of US culture. Most international students see US "culture" depicted on television and believe this is what the US is like. Newly arrived international students need a realistic picture of the culture in which they will study and live during their US academic career. Additionally, these students need specific information on: (1) rules and regulations of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service; (2) academic policies and procedures at their university, what is expected of them as students, classroom procedures, and US teaching styles, (3) educational services, and (4) personal adjustment and health care services.

Design of the Extended Orientation and Cross-Cultural Training Course

The University of the Pacific, a small, liberal arts college of 4,000 students in Stockton, California, designed a unique extended orientation and cross-cultural training course titled "Director's Seminar" to meet the needs of its international students, beginning in the Fall 2000 semester. The course met one night per week for eight weeks. Each class was scheduled for two hours, provided one semester unit of credit, and was required for all newly enrolled undergraduate international students (approximately 80 per year). Graduate students were required to attend the first week's session only. Students who came from countries that speak English as their first language (i.e., Australia and England) or students, who have lived or studied in the US for a number of years, do not experience the same academic difficulties as their counterparts from other countries and do not have the same needs. We do, however, recommend that undergraduate international students in these categories participate in the extended orientation and cross-cultural training course; we have found that they lend a great deal to the discussion and interaction during class.

The Course description and objectives were

The course objective is to aid international students in their cultural adaptation to life and learning in the United States. It is anticipated that students will learn the basic characteristics of US American life and the US educational system. The course helps students:

- Develop adjustment skills necessary to participate in a US university culture
- Evaluate their own culture in relation to US American culture
- Become knowledgeable about the basic traits of US American life
- Use these skills to become an effective student in the US.

The two textbooks required for the course were *American Ways: A Guide for Foreigners in the United States* (Althen, 1988) and *Strategies for Success at UOP* (Snyder, 2001). The Althen text described the basic characteristics of American culture and underlines how they are different from the ways of other cultures. The Snyder text took students through the transition to Pacific and taught them how to approach the learning process and succeed academically. Time management, note taking, and test taking skills are all addressed, and students learned how to interact with professors and about computing a GPA.

The Director of International Programs and Services has traditionally been the instructor for the course, and facilitates discussions about culture shock, cross-cultural communication, and communication styles. Students were given three observation assignments, and each student was required to write a short essay on each observation using the D-I-E (Describe-Interpret-Evaluate) method (see Althen, 1988).

Collaboration with Other Campus Units

The course draws on the expertise of faculty and staff across campus, which, due to its small size, is extremely collaborative, especially between academic and student affairs. Key administrators are invited to be guest speakers and make presentations. The Director of the Educational Resource Center (ERC), the program that provides the academic support on campus and the basic skills courses for the campus, discuss how the use of the Center's services emphasize the importance of skills classes, and teaches study skills needed for survival in college, including note taking, memory techniques, and time management. A second key collaborator is the Coordinator of the Office of Retention Services, which offers referral and support programs that provide preferred tutoring and other support services to students. A third key administrator is the Director of the Counseling Center, who provides a discussion of stress management and how to cope with stress and adjusting to a new culture, as well as self-referral techniques to the Counseling Center on campus. Fourth, the Director of the Health Center discusses health care in the US and at the University and cultural differences and similarities when seeking health care. Finally, the Director of the Student Advising Center discusses adjustments to the US academic system, what is expected of students, classroom procedures and teaching styles, and academic policies and procedures at the University.

Student representatives are also invited to make presentation in the course. A group of returned US study-abroad students, continuing international students, and the president of the Associated Students of the University of Pacific speak to the class about living and studying at the University.

Strengths of Having an Extended Orientation Course for International Students

The greatest strength of the current model is the collaboration and support given to the project by campus administration, faculty, and staff. By having key administrators and student representatives come to the class, new international students not only receive necessary information, but also are introduced to the leaders of critical campus support units. The weekly meetings allow for a slower-paced orientation and cross-cultural training than international students would have received during a typical orientation program. Student feedback has been positive and the syllabus has been modified each semester based on feedback from students and presenters.

References

- Althen, G. (1988). *American ways: A guide for foreigners in the United States*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.
- Snyder, V. (2001). *Strategies for success at UOP: A survival handbook for UOP students*. Stockton, CA: Educational Resource Center, University of the Pacific.