Supporting International Undergraduate Students’ Academic Needs: How Assessment Can Inform Programs and Practice

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YOUR EXPERIENCES

• How many of you work here at Ohio State? Are from other institutions?

• How many of you work exclusively with international students?

• Has your institution surveyed your international student population?

• Does your institution have specialized academic workshops for international students? On what topics?
SESSION OVERVIEW

- Case Study
  - How the Partnership Began
  - Need-assessment: Procedures and Results
  - Workshops: Development and Feedback

- Discussion & Questions
HOW THE PARTNERSHIP BEGAN
 IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

• Inter-office collaboration is key to addressing international students’ needs!
• Our needs assessment survey and workshops developed from a partnership between the Office of International Affairs and the Dennis Learning Center
• Individually neither of our offices would have had access to the full picture of international students’ needs, or possess all the tools for how to address them
In ten years, the make-up of Ohio State’s international student population has changed dramatically.

- **In 2004:**
  - Total international student population: 4,044
  - Number of undergraduates: 1,439
  - Number of undergraduates from China: 50

- **In 2014:**
  - Total international student population: 5,711
  - Number of undergraduates: 3,159
  - Number of undergraduates from China: 2,234
IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSMENT

• With shifting demographics came a “feeling” that there was more we could be doing to help students, especially undergraduates
  • Increasingly fielding questions outside our customary realm of expertise (immigration)
• Current approach needed revision
  • OIA had previously offered academic workshops to international students, but they were not customized, and attendance was relatively low
• How best to turn anecdotal evidence into concrete solutions?
• Two types of assessment, to inform our workshop development:
  • Student Needs Assessment Survey
  • Faculty & Staff Focus Groups
NEEDS-ASSESSMENT: FACULTY & STAFF
FACULTY AND STAFF FOCUS GROUPS

- 10 focus groups held
  - some with faculty and staff all from one college, some with mixed participants
- Different perspective from that of students
  - Greater awareness of the context of the larger student body
  - More historical knowledge
  - Sometimes a lack of knowledge of:
    - Non-US culture
    - Immigration restrictions on international students
    - Resources already available and being utilized by students
FACULTY AND STAFF FOCUS GROUPS

- Most consistent feedback:
  - On the whole, international students are very strong academically— and more so now than ever
  - English language ability is the number one predictor of success— however, teasing out language competency and cultural competency is difficult
  - International students arrive with scant knowledge of US academic culture— steep learning curve
    - i.e., academic conduct
    - i.e., role of an academic advisor
Most significant challenges for students:
- “Nuts and bolts” of being a student (course registration, transfer credit evaluation, etc.) – added layer of complexity
- Class participation
- Interacting with American classmates
- Writing assignments
- Understanding cultural references in class (TV shows, jokes, etc.)

It is necessary to go “above and beyond” to meet international students’ needs
- But how much accommodation is reasonable?
NEEDS-ASSESSMENT: STUDENT SURVEY
SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

- December 5, 2013 – January 17, 2014
- Email sent to all undergrad int’l students (N = 3,241)
- 433 respondents (response rate: 13.36%)
- A total of 383 responses were used for the analyses after removing incomplete responses.
SELF-RATED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Overall English Proficiency

(Mean: 3.54, SD: .86)
In general, how challenging is it for you to study at Ohio State?

(Mean: 2.91, SD: .98)
PERCEIVED DIFFICULTY & IMPORTANCE

- Writing (13 items): Difficulty = 2.29, Importance = 3.86
- Online Writing (4 items): Difficulty = 1.94, Importance = 3.54
- Speaking (6 items): Difficulty = 2.56, Importance = 3.98
- Reading (4 items): Difficulty = 2.22, Importance = 4.03
- Listening (4 items): Difficulty = 2.12, Importance = 4.22
- Interacting w/ Instructors (2 items): Difficulty = 2.46, Importance = 4.12
- Interacting w/ Amer. Classmates (2 items): Difficulty = 2.81, Importance = 3.98

1. Not at all difficult/important
2. Little difficult/not very important
3. Somewhat difficult/important
4. Very difficult/important
5. Extremely difficult/important
10 MOST DIFFICULT TASKS FOR STUDENTS W/ LOW ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (N=130)

1. Building relationships with American classmates
2. Building relationships with instructors
3. Working in groups with American classmates
4. Giving presentations in class
5. Understanding/ participating in class discussions
6. Asking questions in class
7. Discussing academic performance with faculty
8. Discussing ideas with your professor
9. Grammar
10. Communicating with group members

* W: Writing, S: Speaking, I: Interacting w/ Instructors or American Classmates
TO WHAT DEGREE DO THE FOLLOWING ISSUES MAKE LEARNING DIFFICULT FOR YOU?

Language barrier: 2.96
Cultural barrier: 2.75
Insufficient time to prepare for class: 2.51
Inadequate knowledge of material: 2.47
Lack of acad. support outside of the classroom: 2.43
Lack of supplemental materials: 2.30
TO WHAT DEGREE DO YOU NEED HELP IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS TO IMPROVE YOUR LEARNING?

1. Overcoming math anxiety: 2.43
2. Learning test-taking strategies: 2.96
3. Improving study skills: 2.96
4. Understanding and using library resources: 3.11
5. Time management skills: 3.18
6. Improving reading skills: 3.49
7. Improving writing skills: 3.69

1 (No need) 2 3 4 5 (High need)
WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE AND PREFERENCES
STUDENTS WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY ATTENDED A DLC WORKSHOP

- Yes: 43%
- No: 57%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>suggestions</th>
<th>Response examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More interaction, practice, and discussion</td>
<td>“Involve more the audience by allowing them to participate”</td>
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<tr>
<td>More specific topics &amp; details</td>
<td>“More details and specific situations expected.”</td>
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<td>Culture-related topics</td>
<td>“Hope to have workshop about culture adaptation for international students.”</td>
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<td>Better advertisement</td>
<td>“Let more people know the workshops”</td>
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<td>Upload presentation materials</td>
<td>“I think it would be helpful if the powerpoint or lecture notes could be posted online.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>More time schedules</td>
<td>“Offer more time schedule for workshops”</td>
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HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO ATTEND THE FOLLOWING WORKSHOPS?

- Building confidence in participating in classroom discussions
- Preparing class presentations
- Preparing papers
- Communicating with instructors
- Becoming familiar with American classroom etiquette
- Developing strategies to succeed in the U.S. classroom
- Writing effective emails

English Proficiency:
- Low
- Mid
- High

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 Very likely
Avoiding procrastination

Taking effective notes in class

Avoiding plagiarism

Stress less

Learning styles

Strategic, confident test taking

Participating in effective study groups

HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO ATTEND THE FOLLOWING WORKSHOPS?

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 Very likely

English Proficiency
Low
Mid
High
COMPARISON OF FACULTY/STAFF AND STUDENT FEEDBACK

• Commonalities:
  • Building relationships with American students is very difficult
  • The “language barrier” is the number one barrier to learning, followed by the “cultural barrier”
  • Improvement of writing skills is one of the strongest needs
  • International transfer students struggle more than those who begin as freshmen

• Differences:
  • Listening skills– self-rated as relatively high by students, and low by instructors
  • E-mail communication– rated as relatively low difficulty by students, but faculty and staff find this skill lacking
WORKSHOP DEVELOPMENT

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- Professors from Department of Teaching & Learning and Fisher College of Business - anonymous online survey
WORKSHOPS OFFERED SP 14

- (1) Preparing Papers: Writing Strategies for International Students (customized)
- (2) Developing Effective Study Skills: Memory Tools and Reading Strategies (customized)
- (3) Communicating with Faculty and Instructors (NEW)
- (4) Building Confidence in Participating in Discussions and Preparing Class Presentations (NEW)
- (5) Keys to Strategic, Confident Test Taking (customized)
EVALUATIONS

- Level of study (grad/undergrad)

- I felt that the workshop was well organized.

- I will be able to use what I learned in this workshop for my future [academic work].

- Overall, I found this workshop helpful for improving my [learning].

- How was the pace of the workshop? (1 = too slow, 5 = too fast)

- What was most valuable about this workshop?

- If you had a couple of suggestions to improve this workshop, what would they be?
USING FEEDBACK

• Have made enhancements to workshops based on evaluation data and presenter reflections

A longer session will be more helpful in order to cover the two big topics (both "participating in discussions" and "preparing presentations.") The participants actively engaged in the discussion and shared their own experience. --> allocating longer time for each activity will be helpful.

Example of presenter’s notes following the session.

• Sessions will be offered multiple times
• Longer and more interactive
• Clarifying what is/is not covered
What ideas or examples do you have related to supporting international undergraduates’ academic needs?

What role can assessment and evaluation play?
QUESTIONS?

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