

## Providing Educational Hospitality for International Students: A Student Affairs Intervention for Higher Education

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### Abstract

This thesis examines past and current political tensions and anti-immigrant sentiment along with the impacts they have had on the United States University. I focus on the international student experience attaining access to a United States education and their experiences once they are on campus. The context given proves how past and current events may hinder international students to feel welcome. I explore ways in which the United States university may create a more hospitable experience for them. An intervention of bridging the gap between domestic and international students is introduced as a step toward a more hospitable, educationally enriching experience.

**Keywords:**

Educational  
Hospitality,  
Intervention and  
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## **Background to the Study**

In recent years, international students have been facing visa problems during their application process in the United States. They are being denied visas, having visa applications delayed, being questioned, being forced to take semesters off, and facing potential political tension. This further complicates how their educational experience goes while they are studying and living in the United States. According to Anemona Hartocollis (2019) of *The New York Times*, “University officials say the number of visas going through extended security checks has spiked under the Trump administration. The government has cracked down on international students who overstay their visas, issuing harsher penalties on violators. Processing fees for student and scholar visas have risen sharply. And slowdowns in processing applications from international students and scholars for internships and jobs have limited career opportunities”.

In addition to these visa hurdles, anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States is not gone. University of California President Janet Napolitano (2019) released the following statement following a ruling on the cutting down of student visas, which she implied was connected to anti-immigrant sentiment intentions from the President. Today's decision by the Trump administration to expand the definition of “public charge” sends a detrimental message internationally—that the United States does not want other countries to send their best and brightest here to study and add to the intellectual exchange at our universities, to conduct important research, and to contribute substantially to our economy, among other things... this not only leads to harmful, unintended consequences but also raises questions about the true intent behind the federal government's unnecessary and misguided action.

In summary, because of this sentiment, international students are subject to feeling unwelcome which can add to acculturative stress and hinder their ability to thrive in the United States. This is very different from what I as a United States citizen experienced while studying abroad. I studied abroad in Spain in 2015, and while I realize political tensions have heightened since then, I had only one negative experience once when someone judged me for being “adumb American.” This, however, did not impact my amazing experience. I never had a problem with my Spain visa. Many people spoke my native language. I felt instantly welcome. This one man's words did change my view of myself. This, however, is not always the case for international students who study in the United States. Along with these current visa complications, they often face a lack of language support, are often isolated socially, and therefore can have trouble making connections.

Professionals in the field of Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs should be aware of international student realities and be willing to make programs and curriculum accessible to them. There are things educators and student affairs professionals cannot control for the benefit of international students. We cannot, for example, singlehandedly change visa policies, political tensions, and economic climate for our students to be more secure in their time abroad. These factors can cause real fear for international students of all backgrounds, especially those who may be marginalized because of religion or race. Along with things we

cannot change or ensure are things that we can strive to guarantee for students in order to impact and improve their experience. The university has the responsibility to provide more than just a bed, meals, and class schedules. Ensuring students have access to things like relevant advising, cultural excursions, events for socializing, and competent educators are also needed to provide a hospitable educational experience. Students should always be treated as full participants in the educational setting.

I became aware of my own privileges during my undergraduate experience when I took a class called “Intercultural Communication.” I was challenged in my own biases and got to express myself while others expressed themselves. For our final project, I was in a group with 4 other individuals, all of us from different backgrounds, races, and cultures. Our project introduced counter cultures as we acted as people more oppressed than us. It was eye opening and was exactly what I needed to wake up. While the countercultures we were performing were not people from other countries, we dug deep into our emotions and expressed how we feel about people who are 'cast out' of society. I kept this memory with me and decided to be kinder, gentler, and get to know people before I judge. I think this experience woke something in me. I suddenly put my dream to reality and studied abroad to challenge myself even further. Upon graduation, I worked for marketing, communications, and research. I knew there was something else calling me. Yet, I felt most fulfilled when I was traveling and learning.

I finally decided to pair my passion for traveling with my desire to ensure a great experience on college campuses for international students. By no means do I want to appear as having a savior complex. I hope to work hands-on *with* international students to learn from them, not conform them. I strive to listen to their stories and work to provide a meaningful educational experience while they are here in the United States. My goal for researching and writing on this thematic concern is to highlight what universities currently do to ensure a suitable environment and highlight what could be changed for the benefit of international students. I have a vision of a university where international students are not isolated or ostracized by their peers or professors. While we have responsibilities to host the students, we should be helping them thrive by ensuring the opportunity to take relevant classes toward their degree or interest, experience cultural excursions, participate in events for socializing, and interact with competent educators are also needed to provide an enriching experience.

Often times international students have no mentors or peers in their position with whom they can relate, receive advice from, or seek comfort from. These concerns are important for Student Affairs Professionals to address because the university can be seen as a direct reflection of society. If the university is isolating our international students, these students have the feeling of being an outsider, and this could ruin their experience in the country overall. Hence, this could be damaging not only to the international student, but also to the standing of institutions of higher education in the United States. This thesis will aim to address these concerns.

### **Thematic Concern**

Students hold a certain amount of responsibility to make their educational experiences impactful and meaningful, but they must be appropriately accommodated to do so. Usually their experiences will require necessary support and resources from their institution of study to do so. International students are especially in need of these support systems and resources. They deserve to feel like a member of the community that is the university. Universities should be treated as and feel like a community where all students are welcome to learn, to express themselves and to live authentically.

### **Conceptual Framework Historical Influences**

Given the nation's past with anti-immigrant practices and sentiments, some higher education institutions are being negatively impacted due to these international student hurdles. Institutions are having to assist students with visa concerns and travel bans. The Trump administration appears to be carrying on these past anti-immigrant sentiments and thus the historical context of anti-immigrant perceptions will be discussed in this thesis. As institutions strive to be the best, they take in a great number of international students. The benefits of international student enrollment include more money for the university, diversity, and in some cases, claims of merit. Yet, the United States' historically problematic relationships with global citizens must be investigated to fully understand international students today.

### **Philosophical Foundations**

I am looking to impose change for international students by using historical and neoliberal lenses that specifically focus on the nation's history with anti-immigrant sentiment. To support these views, I will draw on Schlossberg's *Mattering and Marginality* (1989) for support in caring for international students who may find themselves feeling marginal. Claudia (2015) and Jacques (2000) provide conceptualizations of the importance of hospitality and prove how educational settings require unique hospitable practices for students to thrive. I will also touch on David Harvey (2005) and Christopher Newfield (2016) for how the university is shaped on neoliberal practices. Michael Oakeshott shapes my idea of how the university should be running for student benefit and not as a machine producing products of economy. This paper will argue for the importance of caring for our students inside and outside of the classroom because of past and current events that may impact their experience.

### **Connections to ACPA/NASPA Competencies**

Social Justice and Inclusion (SJI) from NASPA is the competency that shapes and will lead my research and programming. Social justice, according to NASPA (2015), "is defined as both a process and a goal that includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups and seeks to address issues of oppression, privilege, and power" (p. 30). Furthermore, "this competency involves students affairs educators who have a sense of their own agency and social responsibility that includes others, their community, and the larger global context" (p.30). I hope to use this

competency to the fullest and learn more about my role in the university as a white, cis-gendered female who is not often included in discourse revolving around injustices because of individual privilege. This competency will highlight the basis for my programming: how I train my CulturED staff, how I approach my international students, and how we, as a group will decide to maintain presence and connect with other offices and officials on campus.

### **Narrative Philosophy**

Jacques Derrida has said, “Hospitality is due to the foreigner, certainly, but remains, like the law, conditional, and thus conditioned in its dependence on the unconditionality that is the basis of the law” (p.73). What this means to the university is that hospitality is a basic requirement for allowing international students to come to United States campuses, but it is often conditional, being contextualized by students' language, race, and religion, as well as the United States' anti-immigrant culture. I believe hospitality must be reframed should the hospitality not be enough for said “foreigners”. Education should provide pathways for students to reach their fullest potential. Education, inside and outside of the classroom, should take place in a safe community that respects, listens to, and cares for all students. My strong belief and philosophy of education is that all students, regardless of their identities, have the right to a full educational experience that includes academic and personal support. My thematic concern focuses on international students having a lack of hospitality given to them inside and outside of the classroom. I have discovered many things I must consider for my “theory to practice” and in the following sections I will discuss these theories that inform my practice.

### **Schlossberg on Mattering and Marginality**

Schlossberg's (1989) theory of Mattering and Marginality is an important framework for understanding the experiences of international students. Schlossberg (1989) says, “Every time an individual changes roles or experiences a transition, the potential for feeling marginal arises” (p.3). Schlossberg's (1989) theory hints at acculturative stress. According to the model, marginality promotes contradictions in a person's mind. For example, love/hate will increase sensitivity, self-consciousness, and feelings relating to inferiority (p.7). There are four dimensions of mattering. Attention, Importance, Ego-Extension, and Dependence (p.9-10). I use this for inspiration of creating effective programming that begins before our students even arrive on campus so they have a sense of belonging right off the bat. As relates to my programmatic intervention, Schlossberg (1989) said: By examining across spheres of life, we can get a more complete picture of the individual. People may feel they matter too much at home and not enough at work. This information provides some guidelines for intervention. But describing marginality and mattering is not enough. There is a critical need to help people deal with marginality so that they will eventually matter. Rituals can help. They sometimes occur naturally, but if they do not, then inattention to ritualistic passage can result in the individual feeling isolated (p.12). In this case, we will replace home and work with country and host country. By implementing programming that connects international students intentionally with domestic students and their host country and campus, feelings of isolation may diminish and improve the educational experience.

### **Ruitenberg, Derrida, and Other on Hospitality**

Claudia Ruitenberg (2015), Michael Strange and Anna Lundberg (2014), and Jacques Derrida (2000) provide my basis for the importance of hospitality on campus and what it means to provide a hospitable education in order for students to thrive educationally. International student educational experiences in this paper will include academic and extracurricular experiences. According to Ruitenberg (2015), “the student should not be locked into the position of guest” (p.26). Ruitenberg's (2015) work provides a case of the importance for hospitality and emphasizes how educational settings require hospitality that fully integrates students, moving them beyond “guests.” One of the most impactful lines from Ruitenberg's (2015) view on hospitality is: hospitality is not an educational objective that students must meet, not an ideal of principle to be taught. Not a form of moral education. Rather, it is an ethic to be enacted by the I who finds themselves in the position of educator. An ethic of hospitality in education is about educating hospitality. An ethic of hospitality cannot be taught through direct instruction; it can only be enacted ... An ethic of hospitality is an expression of the educator's responsibility and not a project to shape students into particular kinds of moral subjects ... the educator models and demonstrates an awareness of their own indebtedness and condition of reception but in a way that does not make direct demands of students (p. 138). This puts beautifully and matter of factly just how significant our roles as educators are when dealing with our student populations. We cannot be taught empathy and love, we can only act on it. Higher educational professionals must enact this kind of hospitality for international students.

Derrida (2000) highlights specifically that hospitality should be given without the expectation of reciprocity. He said: absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner ... but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity or even their names. This speaks to the responsibility of the university to provide, regardless of what the student may offer the university. For example, a student on scholarship should not be treated more ethically than students who may be paying in full. Money, status, and power of family should not influence any decisions of treatment from the university to the student. According to Strange and Lundberg (2014), “to give hospitality is a means by which society can both perform and extend its own being, to encompass a wider body of humanity, but also make its existence materially felt through the lives of those individuals” (p. 203). This speaks to the need of providing fair housing, classes, food, opportunity, and individual needs of the students without expecting the reciprocity that Derrida mentions.

### **The Idea of the University**

Michael (1950) and Christopher (2016) shape my idea of how the university should be running for student benefit. According to Oakeshott (1950), “A university is not a machine for achieving a particular purpose or producing a particular result; it is a manner of human activity” (p. 24). Likewise, as stated by Newfield (2016), “Universities are the only social institutions devoted to helping the rising generation master coherent parts of the vastness of

human knowledge *and* acquire personal capabilities that will renew themselves throughout their lives” (p.5). These authors highlight that universities hold great potential to teach and shape students in profound ways. Without the environment they require to thrive in, I argue that this potentiality to develop as a human is slightly or fully diminished. If universities cannot provide for international students based on different life circumstance, we cannot expect them to reach their fullest potential. I hope to prove the need for maintaining a hospitable environment for international students to thrive inside and outside of the classroom. In order to fix issues faced by international students, such as their lack of feelings of belonging, they must be included in the planning process for such changes. One of the first steps is recognizing international students for who they are culturally and individually.

### **My Philosophy and My Concern**

Often you will see international students grouped together in specific buildings on campus, isolated from domestic students. They also seem to be made to assimilate into the United States culture without much explanation of cultural differences in the United States. Assimilation is defined as educational programs designed to absorb and integrate cultures into the dominant culture. According to Joel (2001), (North) American schools have primarily used assimilation programs to integrate immigrant groups into mainstream (North) American culture (p.8). While students are never outright forced to assimilate, I believe some current practices put in place in our institutions make no room for any other way because they are informed by the past. International students are given little time to acclimate to the food, surroundings, everyday difference, and so on. Practices that continue international student isolation are the easiest to do for the university as the budgets and existing policies can remain intact. Examples include isolated classes, little interaction in campus activities with domestic students, and little encouragement to interact with those outside of their study abroad group. This can lead to a lot of dissatisfaction with overall experience with their time here in the United States. I wish to challenge this stagnant behavior and pose a question to the university so it may reflect on who their practices and policies actually benefit.

### **Leadership and Higher Education**

Leadership in higher education is important and should be used as a tool for the benefit of our students. Being proud of all programming is crucial. Student needs, desires, and limitations should be the driving force for all programming. Without intention and collaboration with our students, there is an imbalance of power. This imbalance has the potential to become harmful if students are told what they need and desire. Our students are who we aim to serve. In order to be accountable, we must meet students where they are and listen to what they need. We have the responsibility to seek feedback from various sources including best practices, research, and most importantly, from the students themselves. Effective leadership is leadership that aims to be useful and collaborative, not combative or forceful.

This intervention will serve as a way to provide an impactful, comfortable, and meaningful experience for students who are studying in the United States from another country. My goal

is for this program to create opportunity for community and socialization on campus and provide less risk for isolation. This program is meant for the benefit of international students, but will also involve domestic students, faculty, and staff. I want to emphasize the importance of keeping international students' individual needs and desires in mind while building and introducing this to a potential university.

Assumptions, ethnocentrism, and bigotry will have no place in the building of this program. The first thing to consider is that the program and all its' necessary elements must be attainable for the university. In order for the program to be successful, it must include participation from domestic students and international students, funding, training, and participating faculty and staff to be advocates and representatives for the program. CulturED will be providing a relational bridge between domestic and international students. This proposed program will hopefully flourish into a university-wide movement in which international students become no longer isolated and are given all tools to thrive. The program will include one-on-one student partnering (domestic student paired with international student, but can change depending on the length of time the international student has been in the United States and their personal preferences), events for all students to meet, and trips to enrich their cultural experiences. A significant amount of planning will come from the students. This one-on-one pairing will be for one semester and after the one semester, if the new international student happens to be staying at the institution, they will be invited to be a mentor. Building a sense of community this way could help the separation that many international students seem to face. Certain barriers could prevent international students from having the opportunity or desire to integrate.

### **Social Change Model of Leadership**

With CulturED, I not only have the opportunity to grow as a leader myself, but additionally the faculty, staff, and student partners do as well. I will keep this perspective in mind as I assess effective leadership measures on my part. I will implement leadership values that are articulated in Social Change Model of Leadership (1993). This is the style I envision for CulturED program building and maintenance. This leadership style is to “enhance student learning and facilitate positive social change” (p.24). In this model, the leader must seek to use tools for success for individuals, groups, and community. The 7C's that make up this model include Consciousness of Self, Congruence, Commitment, Collaboration, Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility and Citizenship. These C's are broken up into a flow chart. The Individual includes consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment. Group is made up of collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility. Last is Community which includes citizenship and society. According to the Higher Education Research Institute (1993),

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*the behavior of an individual; rather, leadership involves collaborative relationships that lead to collective action grounded in the shared values of people who work together to effect positive change (p. 16).*

*I am going to lead CulturED with positivity and hopefulness. I will anticipate roadblocks during the first year with planning and implementation but I hope to be able to acquire an excellent team. I hope to work closely with those involved, seek real-time feedback from faculty and staff, and be communicative with student leaders to ensure their needs are being met. I will aim to be the leader I always knew that I needed. Someone who barks orders and expects results is someone I would never be able to work under, nor would I expect to be able to lead like this. I strive for empathy, communication, and human connection.*

## **Assessment, Evaluation and CulturED**

### **Critical Action Research**

I have discussed important elements of CulturED that highlight why a program for international students is suitable for Critical Action Research (CAR). CAR is meant to lead an intervention on areas needing change, but only after fair and accurate observation of the community in question. I feel this process can lead to real change for these students during their time in the United States and can provide the university with a further, more accurate look at their international students. One must keep in mind that careful planning and intentionality must be present when implementing a project with CAR not stop at collecting information, there must be reason for all dialogue, programming, and interventions. Students should be accurately seen, represented, and accommodated.

This type of observation and assessment uses community engagement and dialogue to build rapport. CulturED seeks to do just that with all programs. Seeking feedback and this open dialogue will ensure student involvement and contribution to the intervention as a whole. The use of CAR for my purposes, will act as a way to advance social transformation in higher education by remaining open to facing challenges, and being willing to learn from others. Assessment will allow us to learn what our students need, desire, and require from the university. Ultimately, this assessment will provide pathways to create permanent improvement and change.

### **Evaluation**

I will evaluate the impact of CulturED by how the program made our students feel by asking them to complete mid-semester surveys. If the students ever need to talk open-endedly, I would ensure that they knew I was here for them. I would also look to ensure that there was a sense of community within our student pairs by conducting interviews and conversations with them. In order for CulturED as a whole to be a success, campus as a whole must be impacted and enthusiastic to help CulturED grow. I will attempt this by working with our sponsors and collaborating with other campus groups to create this lasting community.

This program is not for making profit but for the betterment of the international student experience. Although, in some ways, there is a return on investment. By creating an engaging experience for international students, more international students may want to attend. Enrollment of international students benefits the institution in many ways but one way is that they are full- bridge between domestic and international students. This proposed program will hopefully flourish into a university-wide movement in which international students become no longer isolated and are given all tools to thrive. The program will include one-on-one student partnering (domestic student paired with international student, but can change depending on the length of time the international student has been in the United States and their personal preferences), events for all students to meet, and trips to enrich their cultural experiences. A significant amount of planning will come from the students. This one-on-one pairing will be for one semester and after the one semester, if the new international student happens to be staying at the institution, they will be invited to be a mentor. Building a sense of community this way could help the separation that many international students seem to face. Certain barriers could prevent international students from having the opportunity or desire to integrate.

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A leader is not necessarily a person who holds some formal position of leadership or who is perceived as a leader by others. Rather, we regard a pay students. Currently, as mentioned in previous chapters, institutions are very concerned that their international student enrollment will be eliminated given travel bans. While we are not seeking a return on investment, secondary effects might just do so. The difficulty with recruiting international students and just letting them navigate by themselves is that they cannot or may not succeed. In many ways, it is unethical to take their money and just hope they succeed. My plan is intentional in helping them to succeed. We must seek to create a fulfilling hospitable educational experience for our students and their feedback is crucial as we move forward and implement change and improvements. Upon exiting the country, we will administer surveys to our international students on their experiences. For our Student Partners, we will be conducting exit

interviews. The exit interviews and surveys will inform us of their individual experience so that we may assess things like work and academic balance, program ideas, and anything they feel could benefit the future of CulturED. We will allow the students to give open ended feedback as well and follow up if they have programming ideas. The pair interviews may be the most important source of feedback. We can get a better idea of whether or not our pairing process works and should continue in the future. All of this feedback is necessary and fair for the students we will serve in the future.

### **Possibilities for CulturED**

This program would be most successful on campuses with a large number of live-in students and a campus that sees a large participation rate with campus initiatives. If this program were to be implemented on different type of campus, we may have to adhere to different rules with programs. For example, for a private university, we may have to embed some religion into the programming which could work, but only if it was ensured that no agenda had been pushed and that there was room for our students to discuss their own beliefs if they felt comfortable leader as one who is able to effect positive change for the betterment of others, the community, and society. All people, in other words, are potential leaders. Moreover, the process of leadership cannot be described simply in terms of the behavior of an individual; rather, leadership involves collaborative relationships that lead to collective action grounded in the shared values of people who work together to effect positive change (p. 16).

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## **Future**

Issues that CulturED does not out rightly address are gender, sexuality, or race issues. Based upon many current and past events on college campuses, there is often bias around gender and race. We could expand CulturED programming to cover these issues. The programming in Chapter 4 would need some adjustment. For training, we could add subjects on current events, sexism, institutionalized racism, homophobia, transphobia, etc. We could attempt to expand conversation with the international students sharing experience in their home country and how things are different in the United States. We must not be afraid to discuss our realities and fears. If the university were to find that students were feeling isolated as international students because of these factors, we could intervene and make microaggression and cultural competence training available for all students at the start of the fall semester to counteract any potential circumstances. The university will ultimately have to respond to any instances that create racist or sexist attitudes or situations.

As institutions of higher learning continue to seek out international student enrollment, it is important to incorporate programming to support student success. Inviting international students to study in the United States benefits the institution in many ways. It is imperative that we, as student affairs educators and higher education administrators understand the potential transition and acclimation issues faced by international students and develop an intervention that meets their needs. Basic hospitality and care for students is the first step in accomplishing this goal. Intentional programming and support is another step. As we face continued political discussions in our country, increasingly so in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we run the risk of marginalizing our international students even more than we might have done in the past. It is imperative that we create connections with our international students so they can thrive and survive as guest.

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