
Beyond The Immigration Services: The Role of the International Center in Promoting Intercultural Programs for International Student Success

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Abstract

International students have come to a specific country for a specific period of time for the purpose of obtaining a degree. The success for international students who are from various academic and social backgrounds is not only about educational achievement but also regarding social connection in a new academic community. One of the centers that promotes the success for international students is the International Center in every university. The purpose of this inductive study was to investigate the role of the International Center (IC) in promoting international students' success in college academically and non-academically. The theoretical framework of Tinto's (1975) student integration theory in higher education was used to guide the study while the data were collected through Interviews and observations with the director, the intercultural programs and training coordinator, and one international student adviser. The interview data and field notes obtained were organized and analyzed for regularities, patterns, and emerging topics. The results of the data analysis produced six salient themes: mission and vision, pre-arrival programs, arrival programs, ongoing programs, preventive programs, international students' challenges. The implications of the study are also discussed.

Keywords

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Introduction

Students essentially integrate into the college environment in an array of ways, and the college can support in that integration in a number of ways. But, why focus on the International Center? First, it is hard to imagine a college or university without an international center, it has international students. Second, the International Center (IC), which is under the Division of Student Affairs, can play a unique and important role to help international students succeed in academic and non-academic matters through its educational and social programs. Mainly in terms of its role, the International Center is committed to enhancing internationalization initiatives through immigration services, intercultural programs and cross-cultural exchanges, and collaborative efforts with academic and administrative departments. Third, success for international students who come from different educational and social backgrounds is not only regarding academic achievement but also regarding social involvement in a new educational community (Mukminin, 2019).

Avçılar and Gök (2022) who studied to compare the intercultural effectiveness of international and domestic students found that international students compared with domestic ones had a higher level of intercultural effectiveness. In terms of interventions, Aladegbaiye et al. (2022) suggested that universities can introduce programs that could improve international students' acculturation experiences at specific times. Additionally, Kuh et al. (2007) found that success in college related to "academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities; and attainment of educational objectives" (p. 10).

Fourth, international students can become important sources of diversity on university campuses in the United States and American students may take advantage of this situation in order to get used to working and studying with people from different countries and backgrounds (Zhao et al., 2005). In light of the importance of international students' existence in the university, the International Center plays an important role by providing programs and services in order to help them survive and succeed academically and socially. The purpose of this inductive study was to investigate the role of the International Center (IC) in promoting student success in college academically and non-academically for international students. The research question sought to answer, "*What are the programs for international students so that they persist and achieve their educational goals?*" Creating the conditions that support student success in college academically and socially is very important because student success in college may not be "solely the responsibility of students" (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 5).

Literature Review

The focus of the literature review was based on the findings from several studies that examine the link between the institutional conditions or factors and student success in college.

Institutional characteristics, student engagement, and student outcomes

One of the studies related to students' engagement and educational outcomes was done by Öz and Boyacı (2021) who found that student engagement significantly contributed to the students' GPA, the students' satisfaction, pursuing postgraduate education. Additionally, Pike et al. (2003) investigated the relationship between institutional mission and students' involvement and educational outcomes. Their study examined whether institutional mission, as represented by Carnegie classification (background, academic involvement, social involvement, college environment, integration of experience, gains in learning), is related to student learning and development. The participants in this study were a stratified random sample of 1,500 undergraduates from across the nation who completed the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ). The findings that emerged from this study are first students attending different types of colleges and universities reported having significantly different patterns of experiences in college. Students differed in terms of their academic involvement, social involvement, and perceptions of the college environment. They did not differ in their integration of diverse experiences and, with the exception of general education, did not differ in gains made during college. After controlling for student background characteristics, no significant differences were found in students' perceptions of the college environment, levels of academic and social involvement, integration of information, or educational outcomes by Carnegie classification. The findings suggest that the nature of students' educational experiences varies substantially from school to school including for international students and every institution in the US should provide academic and social support based on the nature of the students.

In addition, Kuh et al. (2008) in their study focused on the effects of student engagement on grade and persistence argued that most of the research examining the connections between student engagement and college outcomes were only based on single institution studies that did not always control for student background characteristics or other factors or institution-level data that can mask the effects of student-level variables. The purpose of the study was to find out the relationships between key student behaviors and the institutional practices and conditions that foster student success. The second purpose was to determine the effects of engaging in educationally purposeful activities on these outcomes for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The data for this study were from 18 baccalaureate degree-granting colleges and universities that administered the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at least once between 2000 and 2003. The authors analyzed the data by using ordinary least squares or logistic regression. The findings point to two conclusions: In terms of the educationally intentional activities, there is a positive connection between student engagement and academic outcomes as indicated both by their first-year grades and by their persistence during the first and second year of university (Kuh et al., 2008). Student engagement – a range of behaviors that institutions can influence with teaching practices and programmatic interventions such as first-year seminars, service-learning courses, and learning communities positively affects grades in both the first and last year of college as well as persistence to the second year at the same institution and

second, student engagement in every educationally intentional activity holds a compensatory impact on the 1st-year grades and persistence to the 2nd year of university at the same institution. The authors concluded that students benefited from early interventions and sustained attention at key transition points and students attending institutions that employ a comprehensive system of complementary initiatives based on effective educational practices were more likely to perform better academically, to be more satisfied, and to persist and graduate.

Besides, Kuh et al. (2005) in their book entitled -Student success in college: creating conditions that matter - present policies, programs and practices at nine private and 11 public colleges and universities that provide various types of support academically and socially for a number of students. The main points of the book are to present the findings of a two-year study at those 20 institutions conducted by Kuh et al. (2005) at the NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice at the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE). The research team called the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) consists of 24 scholars and practitioners. By using two regression models, the team selected the twenty schools from the 700 schools that participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) from 2000-2002. The authors concluded that there were six institutional factors or conditions that influence and shape high levels of student integration and persistence. The first is the 20 universities in the study state and share clear missions with their stakeholders, inform decisions and influence the routine operations of the schools. The second, the selected universities focus on undergraduate education and learning, utilizing active and collaborative learning activities, which show that these schools acknowledge their students possess different learning preferences and emphasize assessment of student learning outcomes. Third, the twenty universities adjust physical environments for educational enrichment. For example, some universities create internal gathering spaces that involve campus residences and areas in which students and faculty may naturally come together in ways that promote student engagement. Fourth, the 20 universities have created pathways to student success. Many institutions have instituted early warning systems that identify students at risk and have developed networks of individuals who are ready to support them. They also offer extensive training to advisors so that they can provide accurate and timely information to students. Fifth, assessment and accountability are hallmarks for the twenty universities. They frequently run both internal and external assessments of student performance and satisfaction and rely on data to inform their decision-making. Finally, the 20 universities show a shared responsibility for educational quality and student success.

Studies on international students

One of the studies on international students was done by Ammigan et al. (2021) who investigated whether the satisfaction and institutional recommendations were affected by students' nationality and destination country. They found that students' nationality and destination country considerably influenced satisfaction and recommendations. Also,

learning experience signified most for overall satisfaction while English language support and employability skills were mainly connected with institutional recommendations.

Additionally, Zhao et al. (2005) conducted a particular study on a comparison of international student and American student engagement in effective educational practices. Their study focuses on how the international students' engagement is effective in educational activities by comparing the international bachelor degree students' activities with American students in particular regions. Zhao et al. (2005) found that student engagement had a correlation with their learning, individual development, and satisfaction with their university, including their perception on the support of their campus for the academic and social needs. This study involves nearly 3,000 undergraduate international students and more than 67,000 of their American counterparts at 317 four-year colleges and universities. The authors used *The College Student Report*, which was developed specifically for the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). They used t-tests to see if the experiences of international students differed from American students and employed a series of regression analyses to contrast the scores of the two groups to account for the influence of potentially confounding background characteristics that other studies suggest could affect student engagement and satisfaction. The findings of this study indicate that international students are more engaged in some areas than American students – particularly in the first year of college – and less engaged in others. They also reported greater gains across the board in personal and social development and general education. By their senior year, the international students who are still enrolled tend to be more adapted to the cultural milieu and generally do not differ from American seniors in their patterns of student engagement, including time spent socializing and relaxing. One of the most important recommendations of this study is that a campus cannot simply recruit a critical mass of international students; it must also intentionally arrange its resources so that international and American students benefit in desired ways from one another's presence. Thus, any effort to increase the numbers of international students on a campus must also be accompanied by programs and services that induce these students and their American counterparts to engage with one another as well as in other educationally purposeful activities. This study involved a large number of international students, however, international students from different cultures and nations may differ in ways that also affect student engagement and the result of this study cannot be generalized to all international students.

Moreover, in a 2003 study, Myles and Cheng (2003) investigated the social and cultural life of non-native English speaking international graduate students at a Canadian university. The purpose of the study was to investigate some major features regarding the social and cultural life of 12 non-native English speaking (NNES) international graduate students at a Canadian university through interviews. This study mainly examined the NNES international students' perceptions and experiences of how they had adapted socially and culturally to university life in and outside the classroom. Twelve interviews with semi-structured format of the interviews, ranged from one hour to one and a half hours in length, were held informally. Of the twelve graduate students, six males and six females were interviewed. The participants of this study included five Chinese (Mandarin speakers), one East Indian (Hindi), and six Europeans (two Bulgarians, two Romanians, one Polish, and one Greek). Among them, nine were working on master's degrees and three were working

on their doctoral degrees. Based on the interviews and data analysis, four themes emerged in this study: They are (1) relationships with supervisors and professors; (2) experiences as teaching assistants; (3) communication with colleagues and friends, and (4) social life. The finding of this study shows that international student experiences are mixed and the adaptation process relies on both internal and external factors. This study also indicates that the students who were interviewed seemed very well adapted to the university life regardless of the fact that they had not made an intentional attempt to get in touch with native English speaking (NES) students. Because they have learned about the host culture mostly through a network of students with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, according to the authors, this also shows that cultural mixing does not take place and international students miss out on critical learning opportunities that can improve the process of adaptation. One of the suggestions of the study is that in order to provide a social context that will help the personal adjustment of NNEs graduate students to university life, programs can be devised to promote the establishment of relationships among a mixture of both international students of similar cultural background and host nationals.

Another interesting study regarding international students comes from [Al-Sharideh and Goe \(1998\)](#). They examined the factors that influence the personal adjustment of international students at an American university. The purpose of their study was to examine the validity of the conditional hypotheses that the assimilation of American culture and the establishment of social ties with Americans influence the adjustment of an international student only when the student has not established social ties with other persons with a common cultural background. The data were collected from international students enrolled at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. Of 1,093 international students who were enrolled at the university, representing 95 nations, 300 international students were chosen as the sample consisting of 223 students from the first stratum of better-represented nations and 77 students from the second stratum of sparsely-represented nations by using a disproportionate stratified sampling design with random selection. Data were collected through a survey administered by telephone. In total, 232 of 300 international students in the sample were successfully contacted and 6 said no to participate. The final sample was 226 international students representing 67 nations.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to measure personal adjustment variable, which was conceptually defined in the study as the maintenance or achievement of high self-esteem by an international student within the context of an American university. In addition to measure assimilation of American culture variable, an attitudinal scale comprised of eight items was utilized. The researchers used the multiple regression analysis with ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation to analyze the data and to test the research hypotheses. The findings of the study show that international students in the sample tended to be personally adjusted which indicates that international students in the sample tended to establish strong ties with both Americans and coculturals. Moreover, the findings from the multiple regression analysis revealed and provided empirical support for the hypothesis that “the relationship between the assimilation of American culture and self-esteem is conditioned by the number of strong ties that an international student establishes with other co-cultural” ([Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998, pp. 714-715](#)). Further, the negative sign of the coefficient indicates that the strength of the ties between assimilation of American culture

and self-esteem declines as the number of strong relationships with co-cultural rises. In brief, the study has shown that participation in an ethnic community via the establishment of strong ties with other co-cultural is the most important factor influencing the personal adjustment of international students. However, the study also proposes that the size of a student's personal network of co-cultural should not be big and the establishment of strong ties with Americans should be increased. This study suggests that it is not so good for international students to be extensively integrated into an ethnic community, as it seems to create problems that negatively influence their self-esteem. One of the important recommendations of this study is that higher education policies should provide programs designed to encourage the establishment of social relationships among small groups of students consisting of a combination of both international students from a similar cultural background and Americans. The development of a balanced network of strong ties with both co-cultural and Americans is more likely to provide a social context that will serve to promote the self-esteem of international students and help their personal adjustment to life in the American university.

In addition, Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) investigated the effects of a peer program on international student adjustment. The purpose of their study was to (a) assess the effects a Peer Program on international students' awareness, knowledge and use of campus resources, (b) assess the effects of ongoing, organized interaction with host students on international students' adjustment, and (c) determine whether students from non-Asian countries have higher scores on adjustment scales than students from Asian countries. In this correlational study, sixty newly admitted international students were involved. The majority of their sample came from Asian countries, other students represented Europe, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. Their study sample consisted of two groups: 28 students who were involved in the semester-long International Peer Program (IPP) and a control group of 32 students who did not participate in the program. To get the data, they use two kinds of instruments Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and the Demographics and Campus Resources Questionnaire. The scores of the 28 IPP participants' campus resource use and Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) were compared to those of 32 international students who did not participate in the peer program. The findings of the study indicate that the IPP participants showed significantly higher social adjustment scores than the non-participants. This study also indicates those participants from Asian countries showed more difficulty adjusting to campus life than international students from non-Asian countries.

The studies on the institutional characteristics, student engagement, and student outcomes and on international students above serve as a framework to look at what programs that are provided by the International Center for the international students so that they achieve their goal and serve as a framework for the presentation of the findings of this study.

Theoretical framework: Tinto's student integration theory in higher education

Tinto's theory (1975) stemmed from the preceding work by Spady (1970). Spady, like Tinto a sociologist, represented one of the early conceptual models of the student attrition

process in higher education. Spady theorized that the social integration of students (shared group values, academic performance, normative congruence, and support of friends) enlarges that student's institutional commitment, ultimately reducing the chances of student attrition. In brief, Tinto's (1975) student integration theory covers six characteristics (pre-entry attributes, goals/commitments, institutional experiences, integration, goals/commitments, and outcome).

Prior to matriculation to postsecondary education, students develop certain characteristics that are formed by their familial upbringing. In addition, those students' academic and social skills and abilities may happen in both formal and informal settings. These skills and abilities in turn help form students' goals and commitments regarding college, the workforce, and their place in society as a whole. During college, formal and informal college experiences shape the student's level of integration into the college, academically and socially. According to Tinto, this level of integration has an impact on the student's development of goals and commitments, resulting in a decision to persist in or depart from college. Tinto's (1975) milestone theoretical model has become the framework for college student retention studies. It indicates that student-institution fit forms students' goal commitment and commitment to the institution, which eventually affect student persistence. The theory investigates the many-sided operation of relations between the student and the college academic and social systems on student persistence. Although the theory did not discuss particularly international students, it has been used as the foundation of student retention studies since this model was presented.

I used Tinto's theory as my framework to explore the role of International Center (IC) in promoting student success in college academically and non-academically for international students. I particularly looked at the programs that the International Center provides for international students before and while they are in college so that they persist and achieve their educational goals.

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the role of the International Center (IC) in promoting international student success in college academically and non-academically at an American university by looking at the programs provided for international students so that they persist and achieve their educational goals. The goal of conducting a qualitative study has historically been "to explore, explain, or describe the phenomenon of interest" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 33) and a case study is one of the qualitative traditions. According to Merriam (1998), a qualitative case study is an intensive and holistic description, explanation, and analysis of "a bounded system" (p. 27) or phenomenon such as a person, a program, an institution, a process, a social unit, a group, and a policy. Creswell (1998) wrote that the bounded system can be bounded by time and place and the case can be a program, an activity, or individuals. In this study, I investigated the role of the International Center (IC) in promoting international student success in college academically and non-academically as my case.

Setting and participants

The International Center (IC) at an American university is one of the units, which is under the Division of Student Affairs and is certified by the federal government to enable international students to engage in academic and social programs and that helps international students with acculturation and adjustment, and opportunities to experience American culture. The International Center has fifteen staff and the number of staff working at the IC demonstrates the diversity of its students. For this study, I chose the director, the intercultural programs and training coordinator, and one international student adviser as my interviewees. They three are women.

Data collection

For this study, interviews and observations were the techniques for data collection. Employing a semi-structured interview technique, each participant was interviewed one time for about 45 minutes to investigate the programs that the International Center provides for international students. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed by the researcher. In addition to the interviews, observations of the two programs that the International Center provides for international students were conducted and field notes taken. One of the programs was the Coffee Hour, which is held every Friday during the semester from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The other program was English Conversation Club, which is run from Monday to Thursday for about one hour. I observed the coffee hour twice and English Conversation Club once to investigate the physical layout of the program, time line of events, interactions among students, topics of conversations, students' activities and responses including non-verbal gestures.

Data analysis and coding

Interview data and field notes obtained were organized and analyzed for regularities, patterns, and emerging topics. In qualitative research, data are not organized and analyzed by predetermined criteria; rather the meanings and themes appear from the data. Merriam (1998) wrote that in qualitative studies, data analysis “has been something like a mysterious metamorphosis” (p. 155). Qualitative research is an inductive process (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 1998, Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). During the process, interview data and field notes were read and reread. Merriam (1998) wrote the process was called coding. She explained that coding was related to assign “some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data” (p. 164) which would help the researcher to get back or retrieve to specific data.

In this study, all the descriptions were captured from the interviews and field notes. The quotations are verbatim. The names of the participants are pseudonyms. At the beginning, I organized my data into five categories: mission and vision, pre-arrival programs, arrival programs, ongoing programs, and preventive programs. After the initial coding, the transcripts and notes were reread with the initial list of codes. Codes that suggested similar meanings within the text were combined into one code. One additional code “international

students' challenges" was considered as it emerged from the interview data. In terms of trustworthiness of this study, participant checks (two interviewees because one interviewee was busy) and rich thick description were used to help the researcher determine whether or not the study is accurate, reliable, credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable (Creswell, 1998).

Findings and Discussion

This study was to look at the programs that the International Center provides for international students before and while they are in college so that they persist and complete their educational goals. In his 1975 longitudinal theory of student dropout from higher education, Tinto (1975) argued that students' level of academic and social integration with the university were the major factors in their ability to succeed in college.

The findings from this qualitative case study data revealed that the International Center, which is a unit under the Division of Student Affairs and certified by the federal government, does have programs to promote international student success by engaging them in academic and social programs and by helping them to integrate into acculturation and adjustment of American culture academically and socially. Six salient themes emerged: mission and vision; pre-arrival programs; arrival programs; ongoing programs; preventive programs; and international students' challenges.

Mission and vision

This study revealed that the International Center's mission and vision are committed to enhancing the internationalization initiatives through immigration services, intercultural programs and cross-cultural exchanges, and collaborative efforts with academic and administrative departments. The following excerpt of one of the three respondents (R#1 refers to respondent one (the international student adviser), R#2 refers to respondent 2 (the intercultural programs and training coordinator, and R#3 refers to respondent 3 (the director) illustrates the mission and vision of the center:

R#3: "Basically, the overall mission of the center is to help international students and American students integrate and share cultural understanding and help American students and international students develop intercultural competencies. So, our bigger mission, we do provide immigration services."

Based on the mission that the International Center has, it is not only to provide the immigration services, but also to integrate international students academically and socially into American educational system at the university so that they have no problems with their educational program. The three respondents above revealed that through its mission and vision, the International Center plays an important role to promote International student success at the university academically and socially. Through its mission and vision, the center wants to align international students' goal and institution goal. Tinto's (1975) theory indicates that student-institution fit forms students' goal commitment and commitment to the

institution, which eventually affect student persistence. According to Kuh, et al (2007), colleges and universities that line up their mission with their educational policies and programs in general are more effective and efficient.

Pre-arrival programs

The International Center provides pre-arrival programs for international students by sending them information such as newsletters, compulsory orientations and workshops, weather, and procedures to get visa to ensure that international students who want to study at the university know what they need to prepare and to do when they arrive. The programs also want to help international students to get earlier information related to academic and social matters. The following excerpt of one of the three respondents illustrates what the pre-arrival programs look like,

R#1: “Again, the government does require us to give certain types of pre-arrival information. So, of course, we do compile the regulations but um..um..as things progress and we realize what students really need and we try to provide more information about the procedure, what they should be aware of and how to get involved in campus life even before they step foot on campus and um..um..um..with better technology students start to get more involved even before they arrive.”

The importance of pre-arrival programs for international students in relation to their success at the university can be seen from the following excerpt:

R#3: We have one person that works full-time just doing the initial I-20s of students who just admitted and then that the person who sends out all of the newsletters, updating the students on what to do to prepare, what will be like when you get here, and all of the orientation and the workshops, and et cetera.

Pre-arrival programs are not only required by the Federal Government of the U.S., but also required to promote international student success by providing earlier information regarding academic and non-academic matters for them. Zhao et al. (2005) in their study on international students recommended that a campus could not simply recruit a critical mass of international students; it must also intentionally arrange its resources so that international students benefit from the available resources. Pre-arrival programs are essential for international students to get initial steps before they arrive on campus.

Arrival programs

The arrival programs are also provided by the International Center for international students. The programs are intended to start integrating them into the academic and social life on campus. The International Center usually provides weeks of welcome. During the weeks of welcome, many activities take place, ranging from academic and social orientations

such as academic resources, counseling center, student right, enrollment, social security trips, shopping trips to the U.S. culture. The following excerpt relates to one of the respondents' descriptions regarding the arrival programs:

R#2: "Then, when they arrive, we organize four weeks, we call them weeks of welcome for everyone and throughout weeks of welcome, we organize events here on campus and in the center. We have early orientation, main orientation, SSN trip, Walmart trip, US culture series, student right. In addition to that, like I said weeks of welcome, it's also filled with activities and sessions for international students when they first come here to know. Then we have an office for students' right and we have a counseling center and sports that they can play. So, we bring those people here and they give students workshops on their services. Just to give everything that the university has to offer, to make their lives better and to help their adjustment process."

Explicitly, the excerpt explains that the arrival programs are set up to help international students to integrate and adjust with American culture academically and socially. The programs serve as initial steps for international students to get ready, get into, and get through. Kuh et al. (2008) found that students benefited from early interventions and sustained attention at key transition points and students attending institutions that employ a comprehensive system of complementary initiatives based on effective educational practices were more likely to perform better academically, to be more satisfied, and to persist and graduate.

Ongoing programs

Integration can take place both inside and outside the classroom, and student persistence in college can be influenced by their experiences gained both inside and outside the classroom (Tinto, 1998). This study revealed that various ongoing programs are provided formally and informally by the International Center for both international and American students, ranging from the coffee hour, English conversation club, international friends, global ambassador, global pathway certificate, international education week, international bazaar, to bridging culture workshops.

The purpose of the programs is to help both international and American students benefit in desired ways from one another's presence. Because, success for international students who come from different educational and social backgrounds is not only regarding academic achievement but also regarding social involvement in a new educational community. Tinto (1975) wrote that during college, formal and informal college experiences shaped the student's level of integration into the college academically and socially. According to Tinto, this level of integration has an impact on the student's development of goals and commitments, resulting in a decision to persist in or depart from college. The following description illustrates one of the respondents' perspectives on ongoing programs:

R#2: “I can tell you more about programs that are ongoing that happen every year, every semester for students that are here because that’s my job. We have many different things. We have the coffee hour, which is every Friday afternoon and the main point for the coffee hour is for the international students to come and see each other in a relaxing atmosphere and hang out with each other. But also for the US students to come and meet the international students and also in a relaxed atmosphere and talk to each other, and hang out and make plans for later in the evening or the weekend and stuff like that. That’s one thing and then we do English conversation club, which depends on the schedule of tutors.”

The International Center has academic workshops and multiple social programs to provide support for international students and to integrate them into American culture so that they achieve their educational goal. Zhao et al. (2005) suggested that any effort to increase the numbers of international students on a campus had to be accompanied by programs and services that induce these students and their American counterparts to engage with one another as well as in other educationally purposeful activities. One of the interesting ongoing programs is the international friendship program. The purpose of this program is to match an international student and an American student, as the intercultural programs and training coordinator revealed in the following quotation:

R#2: “Then we have the international friendship program and for that program, international students have to sign up and the US students sign up. Then we match them according to their preference.”

This is like a peer program that matches the international students and the host students facilitated by the International Center. In a study on the effects of an International Peer Program (IPP) on international student adjustment, Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) found that the IPP participants showed significantly higher social adjustment scores than the non-participants. In addition, Kuh et al. (2008) found that student engagement in educationally purposeful activities was positively related to academic outcomes as represented by first-year student grades and by persistence between the first and second year of college.

The ongoing programs that the International Center offers are important to integrate international students academically and socially. Positive interactions with other members in one institution will enhance academic and social integration. Myles and Cheng (2003) stated that if cultural mixing did not take place, international students missed out on critical learning opportunities that could improve the process of adaptation. The International Center as one of the units at the university facilitates the cultural mixing through educationally purposeful programs because international students from different cultures and nations may differ in ways that also affect student engagement.

Preventive programs

Generally speaking, international students face a number of academic and nonacademic challenges that make them work hard to be successful in college because they come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. During the interviews with my interviewees, I asked about the preventive programs that might be offered by the International Center. What the International Center does to prevent the international students from leaving the college? The following excerpts illustrate the respondents' perspectives on the programs:

R#1: "From the immigration perspective, students fail to maintain their status in some ways, they won't be able to progress to their degree have to leave the country and if they are no fully enrolled in their program and they are not making progress in general. Then they have immigration problem that we have to attend to. So, we do try to prevent problems as much as possible by looking at the students' record by looking at individual circumstances, advising what resources are available to them. It's not just an immigration role but we feel like we are a part of the university as a whole."

R#3: "Well, at the undergraduate level, we have tuition waivers that we can award to the higher achieving international students. Now at the graduate level, we have no waivers because those are in the departments."

In terms of academic matters, the preventive programs that the International Center provides are to ensure that international students follow the rules that the university applies. The International Center does have access to student record in case they are in trouble and the advisers at the center will respond and give advice to the students. In terms of non-academic matters such as financial problems, the International Center provides scholarships for higher achieving undergraduate international students as illustrated in the above excerpts. One of the studies on international students recommends that a campus cannot simply recruit many international students; it must also intentionally organize its resources so that international students benefit from those resources. Thus, any effort to increase the numbers of international students on a campus must also be accompanied by programs and services that help them to be successful (Zhao et al., 2005).

International students' challenges

The three respondents revealed that international students face various problems and challenges academically and socially. The International Center through its programs wants to bridge and help them succeed in their programs. Among the challenges are language barriers, communication skills, adjustment to academic matters such as writing and speaking, plagiarism, and choosing major professors. In terms of language barriers, one of the respondents illustrated that:

R#1: “Well, you know it’s a different environment altogether and most of our population are graduate students and having better graduate students I can say it very difficult. Going into a new program, not knowing what to expect. Having expectation that you have never encountered before. So that couples with not being a native speaker of English. I can imagine how challenging that is.”

In terms of adjustment to academic and social life, the following excerpt illustrates one of the respondents’ perspectives on it:

R#2: “It is about the adjustment, but the adjustment to a general life in another country. It is the adjustment to academic requirements because academic settings are different from their home country. So, it’s the adjustment to speaking, thinking, writing. It’s making friends because it’s difficult to make a friendship.”

Plagiarism and selecting major professors are the two major problems faced by international students as illustrated by the third respondent below:

R#3: “So the main thing that I focus on since I came here is to identify what are the problems that the international students are having and then what can we do?... But some of the biggest problems for those I mentioned, plagiarism which is a cultural thing that many students just don’t realize that come from other countries. And, then, another huge problem of our students as I mentioned before is the major professors. And just helping students understand and navigate how they go about choosing the professors and now we also have workshops with the graduate studies on choosing professors and working effectively with your major professor. Those are some of the biggest issues.”

Students differed in terms of their academic involvement, social involvement, and perceptions of the college environment (Pike et al., 2003). In relation to effective retention programs, Tinto (1993) proposed that first, the programs must be targeted and directed to the students that they serves. Next, the programs must include all students. They need to help student success by offering what students need so that they achieve their educational goals. Third, effective retention programs must be dedicated to the development of supportive social and educational communities on campus. To help students out of those problems, the International Center in cooperation with several academic departments and graduate studies provides programs like workshops for international students.

Conclusion

International students may not always be aware of or ready for their transition to the new academic and social life in the United States such as a new educational system, culture, language, and society. In addition, international students will face many challenges during

their life in college. If they have no assistance to solve their problems or if they do not know where to consult with, their studies might be disturbed that finally will lead them to leave college without completion. In other words, there should be a unit with various programs to integrate them. Tinto (1975 and 1998) argued that integration could take place both inside and outside the classroom, and student persistence in college could be influenced by their experiences gained both inside and outside the classroom.

The purpose of this inductive study was to investigate the role of International Center (IC) in promoting international student success in college academically and non-academically by looking at its programs. The finding of this study indicates that the International Center has provided a wide range of programs, ranging from immigration services to academic and social matters. The programs are provided before the international students come, after they come and while they are studying at the university. In addition, the results of this study also show that in order to integrate international students into the American academic and social life on and off campus, the International center provided pre-arrival program, arrival programs, ongoing programs, and preventive programs for them. Each program has its own purposes to ensure that international students can get ready, get into, and get through their educational goal at an American university.

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Human Participants

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