MYTHS AND REALITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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Student Success Office

April 9th, 2019
AGENDA

- Who are our international students
- Myths, assumptions and realities
- 4 pillars of support
- The Student Success Office’s role
- Strategies to help you support international students - no matter where you work
- Putting it into practice - 3 case studies
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CANADA

Where do inbound students come from?*

*Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) data

1. CBIE Infographic based on IRCC Data: https://cbie.ca/infographic/
Based on the traditional definition of international student, top 9 countries international students represent:

1. China
2. India
3. Iran
4. South Korea
5. United States
6. Pakistan
7. Bangladesh
8. Nigeria
9. Germany

2. Based on the traditional definition of international student
3. Based on 2017/18 Performance indicators: https://uwaterloo.ca/performance-indicators/students/international-students
2018/19- INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT WATERLOO

By country of citizenship and level of study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergrad - Country of citizenship</th>
<th>Grad - Country of citizenship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Based on 2018/19 Performance indicators: https://uwaterloo.ca/performance-indicators/students/new-international-students
### INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT WATERLOO

Total number of students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>25,424</td>
<td>6,183</td>
<td>31,607</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>2,668</td>
<td>1,958</td>
<td>4,626</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28,092</td>
<td>8,141</td>
<td>36,233</td>
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</table>

International breakdown by faculty:

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AHS</th>
<th>ARTS</th>
<th>ENG</th>
<th>ENV</th>
<th>MATH</th>
<th>SCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Based on 2018/19 Performance indicators: [https://uwaterloo.ca/performance-indicators/students/new-international-students](https://uwaterloo.ca/performance-indicators/students/new-international-students)
MYTH VS. REALITY

What are some of the assumptions we hear about international students?
**ASSUMPTION:** Visa status determines whether a student is international

In reality, it isn’t always clear....

- An ‘international’ student with a study permit may have lived in Canada for their entire high school career. 40% have studied in Canada before coming to Waterloo!

- A ‘domestic’ student with Canadian citizenship may have been raised almost entirely in another country.

- A ‘domestic’ student with permanent residency may have just arrived in Canada, or may have come to Canada as an infant.

*To support all students – we need to think about student needs and experiences, rather than immigration status.*
ASSUMPTION: Students from the same country stick together - they don’t want to interact with other students

In reality...

- A survey conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education found:
  - 56% of international student respondents reported having no Canadian students as friends
  - 36.6% indicated that it is difficult to get to know Canadian students
- Almost 40% of international students in the U.S. have no close American friends and would like more meaningful interaction.
- Students highlighted internal as well as external factors for their lack of social bonds such as:
  - “Shyness”
  - Perception of strong language proficiency
  - Perception of lack of interest in other cultures on the part of U.S. students
  - Homesickness and familiarity of home

**ASSUMPTION:** They don’t speak English well enough to be here

In reality....

- All international students meet strict English language requirements in order to be admitted to the University of Waterloo.
- Students who do not meet the minimum English language requirement are invited to participate in English programs, like BASE and ELAS.
- A student’s perception of their English language skills can impact their confidence, self-esteem and feelings of belonging.

ASSUMPTION: They are extremely wealthy and drive fancy cars

In reality….

- International students must demonstrate that they can afford to sustain themselves in Canada in order to get a study permit; however, we know that they sometimes need financial support from other sources prior to or during their studies.

- A soon to be released study from Western University reveals that 81% of international graduate students struggle financially.

- In general, international students and their families contribute $28.3 billion to economic activities in Canada.

  Remember, you can’t tell if a student is international or not by looking at them.

9. Based on: https://london.ctvnews.ca/more-international-students-than-ever-are-studying-in-canada-starting-in-high-school-1.4352566
ASSUMPTION: International students don’t do well academically

In reality….

- When we compared Fall 2018 undergraduate students academic average (across all levels), we found:
  - Canadian students in fall 2018 = 78% average
  - International students in fall 2018 = 76% average
- Comparison of undergraduate international to domestic student persistence in fall 2017:
  - Canadian students that started year 1 in fall 2017 persisted to winter 2019 by 91.1%
  - International students that started year 1 in fall 2017 persisted to winter 2019 by 92.6%

10. Persistence meaning students who remain enrolled at the University, not necessarily in the same program, between Fall 2017 till Winter 2019
ASSUMPTION: Enough supports do not exist/they need more support

In reality....

- As with domestic students, international student needs are not static and shift individually and as a group.

- International students are not only ‘international’ – their needs are similar to domestic students as well. Therefore, all programming supports them (from Athletics and Recreation to Counselling Services).

- There is already so much available! Many campus partners are doing excellent work. Moving forward, there are opportunities to enhance programming and collaborate within the existing programming.
WATERLOO ALREADY HAS GREAT PROGRAMS AND SUPPORTS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (an incomplete list)...

- Athletics and Recreation
- Campus Wellness
- Centre for Career Action
- Co-operative Education
- Faculties
- Feds
- GSA
- GSPA
- Food Services
- Renison English Language Institute
- Student Awards & Financial Aid
- Student Financial Services
- Waterloo International
- Waterloo Residences

There is opportunity to work more collaboratively to enhance existing programs
No two international students have the same experience, their needs and experiences will look different, however common themes are focused on four key areas:

- Sociocultural integration
- Language acquisition
- Academic and career preparation
- Immigration status
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- Sociocultural integration
- Language acquisition
- Academic and career preparation
- Immigration status

There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution.
### SSO Programs and Services

#### International Student Experience
- Pre-arrival and orientation programs
- International Peer Community
- Faculty-specific support

#### Global Learning
- Intercultural learning skill development
- Global Experience Certificate
- Outbound and inbound exchange programs

#### Immigration Consulting
- Appointments with students
- Workshops and immigration information sessions
SSO SUPPORTS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- 26,000 page views on the International Student Guide
- 700+ participants in International Orientation
- 1,300 people welcomed at YYZ via the Airport Pick-up program
- 7,000 International Student Connection newsletter subscribers
- 900+ International Peer Community participants

But, that’s not all...
SSO SUPPORTS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

4,805 immigration inquiries by phone and email + 4,164 students received one-on-one in-person immigration advice = 8,000 International students supported by the SSO annually

2,704 students attending Immigration Information Sessions

1,277 UWinterloo program participants
HOW CAN WE CREATE A MORE INCLUSIVE WELCOMING COMMUNITY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
SUPPORTING THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

What can I do in my day to day to better support international students?

Reflect on your reactions

Be curious and vulnerable

Be a referral expert
REFLECT ON YOUR REACTIONS

What does that mean? What do I do?

▪ Pay attention to how you’re reacting to a situation, positive or negative.
  ▪ Ask yourself: how do I feel in my body?

▪ Moments when you feel frustration or confusion are excellent opportunities to pause and reflect on what’s happening, and re-consider your approach.
  ▪ Ask yourself: Is your frustration or confusion rooted in cultural differences or expectations?

▪ You don’t have to be an expert on every culture around the world.
  ▪ Remember: Both you and the people you’re communicating with are trying very hard to be respectful and heard. You might be working with different expectations.
REFLECT ON YOUR REACTIONS

This allows us to shift (internally) from:

Why is this student not making eye contact! They clearly don’t care about this conversation! Rude!

To:

This lack of eye contact is bugging me and feels impolite. I wonder if eye contact with an older person might be considered impolite in this student’s culture? Maybe they’re just nervous? Let me focus on what they’re saying.
This allows us to shift (internally) from:

Why does this student keep coming back with the same question? Why aren’t they listening to me?! Why don’t they understand, this is simple!

To:

I’m irritated because I’ve told this student this information before. If they’re back, there must be a reason. I wonder if they understood my previous advice? I wonder if they’re nervous or confused about how to follow through with my advice. Did I really understand what they were asking?

I should ask some questions.
BE CURIOUS AND VULNERABLE

What does that mean? What do I do?

- Connecting with others sometimes means sharing something of yourself – it can be harder to do this with folks who don’t appear to share your culture.

- Don’t let fear of being impolite/awkward or misunderstood keep you from connecting. Everyone appreciates an effort to help.

- Names are important. It’s worth making an effort to get it right, even if it makes you nervous. Even if you have to try several times.

- Imagine students are wearing an ‘Ask Me’ button.

- Find your favorite ice breaker question:
  - I’ve never been to your home country or town, what’s the biggest difference/your favourite thing about home? What is your favorite part of Waterloo so far?
  - Do you have family or friends nearby?
Think about names - sometimes when students have unfamiliar names our instinct is not to refer to them, but being vulnerable and asking a student how to pronounce their name, can mean everything to the student.
BE A REFERRAL EXPERT

What does that mean? What do I do?

- Consider the ‘what’ – what services, opportunities, or supports might you mention to students?

- And consider the ‘how’ – are you presenting that information in a way that’s understandable, or that opens the doors for clarification/support?

- Students may need more information about why a service or opportunity exists. You may also need to help break down cultural barriers that might prevent a student from getting help or seeking a great opportunity.
BE A REFERRAL EXPERT

This allows us to shift from:

You sound stressed, maybe you should think about Counselling Services...

To:

Have you heard about Counselling Services? When students are struggling, feel stressed or uncertain, they can find help there. It’s free and it’s confidential. No one will share anything you’ve said to them - not to your parents, professors, or friends.
BE A REFERRAL EXPERT

What does that mean? What do I do?

• If you’re often working face to face with students: communicating what a service is and why it might be helpful is a great start.
  • Ask questions about whether the student has had similar experiences
  • Remember that even though feelings are universal, how we describe and understand them are not

• If you’re designing policy or programming that affects students:
  • Consider what information may be necessary to have a broad audience understand
  • Is the policy clear and understandable to all audiences?
  • Are there immigration or other implications that might differently affect international students?
REMEMBER:

- Your best efforts might not get the results you hoped for – even if you follow all our ‘tips and tricks’.
- Students may need to hear the same information multiple times in different ways before they act on it.
- Our job is not to help international students be ‘more Canadian’ – but to meet them where they are.
- Efforts to engage between cultures are often full of miscommunications and frustration. It can be exhausting to constantly try and figure it out.
- As with any group, words matter. How we talk about international students informs how international students are perceived.
We will now apply the information you received, by looking at three different international student experiences, based on the SSO’s own data.

With each case study, consider:

- How you could support students in these situations.
- Remember the pillars- notice that where each of these students need support looks quite different, its not a one size fits all.
- How do these case studies challenge our assumptions of the international student experience.
MYTHS ABOUT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

In case you need a reminder, the assumptions were:

- They all come from the same home country
- Visa status determines whether a student has “international needs”
- Students from the same country stick together – they don’t want to interact with other students
- Don’t speak English well enough to be here
- Are extremely wealthy and drive fancy cars
- They don’t do well academically
- Enough supports do not exist / they need more supports
Azra Ahmed is one of very few international students whose home country is Jordan, in the Middle East. She’s in her 1B term and has not met any other Jordanian students at Waterloo. Despite being surrounded by people, Azra feels very lonely and struggles with culture shock. She wakes very early to ensure she has privacy when using the co-ed bathrooms. Her roommate Malika practices Islam, like her, but was raised in Canada. She is surprised to learn Malika allows her boyfriend to visit her alone in her bedroom. She hoped they’d be better friends by now.

She’s often distracted in class and hopes her grades will be good enough to allow her to continue in her program. Her parents have invested heavily in her education, and she feels intense pressure to succeed.

You supervise Azra at her on-campus Food Services job and have been concerned that she’s not fitting in. You notice that she doesn’t chat much with other student employees, though they are friendly and outgoing, and she often appears to be distracted. You tried to ask her if she was ok once before, but she said that she had a stomach ache and changed the subject. The two of you are working together alone after her colleagues have left and you see an opportunity to have a private chat while cleaning up. You’re nervous about how to begin the conversation.

**Question 1:** How does Azra’s experience challenge the myths about international students?

**Question 2:** How can you use the three ‘tips’ (*Reflect on your reactions; Be Curious and vulnerable; Be a Referral Expert*) to prepare for this conversation?
Case Study #1 – Azra Ahmed

Reflect on your Reactions:

- You’re confused as to why Azra doesn’t seem interested in connecting with her friendly colleagues, worried about her, and nervous that your planned conversation might go poorly.

Be curious and vulnerable:

- You know, I don’t know much about Jordan, Azra. Did you work there before you came to Waterloo?
- What do you miss most about Jordan?
- What’s your favorite part of Waterloo so far, Azra? Are you in any clubs?

Be a referral expert:

- Students like Azra may not feel like they’re able to spend the time necessary to get the help or support they need. Azra may not open up, but she might listen. Your curiosity and vulnerability helps to make a connection.
Sansa is from North Dakota. Assuming Canada and the U.S. are basically identical, Sansa didn’t bother to attend International Orientation in her first year and mostly deletes any emails about “international supports,” thinking that, as a native English speaker they didn’t really apply to her. In her day to day life at Uwaterloo most people assume she’s Euro-Canadian, and she’s had no trouble making friends with other Canadian students.

As her first co-op term approaches Sansa feels lost trying to understand immigration requirements and how they relate to her first co-op work term. She’s confused and frustrated by the UHIP plan and has been paying out of pocket for her medical expenses.

You are Sansa’s Residence Life Coordinator (RLC), and in a casual chat about her health, she discloses her frustration and concerns about UHIP and immigration requirements. She grows angry, saying that she doesn’t understand why no one is here to help her. You know that students like Sansa have received lots of emails and had lots of opportunities to get information on immigration support, co-op and UHIP, you get a bit frustrated that she hasn’t been paying attention.

Question 1: How does Sansa’s experience challenge common myths about international students?
Question 2: How might you effectively connect with Sansa, use the tips and tricks (Be Curious, Be Supportive, Be a Referral Expert)?
CASE STUDY #2 – Sansa Stark

Reflect on your Reactions:

- Your irritation during the interaction – Sansa has definitely received this information before – is your cue to consider there might be a disconnect.

Be curious and vulnerable:

- Sounds frustrating – I’ve never had to deal with figuring out how to work in another country. Have you spoken to any other international students about their co-op process?

Be a referral expert:

- You know that Sansa can get help with UHIP at The Centre and ask her immigration questions at the Student Success Office or Co-op.
  - Did you know there are a lot of supports on campus for immigration and co-op?
Zhang Wei is from the Guangxi province of China. He honed his English in the ELAS program before beginning Honours Math full time. Zhang is doing well academically, but is concerned about maintaining his grades. He spends the majority of his “free” time studying, mostly with other Chinese friends from ELAS. He finds comfort and community studying in Mandarin, but wishes he had more time to have a “Canadian experience”. He’d like to make friends with Canadians but is uncertain about how to go about it.

In China, his school system placed far more value on grades than extracurricular activities. He feels it’s risky to alter his study schedule to try new experiences. He understands and speaks English well, but he’s hesitant to speak up in-class when he has questions or chat with other students. He worries that his accent or grammar mistakes will make people think he’s not smart. Zhang often struggles to feel like he belongs outside his friend group from home.

In your role with Campus Athletics and Recreation, you are working a booth encouraging students to get involved and try a sport. Zhang stands at a distance to look at some materials, but when you ask if he’s interested in joining a team he responds, “I can’t. Sorry!” You’re confused at this response.

**Question 1:** How does Zhang’s experience challenge common myths about international students?

**Question 2:** How can you use the three ‘tips’ (*Reflect on your reactions; Be Curious and vulnerable; Be a Referral Expert*) to engage with Zhang?
Case Study #3 – Zhang Wei

Reflect on your reactions:
- What does he mean “I can’t”? What an odd response? Why did he just shut that down? Does he think he’s not allowed? He approached this booth – why’d he do that if he wasn’t interested?

Be curious:
- That’s too bad. What’s keeping you from joining?
- Do you play any sports now?
- I’m sorry to hear that – we have a lot of fun. Where are you from?

Be a referral expert:
- Zhang may or may not reveal his reasons for being hesitant or unwilling to participate, but the connection is important.
I AM AFRICAN: ADDRESSING MISCONCEPTIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

View the YouTube video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TN_rqN6EfMU
TAKEAWAYS
There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution.

THE FOUR PILLARS

Remain the same....
AND HOW YOU CAN HELP IS THE SAME TOO!

Remember to....

Reflect on your reactions
Be curious and vulnerable
Be a referral expert
Think about what you might take away from this session. If you had to share one thing with a colleague—what would it be?
Please let us know if you have questions, or if you’d like us to present a customized version of this presentation to your unit.

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