



AIEA OCCASIONAL PAPER

APRIL 2022

The Benefits of International Students to the Diversity Paradigm

Janice Kim • *University of Louisville*





ABSTRACT

This paper examines international student mobility as a necessary component for global initiatives and diversity agendas. The importance of increasing the profile of the international communities on college campuses and exploring the benefits of internationalization must envelope plans and activities of amalgamating international students in global learning and activities to further understand ways in advancing diversity engagement. Therefore, recommendations to international leaders and campus stakeholders suggest parsing out details on actively engaging international students as a cultural resource to discussion, learning activities, and other meaningful opportunities.

Keywords: Internationalization, diversity, international student mobility, diversity engagement, global learning, global competence

INTRODUCTION

A number of diversity initiatives have been touted in higher education institutions. Among these initiatives, Ozturgut (2017) asserts that the missing component in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives is a global approach. According to Siczek (2015), the conception of including international students commonly relates with “broader internationalization agendas at a university level” (p. 8). Nonetheless, institutions are increasingly citing clauses of “creating global citizens” (e.g., University of Washington) to “cultivate enriched learning opportunities in a global community” (e.g., University of Central Arkansas) and to “prepare students for success in a diverse and global workplace” (e.g., University of South Florida) into the mission and vision statements; however, without the presence of international students, a campus cannot fulfill the elements of a global education.

Integrating international students to the diversity strategic plan recognizes the opportunity for global and intercultural interconnectivity. The following research will generate a comprehensive analysis drawing from Williams’ (2013) Learning, Diversity, and Research Model that identifies the indispensable need for international students to the educational practices of higher education institutions. In terms of diversity strategies, the focus of Williams’ model ensures students’ learning opportunities and readiness for an increasingly diverse global world. Therefore, if international students are a necessary component of global initiatives and diversity agendas, higher education institutions must explore the benefits of having an international student population, focus on initiatives to integrate international students in global learning, and understand the importance of advancing diversity engagement.

DEFINING THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT POPULATION

According to OECD (2004), international students are “students who are neither U.S. citizens, immigrants, nor refugees, thus excluding permanent residents” (as cited in Bain, Luu, and Green, 2006, p. 3). The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) (n.d.) defines international student as a nonimmigrant enrolled in an “academic” educational program, a language-training program, or a vocational program. According to the Open Doors 2019 Enrollment Survey by Sanger and Baer (2019), international enrollment started to witness a decline following Fall 2016. Furthermore, the new international student enrollment rate had the greatest plunge of 6.6% in Fall 2017 despite the growing efforts through recruitment agents and alumni engagement (Sanger & Baer, 2019, p. 7). Regardless of the uncertainty in the future of international student mobility, an increasing number of universities state that engagement with an international



student body channels campus diversity that cannot exist by any other means (McMurtrie, 2011). Therefore, higher education institutions should consider the benefits of international student mobility and the importance of integrating international students in global learning and examine the importance of diversity engagement to improve diversity efforts towards a globalized society.

THE BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

In opposition to the decline of new international student enrollment, data continue to highlight the competitiveness of the United States higher education institutions as the top destination of choice for international students and the growing interest in international educational exchange among U.S. students (Institute of International Education, 2019). Additionally, higher education institutions further recognize the importance and benefits of enrolling international students to advance diversity efforts. In particular, Pandit and Alderman (2004) state that international students are an “important resource for helping students explore different cultures firsthand” (p. 127). The growing interest in global engagement has brought more American institutions to incorporate international students as part of their diversity initiatives. For this reason, the American Council on Education (2011) introduced the concept of comprehensive internationalization to encourage institutions to address approaches in a more international scope and purpose (p. 19).

The terms internationalization and globalization are often used interchangeably when referring to international student mobility. Internationalization in higher education remains better defined as a response to globalization (Knight and De Wit, 2018; Knight, 2012; Kehm, 2005). Knight (2012) defines student mobility in reference to international students pursuing a full degree abroad or a short-term, semester or year-abroad program (p. 24). Furthermore, Knight states that student mobility persists as a high priority in internationalization (p. 21). Therefore, internationalization in diversity colloquies exists within the strong interconnection of global and national representation, which is reflected by the international student population on college campuses. Ho, Bulman-Fleming, and Mitchell (2003) state that higher education institutions recruit international students for the purpose of internationalizing campuses and preparing all students for the globalized workforce (Urban & Palmer, 2014).

Several common misconceptions of internationalization insinuate having a critical mass of international students or creating various international programs to achieve the goals of internationalization. In Knight’s concept internationalization at home, international student mobility closely relates to the internationalizing of curriculums and research experiences of students. One of the “at home” strategies include the “integration of foreign students and scholars into the campus life and activities” (Knight, 2012, p. 23). Knight says, in the interest of international and global issues, higher education institutions have the responsibility to integrate comparative international perspectives into the student experience in addition to international academic mobility experiences (p. 23). The presence of international students is clearly a vital component of internationalization. Strategies to internationalize frequently postulate an increase in the international student population. More importantly, recognizing the value of engaging international students enables institutions to embed an international and global dimension into student learning and training. In research by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2019), the parameters for ranking internationalization focused on the characteristics of a compositional approach (pp. 1036-1037). The metrics used—Time Higher Education rankings, QS World rankings, and U-Multiranking—all demonstrated that acquiring a compositionally diverse population of international students was imperative to the transformative learning outcomes and global education.



THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN GLOBAL LEARNING

A key strategy in achieving internationalization is an integrative learning experience. Williams (2013) states in the Learning, Diversity, and Research model, integrative learning focuses on diverse perspectives “connecting the knowledge and skills they gain from one context and applying them to another” (p. 141). Furthermore, Williams indicates that global learning encourages learners to “look beyond specifics and toward the broader context, or how seemingly discrete issues play out in ways that are both local and global in their implications” (p. 151). According to Agnew and Kahn (2014), learners are cognizant of cultural diversity, but evade the responsibility to intentionally engage in diverse learning opportunities (p. 32). Higher education institutions benefit from the global perspective generated by the international student population; however, researchers are discovering that, irrespective of the social interaction on campuses, universities have difficulties integrating domestic and international students in discussions. Studies denote international students benefiting from other international students; however, on the contrary, domestic students did not acquire the same diverse experiences as their international counterparts.

Despite a compositionally diverse international student population, the research by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber advocates that diversity “does not in itself ensure that the benefits of a ‘global education’ will be achieved” (p. 1037). The authors emphasize the underlying component for a global education exists in the inclusion of international students within the communities and classes. Therefore, the factors of integration and global learning proceed to explore the importance of international and domestic students in their experiences relating to diversity. The research by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber examined a sample of 2,360 students from four countries. The findings compared the scales of importance and experience through Social Integration, Academic Integration, and the Global Opportunities and Support. In juxtaposition to the importance and experience scales, students experienced high levels in the Academic Integration category. Although the experience level in the Academic Integration category for domestic students appeared lower than for international students, the importance scale was higher. Moreover, data indicated that a proportion of students experiencing high or very high levels of Academic Integration was particularly low for domestic students (p. 1045). In other words, domestic students perceived less diversity experiences within the Academic Integration.

In a research conducted by Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013), domestic students who were highly interactive with international students recorded higher levels of development and college outcomes. The study was conducted through an online survey of former students and alumni from four U.S. private and highly selective research universities over three years: 1985, 1995, and 2000. The respondents were all U.S. citizens. According to the data, roughly 65% in 1985, 75% in 1995, and 79% in 2000 reported to have substantial international interaction (p. 90). Furthermore, highly interactive domestic students recorded higher levels of skill development in 9 areas, including reading or speaking a foreign language, understanding the role of science and technology in society, and gaining in-depth knowledge of a field (p. 91). In agreement with this data, integrating international interaction to learning experiences provided meaningful opportunities for domestic students.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT



Many empirical studies examine the significance of social integration in terms of diversity; however, the study by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber and Luo and Jamieson-Drake further indicates the importance of diversity engagement with diverse others in academic topics and the participation in classroom and extracurricular activities. As Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) state, the benefits of diversity greatly influence the effectiveness of higher education when students are exposed to “different experiences, viewpoints, and opinions” (p. 7), for example, within the classroom discussion or different functions in learning simulations. Moreover, the authors define diversity engagement when referring to a set of activities and initiatives across racial and ethnic compositions (p. 4). The relationship between diversity engagement among different racial and ethnic groups implies a growing value towards having a pluralistic orientation. According to Engberg and Hurtado, developing pluralistic skills “incorporates higher levels of complex thinking that enable students to engage in cooperative behaviors, manage controversial issues, and develop a high regard for others’ perspectives, beliefs, and backgrounds” (p. 417). Several studies verify that students who engage in diverse interactions, such as with international students, exhibit greater receptiveness towards diverse viewpoints that may potentially challenge their own views (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013; Engberg & Hurtado, 2011); however, the following study shows that higher education institutions are not adequately utilizing resources to promote more effective engagement.

In a study by Urban and Palmer (2014), responses from 249 undergraduate and graduate international students attending a Midwest public university were examined in relation to the institutional goal for global engagement. Most of the respondents resided in the United States for at least one year. The research analyzed the importance of international students as cultural resources to the overall purpose of global engagement. In the nine-question survey examining “actual engagement,” all but one area failed to demonstrate international students’ involvement as cultural resources. Subsequently, when questioned in which manner international students “would like to be engaged” as cultural resources, integrating international perspectives into classes scored the highest. Furthermore, comparing the intentional measures implemented by institutions to integrate international students as cultural resources for internationalizing the campus, data from Urban and Palmer further indicated that institutions did not harness optimal use of engaging international students regardless of their propensity to support and provide cultural experiences and perspectives.

COMMON BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

The American Council on Education (2011) projects a decline in international student mobility in the United States as many other countries increasingly expand competitive recruiting efforts (p. 11). As in the aforementioned definition of internationalization, discourses surrounding globalization, particularly in higher education, have transformed and increased diversity initiatives; however, involving international students in global and international engagements on campuses reveals a deeper challenge. While the United States remains the highest-ranked destination for students seeking to pursue a postsecondary education overseas, international students encounter barriers within the educational and student experience. The importance of integrative learning emphasizes applying diverse perspectives. As noted in the research by Urban and Palmer, the challenge in facilitating an intellectual environment exists in the actual engagement and involvement of international students.

If the goal of diversity is preparing students to engage in the global workforce and to enhance global competence, the relevance of combining international students and intercultural dialogues to the teaching, training, and research is crucial in diversity strategies. A more comprehensive



review examined the relationship between student-faculty interactions to international students' sense of belonging (Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015). The most prominent effect in relation to international students' sense of belonging intertwined with that of an inclusive academic atmosphere. Negative experiences, such as lack of support for inclusion, limitation in language proficiency, and insecurity in communication abilities, impact international students' desire to contribute positively to the social and academic settings (Glass et al., 2015, p. 364).

RECOMMENDATION

Williams (2013) strongly suggests, in addition to internationalization efforts from the development of an international student population, the overarching goal for higher education institutions is to “offer programs and initiatives that complement the educational principles...” (p. 145). Williams strongly asserts that the effect of diversity in higher learning institutions defaults to the intellectual core of the academy (p. 148). Drawing from the Learning, Diversity, and Research Model and observations based on the evidence review, several recommendations unfold to support the international student population in the diversity paradigm.

When working to leverage diversity strategies, “internationalization is rarely a topic of interest and/or concern” (Ozturgut, 2017, p. 84). Executive administrators in higher education institutions have an obligation to include internationalization in diversity initiatives; however, as Ozturgut states, despite detailed strategies from campus leaders, the only indication towards internationalization is to provide cultural and international experiences for students. Cultural and international engagement requires accentuating a compositional diversity of international students, which, in turn, promulgates attention to educational practices. Therefore, campus stakeholders should analyze two components in diversity commitments towards internationalization.

First, faculty, academic, and international leaders must actively review learning activities and experiences interconnected with global learning. For example, academic departments connect community leaders with global expertise to provide service-learning and training opportunities particularly for international students through Curricular Practical Training (CPT), a work authorization that is regulated by the U.S. government. For many international students, particularly on F-1 visas, securing a CPT opportunity is valuable in their learning experience. Furthermore, cultural competency and opportunities for global learning equip students to engage in different perspectives, acquire insights of other cultures, and develop professional skills to be globally competent on issues and application.

Intentional engagement of international students as a cultural resource in classroom discussions and learning activities maximizes deeper awareness of global issues and provides meaningful opportunities for all students. Strategies would include global topics or issues within the discussions with demonstrations of potential and innovative resolutions. Moreover, faculty and the curriculum committees would frequently assess the curriculum to ensure adequate and appropriate global competency.

CONCLUSION

As confirmed in various studies, diversity engagement facilitates international students as cultural resources, which, in turn, plays a major role in enriching diverse experiences (Engberg & Hurtado, 2011; Urban & Palmer, 2013). Higher education institutions use statements of



diversity, hoping the usage would help engage students entering the global workforce; however, the leading variable in response to generating greater diversity engagement ensures the full involvement of diverse others. Increasing international student mobility fosters the preliminary awareness of addressing internationalization but does not often lead to achieving global learning and global competence. The importance of integrating international students in the learning experience with actual engagement elevates the diversity efforts towards a globalized society. In sum, connecting a diverse community of international students to the comprehensive approach of global learning broadly provides a transformative experience for domestic and international students.

REFERENCES

- American Council on Education [ACE]. (2011). *Strength through global leadership and engagement: U.S. higher education in the 21st century*. Report of the Blue-Ribbon Panel on Global Engagement. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Bain, O., Luu, D.T., & Green, M.F. (2006). Student on the move: The future of international students in the United States. *ACE Issue Brief*. Retrieved from <https://shelbycearley.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/ace-future-of-intl-students-in-us.pdf>
- Engberg, M.E., & Hurtado, S. (2011). Developing pluralistic skills and dispositions in college: Examining racial/ethnic group differences. *Journal of Higher Education*, 82(4), 416–43. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/29789533.pdf>
- Glass, C.R., Kociolek, E., Wongtrirat, R., Lynch, R.J., & Cong, S. (2015). Uneven experiences: The impact of student-faculty interactions on international students' sense of belonging. *Journal of International Students*, 5(4), 353-367. Retrieved from <https://jistudents.org>
- Institute of International Education. (2019). *Number of international students in the United States hits all-time high*. New York, NY: Institute of International Education. Retrieved from <https://www.iie.org/Why-IIE/Announcements/2019/11/Number-of-International-Students-in-the-United-States-Hits-All-Time-High>
- Kehm, B.M. (2005). The contribution of international student mobility to human development and global understanding. *US-China Education Review*, 2(1), 18-24. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED494512.pdf>
- Knight, J. (2012). Student mobility and internationalization: Trends and tribulations. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 7(1), 20-33. <https://doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2012.7.1.20>
- Knight, J., & De Wit, H. (2018). Internationalization of higher education: Past and future. *International Higher Education*, 95, 2-4. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2018.95.10715>
- Luo, J., & Jamieson-Drake, D. (2013). Examining the educational benefits of interacting with international students. *Journal of International Students*, 3(2), 85-101. Retrieved from <https://jistudents.org>
- McMurtrie, B. (2011). International enrollments at U.S. colleges grow but still rely on China. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/international-enrollments-at-u-s-colleges-grow-but-still-rely-on-china/>
- Milem, J.F., Chang, M.J., & Antonio, A.L. (2005). *Making diversity work on campus: A research-based perspective*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Ozturgut, O. (2017). Internationalization for diversity, equity, and inclusion. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 17(6), 83-91. Retrieved from



https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322804711_Internationalization_for_Diversity_Equity_and_Inclusion

Pandit, K., & Alderman, D. (2004). Border crossings in the classroom: The international student interview as a strategy for promoting intercultural understanding. *Journal of Geography*, 103, 127-136.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221340408978587>

Sanger, J., & Baer, J. (2019, November). Fall 2019 International Student Enrollment Snapshot Survey. New York: Institute of International Education. Retrieved from <https://www.iie.org/Research-andInsights/Publications/Fall-2019-International-Student-Enrollment-Survey>

Siczek, M.M. (2015). Developing global competency in US higher education: Contributions of international students. *The Catesol Journal*, 27(2), 5-21. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1111655.pdf>

Spencer-Oatey, H., & Dauber, D. (2019). Internationalisation and student diversity: How far are the opportunity benefits being perceived and exploited? *Higher Education*, 78, 1035-1058.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00386-4>

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (n.d.). *Student and Exchange Visitors*. Washington, DC: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Retrieved from <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors>

Urban, E.L., & Palmer, L.B. (2013). International students as a resource for internationalization of higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18(4), 305-324.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313511642>

Williams, D.A. (2013). *Strategic diversity leadership: Activating change and transformation in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.



The Association of International Education Administrators is a member organization that equips leaders to shape the future of higher education in a global context.

Founded in 1982, it is the only association specifically focused on international education leadership.

811 Ninth St. Suite 215
Durham, NC 27705

info@aieaworld.org
www.aieaworld.org

AIEA: Leaders in International Higher Education

