

Far Beyond Recruitment: Understanding Chinese International Students and Helping Them Succeed

Wednesday, April 12, 2017
Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY



Stony Brook University hosted its first AIEA Thematic Forum, *Far Beyond Recruitment: Understanding Chinese International Students and Helping Them Succeed*. Seventy-three participants from twenty-five universities attended the event, which took place April 12-13, 2017.

Stony Brook University President, Dr. Samuel Stanley Jr. welcomed the participants. Darla Deardorff kicked off plenary talks with an interactive discussion on the misconceptions, challenges, and opportunities for Chinese international student success. Karin Fischer looked at the Chinese student lifecycle, from recruitment and admission to integration in the American college experience to graduation and career counseling. Agnes He broke down the differing characteristics between Chinese heritage and Chinese international students, as well as how conflicting cultural views of education can affect academic success. Finally, Jun Liu spoke about classroom interaction and the cognitive, pedagogical, affective, socio-cultural, and linguistic factors preventing Chinese international students from participating in class.

In the afternoon, a research panel discussed findings and implications of three studies: a longitudinal study supported by an NSF grant on international Chinese teaching assistants' communicative challenges; a large-scale survey among international Chinese students in a research institution; and an ethnographic study on international Chinese students' socialization patterns and challenges into academic discourse. The participants were then divided into roundtable discussions on Orientation and Advising; Student Services; Acculturation; and Academics to determine challenges and potential solutions. Several common themes and recommendations appeared during the roundtables, including the need for proactive interaction with both Chinese international students and their families, the need to create one-stop shop to provide continued services from pre-arrival throughout their educational experiences and career development opportunities, the need to add more staff and funding resources to provide adequate services.



A list of follow-up action items were proposed and discussed at the deep-dive post-forum session including a multi-university survey of Chinese international students.

Far Beyond Recruitment

Understanding Chinese International Students and Helping Them Succeed

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York

About the Forum

This forum, intended for SIOs, Deans, and Student Affairs leaders, will focus on helping Chinese international students succeed in the US. Over the last decade, the number of Chinese international students has exceeded 50% of all international students in the US. Along with increasing numbers, issues and concerns have been raised about these students' academic integrity, English skills, and acculturation. The thematic forum zooms into this target group to give in-depth treatment from both emic and etic views. The forum intends to bring faculty and administrators (e.g. admissions, enrollment, advising, ESL programs, student affairs and career services) together with SIOs to address the issue by highlighting best practices and showcasing cutting-edge research and statistics. Sponsored by the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) and Stony Brook University.

Forum Participants Will

- learn common characteristics among Chinese international students
- hear cutting-edge research and statistics on Chinese international students in the US
- take away innovative ideas and interventions to help Chinese international students succeed
- explore interventions and best practices for other sub-groups of international students
- engage in formal and informal break-out sessions with participants and leaders

Speakers and Panelists

**Karin Fischer**

Senior Reporter
The Chronicle of Higher Education

**Dr. Darla K. Deardorff**

Executive Director
AIEA, Duke University

**Dr. Jun Liu**

Vice Provost, Global Affairs
Dean, International Academic Programs
Professor, Dept. of Linguistics
Stony Brook University

**Dr. Agnes He**

Chair, Dept. of Asian & Asian American Studies
Director, Center for Multilingual & Intercultural
Communication
Stony Brook University

**Dr. Jeff Wang**

Director, China Office
Special Assistant to the Executive Vice President
for Academic Affairs
Rutgers University

**Dr. Shyam Sharma**

Assistant Professor, Program in Writing & Rhetoric
Stony Brook University

Information and Registration Online

www.stonybrook.edu/oga/globalforum/AIEAThematicForum

Register and reserve your conference hotel before March 1 to receive the discounted rate!

AIEA THEMATIC FORUM

Far Beyond Recruitment: Understanding Chinese International Students and Helping Them Succeed

**April 12 - 13, 2017
Stony Brook, NY**



**Stony Brook
University**



**Association of International
Education Administrators**

Agenda

Welcoming Remarks

Samuel L. Stanley, President of Stony Brook University

Sally Crimmins Villela, Vice Chancellor for Global Affairs at the State University of New York

Darla Deardorff, Executive Director of the Association of International Education Administrators

Plenary Speakers

Chinese Students on American Campuses: Challenges & Opportunities in Intercultural Communication

Darla Deardorff, Executive Director of the Association of International Education Administrators

The China Conundrum: American Colleges Find the Chinese Student Boom a Tricky Fit

Karin Fischer, Senior Reporter at The Chronicle of Higher Education

Students of Chinese Heritage: Characteristics and Possibilities for Greater Success

Agnes He, Professor & Chair of the Dept. of Asian & Asian American Studies and the Director for the Center for Multilingual & Intercultural Communication at Stony Brook University

Can't Get Them to Speak Up? Strategies to Break the Silence

Jun Liu, Vice Provost for Global Affairs, Dean of International Academic Programs and Professor of Linguistics at Stony Brook University

Panelists

Communicative Challenges & Adaptation of Chinese ITAs

Soyon Kim, Sociology and Agnes He, Asian & Asian American Studies, Stony Brook University

Experience of Chinese Students at Rutgers University

Jeff Wang, Assistant Vice President for International & Global Affairs, Rutgers University

Reflective Encounters: Beyond the Profile of Chinese Graduate Students

Shyam Sharma, Assistant Professor, Program in Writing & Rhetoric, Stony Brook University

Roundtable Discussions

Orientation and Advising

Student Services

Acculturation

Academics

Post-Conference Workshop

Action Plans for Intervention and Research



Introduction

Over the last decade, the number of Chinese international students has exceeded 30% of all international students in the US. At Stony Brook, as with many of our peer institutions, that number is now above 50%. Along with increasing numbers, issues and concerns have been raised about these students' English abilities, communication skills, academic integrity, and career and internship opportunities. The AIEA Thematic Forum, *Far Beyond Recruitment: Understanding Chinese International Students and Helping Them Succeed* co-organized by Stony Brook University (April 12-13, 2017) focused on this target group via plenary speeches, panel presentations, in-depth discussions, and a post-forum workshop from both emic and etic perspectives. The forum brought 73 university administrators, faculty and staff from 25 institutions of higher education together with SIOs to address the issue by sharing cutting-edge research and recommending and discussing best practices to address issues of concern in this focal area.



Plenary Sessions

Chinese Students on American Campuses: Challenges and Opportunities in Intercultural Communication

Darla Deardorff, Executive Director, AIEA, Duke University



While language is always a challenge for Chinese international students, what seems to be most lacking is the intercultural communicative competence that encompasses linguistic, sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and strategic competences. Darla Deardorff explored how universities can encourage and assist development of intercultural communication skills in Chinese international students as well as in faculty and staff.

We often wonder why Chinese international students who have learned English and obtained high iBT and GRE scores still fail to communicate appropriately in many social and educational settings. We also wonder why some of them seek opportunities to communicate with people in the target language, and while doing so, gradually improve their intercultural communicative competence, while others tend to avoid or passively wait for these opportunities to come to them. In order to help Chinese international students develop intercultural communicative competence, we need to provide and enable them to have culture-sensitive knowledge and mindful reflexivity, as well as social identity negotiation skills.



As Deardorff noted, there are many opportunities to make this happen on campus. For instance, we can develop new support programs to encourage dialogues, group work, problem-based learning, presentations, critical thinking, and creativity. We can redesign our orientation to include pre- and post-orientation

continuum. We can emphasize peer-to-peer learning and learning cohorts, and focus on curriculum (content and delivery). We can be clear on expectations, pay more attention to underperforming students, and be intentional about connecting domestic and international students in the classroom rather than singling out international students. Finally, we can connect students with campus resources, such as study skills, writing center, and career centers to enable academic and career success.

The China Conundrum: American Colleges Find the Chinese Student Boom a Tricky Fit

Karin Fischer, Senior Reporter, The Chronicle of Higher Education

Because colleges and universities are so siloed, when it comes to ensuring the success of Chinese students, it can be easy for different offices to focus on a single slice of the Chinese student experience. The admissions office, for instance, uses recruiting a student who can matriculate onto campus as its metric of success. For the international student office, it's integration in the classroom and on campus.



Karin Fischer proposed that it would be more appropriate to think of the Chinese student experience more holistically, as part of a three-part life cycle: recruitment, the on-campus experience, and post-graduate and work outcomes. Success is defined across the three parts and all the parts are interrelated. Stumbles during the recruiting process, for one, can determine a student's success on campus. A student who is academically ill-prepared or who does not have sufficient English proficiency may not be able to do well in the classroom and may feel left out of broader campus social life. Not appropriately recruiting and vetting a student during the admissions process could set that student up for failure in their studies. Likewise, how well colleges do in readying students to find jobs after college, whether in the United States or back in China, could undermine recruiting efforts. Chinese students and their families are practically minded and expect that their investment – financially and personally – in an American degree will yield returns. If a student struggles to find work and perceives that the college is ill-equipped to help in the job search that could send the message that the college's degree is not worth the expense. Ensuring Chinese student success takes intentionality and dedication.

Students of Chinese Heritage: Characteristics and Possibilities for Greater Success

Agnes He, Professor & Chair of the Dept. of Asian & Asian American Studies; Director of the Center for Multilingual & Intercultural Communication, Stony Brook University



Not all who look Chinese are Chinese international students. Some of came to the United States with their parents from early on and have had earlier education in US. Others were born and raised in the US, and may or may not speak Chinese at home with parents. Agnes He spoke highlighted the fundamental differences with regard to their linguistic repertoires and learning styles, noting that regarding various Chinese-background students as a homogenous group can be problematic.

It might be safe to differentiate Chinese students in the US into two

major categories: Chinese international students (holding a student visa) and Chinese Heritage students (citizens and permanent residents). As more Chinese international students come to American campuses, it seems easier to forget that Chinese Americans exist outside of this one subgroup of prominent international students.



A growing awareness of Chinese international students on campuses can negatively impact Chinese Heritage students. When it comes to learning styles, these subgroups are different in many ways, but they share common cultural values: modesty, diligence, respectful of authorities, and they highly value education.

However, they also hold different views on the meaning of learning, process of learning, and optimal mode of learning. It is tempting to generalize Chinese international students as high performers and Americans as entrepreneurial leaders. But any stereotype is unhelpful at least, and dangerous at most. We have to rethink some dichotomies by challenging ourselves with these questions: Does deep learning (critical thinking) occur without surface learning (memorization)? Does participatory learning occur without collaborative, exploratory learning? When and how? Are Chinese students truly obedient, passive and non-participative-rote-learners?

Can't Get Them to Speak Up? Strategies to Break the Silence

Jun Liu, Vice Provost for Global Affairs, Dean of International Academic Programs, & Professor of Linguistics, Stony Brook University

Though some Chinese international students are less outspoken than their American peers, their silence cannot be simply attributed to any single factor. Jun Liu reviewed the ways in which Chinese international students are actually facing various difficulties with speaking up in class, including culture shock, language barriers, lack of social connection, and so forth. These obstacles are influencing their behavior in different ways.

Many students identify their English proficiency as the biggest shield blocking them from classroom participation. As a result, many Chinese international students hesitate to share their ideas in class, concerned that they will fail to deal with conflicts or address disagreements properly. This lack of language competence has a negative impact on Chinese students' self-esteem, influences their decision-making, and ultimately restricts their class participation. Additionally, cultural differences in educational background prevent students from speaking. In most Chinese class settings, students are told to follow classroom rules and are not encouraged to ask questions during lectures. The value of face has been ingrained in Chinese culture, and students may also hesitate if there is a possibility of giving an incorrect answer or if their opinion might contradict and embarrass their professor.



It is important for administrators and faculty to have systems in place to help break the silence. Seating arrangements that break up self-formed groups, structured questions and discussion objectives, allowing time for students to process and formulate talking points in English, and giving positive reinforcement are all methods that can help in the classroom setting. Administrators can help by hosting more multicultural activities and events, organizing orientation programs and workshops for both international students and faculty, and having study abroad returnees reach out to international students to reciprocate hospitality.

Research Panel

The afternoon research panel examined data on language improvement, the overall Chinese international student experience, and the reality behind the typical Chinese international student profile.

Communicative Challenges & Adaptation of Chinese ITAs

Soyon Kim, Sociology and Agnes He, Asian & Asian American Studies, Stony Brook University

Soyon Kim and Agnes He detailed their NSF-funded study on the communication skills of international teaching assistants (ITAs) from China. The study started with three conventional assumptions: 1) being in the US will lead ITAs to language and cultural immersion; 2) ITAs' English proficiency is low but will improve fast; and 3) ESL classes will be a big help. Findings, however, showed that none of these assumptions held.

Researchers found that the top factors actually affecting Chinese ITAs' communication skills are (in descending order of importance): not being overly confident in English capabilities, confidence in receptive and production communication skills, and daily interactions in English (including at US home).

Universities can improve ITA communication skills by providing opportunities for them to develop metacognition, hear and give presentations, and engage in informal conversation.



Experience of Chinese Students at Rutgers University

Jeff Wang, Assistant Vice President for International & Global Affairs, Rutgers University



In order to better understand its Chinese international student population, Rutgers University administered a comprehensive questionnaire to this population, focusing on demographics, academic experience both in and out class, multicultural experience, career experience, and other issues.

Results from the survey showed a few notable points: ranking and location were the top factors for undergrad and Master's students when choosing a university; the majority of students did not always communicate well with professors or classmates, but were very confident in their English proficiency; most were not involved in club activities and found it difficult to make non-Chinese friends; students were not satisfied with the diversity of food options on campus; and students felt they lacked the internship and career opportunities of their American peers due to legal restrictions and poor communication skills, however most expected to work in the US after graduation.

Findings led to the creation of a China Office, and a three-phase international academic support initiative including acculturation and internship workshops, a head-start summer program, writing center programs, counseling services and more.



Reflective Encounters: Beyond the Profile of Chinese Graduate Students

Shyam Sharma, Assistant Professor, Program in Writing & Rhetoric, Stony Brook University



Services and support for international graduate students are often neglected given their lower numbers and more specialized areas of study. Shyam Sharma shared his research looking at former graduate-level international students, interviewing about how they viewed their educational experience in the US, and determining what issues they are experiencing that need to be addressed and what the best practices are for solving these.

Through interviews with over 200 graduates from 20 universities, a number of issues became clear. The Chinese international students possessed higher levels of ingenuity and resilience, forging their own paths to success rather than taking advantage of university resources. They are also non-linear and multidimensional, not necessarily following the system that universities design for them. Student identities are intersectional and multidimensional, and their stories and identities change rapidly while transitioning to their new environment.

Based on findings, Sharma found that universities need to recognize the challenges of dealing with changing student identities and needs; embrace advocacy, including student self-advocacy; recognize diversity instead of lumping students into one category; and creating transition-adaptive support structures with a variety of options to address changing needs.

Thematic Forum Outcomes

Roundtable Discussions

Forum participants were then divided into roundtable discussions on Orientation and Advising, Student Services, Acculturation, and Academics to determine challenges and potential solutions, which were presented to the full group for discussion.

Three common themes and recommendations appeared during the roundtable presentations:

- Higher education institutions must be proactive in their interactions with both Chinese international students and their families. This can include delivering some key information (though not all) in Chinese to ensure comprehension, and developing or increasing the university's presence on WeChat. Participants also noted that universities should be sending frequent emails prior to arrival with consistent messaging, and continue that messaging throughout students' academic careers with information on university resources.
- Students would benefit from a one-stop shop for international student services. This office would provide services throughout the lifespan of students' university careers, from admission through post-graduate and work outcomes. Instead of being shuffled from office to office looking for an answer, the one-stop shop would give students a central location to get accurate information, and make it easier to take advantage of services and programs already in place.



- Most participants noted the need for more staff and funding resources in order to provide adequate services. Access to greater resources would allow for more programming to address acculturation issues, as well as the ability to provide ongoing professional development for faculty and staff dealing with international students. Additional staff and funding would also allow for pre-orientation sessions in China to begin the preparing students for academic expectations.



Post-Forum Workshop



At a smaller, in-depth session the morning of April 13, participants discussed the individual issues related to their Chinese international student populations. Topics ranged from how to recruit quality students rather than students who may not be academically or linguistically ready, but able to afford the high costs of studying overseas to how to get administration on board with developing services and devoting resources to international students.

The group identified two areas of continued collaboration among forum attendees.

- Propose a session at NAFSA to delve deeper into Chinese international student success. Previous NAFSA sessions on Chinese international students have stayed at a superficial level, geared more toward staff who are new to working with this population. An in-depth session and discussion at NAFSA would be helpful to learn what peers institutions are doing to help this population succeed and define best practices.
- Develop and conduct a multi-university survey of Chinese international students across a variety of metrics. This effort would be similar to the survey conducted at Rutgers University, but span 8-10 peer institutions. The survey would be used to identify trends and solutions, as well as a tool to prompt senior administrators to support new initiatives and explain why it is necessary to spend time and resources on Chinese international students in particular.

