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Creating Connections to Enhance International Student Sense of Belonging

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Creating Connections to Enhance International Student Sense of Belonging

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my friends and former students in Jumilla.

I would not be who I am today without you.

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Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have received a great deal of support and encouragement. The past two years of work would not have been possible without many people, but I would like to take the time to mention a few of those important people.

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Abstract

This is a critical action research thesis proposal that explores international student sense of belonging at a United States University campus. As someone who has studied and lived abroad, I understand firsthand the importance of the relationships we foster and how having someone to lean on can be beneficial when you are in a new place. International students do everything in their power to come study in the United States, yet are met with endless barriers due to the laws the government has in place as well as the broader environment of higher education in U.S. society. They want to be here, and we want them to be here, so why is it that we cannot make the adaption process easier for them? This thesis looks at current events and research from the field, as well as historical data, to give insight into why these students might not have a sense of belonging. I then explore the different ways in which international students can foster a sense of belonging on an institution's campus and propose an intervention for the university setting. My proposed intervention is a mentorship program, that will attempt to give international students that sense of belonging on a United States University campus.

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Chapter One: Introduction

College was always a plan for me. I, fortunately, came from a family where my parents met in college. I always looked up to my older cousins, who also went to college. There was never any question about if I would go or not. I honestly cannot even say that the discussion of not going was ever on the table. The biggest question was where I would go. Even as I made my decision at 17 years old, I did not finish where I thought I would. I never imagined myself in the academic world. I come from a family of teachers and was the first to not choose education as my undergraduate major. There were many situations in my life that led me to believe I was making the correct decisions at the time.

After attending a college in the middle of nowhere Pennsylvania, I took some time off from school to help out at home with my father's illness while working. I never had that sense of belonging at my first school, so it was not very difficult for me to leave. The lack of feeling like I belonged at my previous institution led me to become an extremely involved student once I transferred to West Chester. But what was important to me at that point, was still not what would end up being important at different parts of my college experience. I do have to say, I know that I would not be where I am today if it had not been for the experiences that I had. And upon transferring to WCU, I knew that it was where I was meant to be.

Upon transferring, I chose to keep taking Spanish classes and ended up meet the professor who would eventually be my advisor. It was during her class I learned about West Chester's summer study abroad program in Argentina. I knew that it would be a great opportunity to finish my minor requirements all while having my first opportunity to travel internationally. This study abroad experience was a turning point in my life. Even through the hard times of realizing the Spanish I was taught in class was nothing like the accents I would encounter in South America,

or missing events and friends at home, I would not change this experience for anything in the world. I saw sights that I did not know existed. I learned history that I did not realize had occurred, and realized exactly how sheltered and blind I had been to the world that is out there. From this study abroad experience, I gained new friends and new insights to the world. I started to question things that I had not been questioning before. The food was better, the lifestyle, everything seemed better outside of my life back in the states. After returning, it took me all of fall semester to decide (my indecisiveness has not changed over the years) but I ended up changing my major because of that study abroad experience. The study abroad experience made me realize what else is out there. There is a whole world, so many different peoples, cultures, and things to learn. Not only did the faculty member who led the program become one of the most important professors and guides during my time at WCU, but even still today he is one of the people I know I can go to with anything.

In general, I was happier after changing my major. I became involved in more clubs and organizations, worked during the week at the recreation center, and paved my way to becoming a student leader. I loved the praise I received for my hard work and success, which was something I had not experienced in the past. I made friends and connections that I knew would last a lifetime. These friends became some of my motivators. It was not just to have friends, but to have like-minded friends. I'm sure if I had made different connections, I would not have gone in the same direction. One of my best friends was just as involved as I was. We were always pushing each other and made sure to organize our office hours in Sykes so we could be in our adjoining offices for lunch together. That sense of belonging, and the support, was something that I think is very important for college students. As I saw in my first institution, I did not have that sense of connection, of belonging to my college. Being an athlete, I was rarely on campus, and when I was

there, I was almost always exclusively in the gym. The lack of connection is something I think can make or break a college students' experience. A connection is important in any part of someone's life, and is the reason I loved West Chester University, the reason I loved living in Spain, and now the reason I love West Chester again as I am working and studying another degree.

The professors in the Department of Languages and Cultures were, once again, nothing like my previous professors. Going from huge lecture halls in Schmucker to the small, moldy classrooms of 10-15 students in Main Hall really made a difference, and those relationships that I made with my professors were critical for my success as a student and a person. These professors shaped me and changed me for the better. My linguistics professor made me fall in love with languages and cultures I knew nothing about. He constantly pushed us and motivated us and made learning so fun that I decided to add a linguistics minor to my time in school. My advisor was brutal, but I knew that I could show up at her office and could talk to her about anything. I know that these professors are the reason that I was so successful in the program. Their love for the language and the topics we discussed, along with their desire to see us succeed and help us is something that has stuck with me to this day.

The summer before my last year, I received the Department of Languages and Cultures Study Abroad award, which funded my trip back to Argentina to do my senior seminar. Thanks to this scholarship, I was able to research the literature during the time of the dictatorship in Argentina, with my focus on the "desaparecidos." My first trip to Argentina did not only shape me in my desire to study something different, but it also peaked a previous interest I had in history. I applied for the scholarship, talked to my professor about what I wanted to investigate, and off we went. He asked me to be something like a teacher's assistant and help him while there. I left my house in May 2014, ready to explore, investigate, and write an incredible paper about what I

would find. I had the best time. I loved living abroad. I loved the lifestyle, the new places, and my friends, both old and new. In that moment, I swore that I would spend time living abroad again.

These life experiences are reasons as to why I am where I am today, about to finish my master's degree, applying for doctoral programs, and working full-time as the Associate Director of International Programs at the university that helped shape who I am. Granted, COVID had a huge piece of it, but that is beside the point. I knew that if I went for my master's it would have to be at WCU. I grew and changed so much at this university, and it will always have a piece of my heart. My previous personal experiences have showed me what it means to be a higher education professional, because I know the way I was treated by my professors is how I will treat any students that I work with. The sense of belonging that they gave me, along with my friends in and out of the classroom, is one that I hope to be able to give to other students someday. Working in this field, I see the struggles and challenges that international students face on a daily basis, and their sense of belonging at universities here in the states is not as strong as it could be. There is no fault on these students in this situation though. It is the institution, and the citizens of this country that do not always take an international student into consideration when making decisions. If we truly want to call ourselves diverse and inclusive, we should try to ensure international students have a voice at the table. I want my international student to feel like they have someone they can turn to, which is why I think that a mentorship program for international students would greatly help with their sense of belonging.

Why This Matters

College students are different in many ways, and due to this, not all student experiences will be the same. There are many events and factors that can play into the development of a

college student's identity, and a big part of that is their experience. Most of these experiences, and how I looked at them in the past, in comparison to how I am currently studying them today, are the reason I am who I am today. I recognize that the same will be true for international students coming to institutions in the United States. Thus, my concern will focus on international students' sense of belonging. More specifically, it will center on the lack of belonging that often plagues students in this community due to unresponsive university initiatives to support them. Belonging will have a different definition based on who you ask. Everyone will feel a certain sense of belonging to their work, their school, or their friends in different ways. Belonging is defined as a sense of identity for a member of a certain group or place, but this definition should be expanded when talking about international students (Glass, 2018).

When we look at research on sense of belonging or what is helpful for getting students engaged, the nuances of students' identities, particularly international students, are not always centered. Instead, international students are often identified as racial and/or ethnic minorities here in the United States, but we should not group them in with the multicultural diverse groups of domestic students as international students face unique cultural, linguistic, and legal concerns. All students deserve to feel as though they belong at their college or university. If the field of student affairs wants to fully support the entire student population, as is their mission, it is necessary to explore the experiences of international students and develop supports that are unique to their needs.

Personal Experience

Upon graduating from my undergraduate program at West Chester University, I thought I knew a lot about what I wanted to do and who I was, but I was very wrong. I know I love to travel and learn about people, cultures, and experiences. What I did not know about myself is

that seeing others learn about new cultures and places gives me just as much excitement as if it were for my own trip. I had the opportunity to teach for four years in a trilingual program at a high school in the south of Spain. The desire and motivation that these kids have to go to "America" and learn about new places had me so excited to go to work every day. I will never forget the look on their faces when I took them on the exchange trip that I organized to London and they saw the landmarks from our books in person. The ability to share experiences and share their love of wanting to learn, was something I had never experienced before. By helping them learn, I learned more about myself.

Living abroad was not easy, at times it was extremely difficult. I suffered a lot of loneliness and dealing with my own sense of self and what I was doing with my life. Navigating a new language, a different culture, and my first-year post-grad was overwhelming and stressful. As my first year came to an end, I knew that my original plan of only staying one year had changed, and I am so glad that it did. I had a much better experience during years 2-5 of living abroad once I had fostered relationships and made friends and a life for myself in my small town in the south of Spain.

International Students

Due to this life experience, I decided to research international students and their experiences here in the United States. A common theme in my research is the relationships that international students are able, or unable, to foster. Having a relationship with someone is extremely beneficial to an international student, as seen in the results of research, and is something I can personally attest to as well. Once I had those friends and those casual relationships in my life while living in Spain, I was more willing to ask questions without fear of sounding stupid about not knowing something. Even after five years abroad my best friend

would eventually joke with me about my asking questions or how I didn't know something after so long in Spain, but he would always first give me the answer and help me in any way that he could. I travelled with him and his family, spent holidays with them, and ended up falling into his entire friend group as if I had been friends with them forever. There are many situations where international students need a friend to talk to or get advice from, for any number of reasons. The relationships formed with faculty and staff are also incredibly important and helpful for these students because it gives them someone to look up to, someone to give them professional and personal feedback and help them in their studies in a way that maybe a peer would not be able to. Thanks to my work experience, my time in Spain, and my work as a graduate assistant in the Center for International Programs at West Chester, I was hired full time as the Assistant Director of International Programs. After 9 months of working in that position, I was promoted to Associate Director of International Programs. Every single day I now get to work with this group of international students and see exactly where we are lacking as higher education professions and try to figure out how to change this process.

The research on this topic (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014, Hausmann, et. al, 2007, Osterman, 2000, Becker et.al 2018, Glass et.al 2015, etc) is very interesting, and something that I have often wondered about while working with these students. One theme that is often commented on is how international students need social networks and support. This leads me to the question for my own research, how can we get them to be more involved on campus and improve the sense of belonging? I personally have lived abroad and found the research results and findings comparable to what I experienced while living in another country. The critiques and issues are the same: finances, belonging, adaption, language. The debates are also very similar, in the way that everyone is trying to find the best way to have these international students adapt

to our culture, and in the easiest way possible. This is interesting, and potentially problematic, because as I have found in my research, not all international students are the same. Not every country will have the same issues, and that is something that we also must take into consideration.

Conclusion

The research that we have studied during this master's program and the feedback I have been given, have encouraged me to reflect on my college experience, as well as the college experience of the international students that I work with. Most of my college life, I thought that I had to identify and be certain way. I grew up in an upper-middle class, white, catholic household, and suddenly both my situation and identity were changing, and not by my choice. I had never left the country, and in that one step over the border, I changed forever. I believe that the ideologies that I had to be a certain way is what led to my college, and post graduate decisions. International students can be looked at the same way. They all have multiple hats, who they are at home and who they are here. What they have to do in order to stay in valid visa status versus what they would really want to be doing. They do everything in their power to come study in the United States. They want to be here, and we want them to be here, so why is it that we cannot make the adaption process easier for them? Granted, a lot of the restrictions have to do with the laws the government has in place, but we could still make the process of adaption smoother for them. We offer so many resources for traditional students, so why can't we make these resources more inclusive in order to help our international student community?

Preview of Thesis

In this thesis, I will look into international student sense of belonging and how we can make a difference during their time here in the United States. Chapter 1 started with important

factors of my positionality. I looked at my background and how I got to where I am today. Chapter 2 will go into theoretical foundations and frameworks, and what I believe the ideal education and university would look like. This chapter will include the importance of student experience and will discuss why I am using Critical Action Research in a program implementation of this type. In chapter 3, I will briefly detail the history of higher education in the United States, and how historically marginalized groups have impacted the view of international students today. This chapter will continue into the current state of the concern of international student sense of belonging with detailed examples from the field. Chapter 4 will showcase my program plan and design in detail. This thesis will conclude with chapter 5 which discusses assessment and evaluation options, funding and budget plans, as well as the limitations for a program of this type.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Foundations

In this chapter we will look at my philosophy of education and the importance of experience when talking about learning. I will detail how schools and institutions are not the only places we can learn, and how our current international student population can bring an extensive amount of knowledge to the table just from their life experiences in other countries. From there, we will look at the definition of Critical Action Research (CAR) and why it is the method of research that I am using during this thesis.

What is Education?

Education and its definition will vary depending on who you talk to, what country you are in, and what culture is doing the defining. Additionally, these definitions highlight the distinct philosophies of education that inform them. Freire (1970), for example, argued against certain theorists' definition that education is a gift bestowed upon those less knowledgeable. While myself and others view education more broadly as "an experience that teaches you something" (Oxford University Press, 1989).

Both definitions hold important key words that provide insight into these philosophies. Teaching, for example, goes hand in hand with traditional understandings of education. Education is seen as something that needs to be given to you by someone who has more knowledge than you. Teaching is commonly perceived as being ideas being transposed upon those "less knowledgeable" by someone of authority. Teachers are these special people who have been selected to bestow knowledge of the most importance on the rest of the world; but who decided that learning needed to be this way? When was it written that knowledge can only be learned from someone of a higher authority than you? Can teachers not learn from students? Can

parents not learn from children? Why is the idea of authority always present? What really is learning?

Learning can be done in many different ways. We can learn through experiences, academic study, or being taught something. This leads us to the second definition of education, which I believe is the more important of the two. The second definition states that education is an experience. It does not go on to say that any level of knowledge needs to come from said experience, nor does the definition say that it must be an experience in a school setting. This leads us to the possibility of the first question asked in this paper: "is the university the only place we can truly learn?" I personally have been educated from many different experiences in my life, and they have not been from people or persons of authority. Running out of gas on the side of I-95 two days before my seventeenth birthday was definitely a moment of education for me, but, alas, there was no person of authority to bestow the knowledge upon me. Since there was no authoritative figure to gift me that knowledge, does that mean that I did not learn? Who sets these parameters of learning and teaching, and where did they come from?

Banking Model of Education

Paulo Freire's (1970) "banking" theory of education consists of students being seen as containers that educators need to put their knowledge into. Anyone who is unknowing is to receive the deposit, file it in the correct place, and store it away for safe keeping in their memory. This is the traditional educational pedagogy in most schools and universities still today. Freire believes that this oppresses students, therefore he is a great philosopher to tackle the question of if a university is the only place where one truly learns. Clearly, if students are in university classes, being taught by world-renowned professors, the most intelligent and prized people that the university can find, then the answer should be yes, the university is the only place we learn.

Freire, like myself, would not agree with that. Each level of this hierarchical business opportunity known as higher education is oppressed by the other. Since the first university in the United States, Harvard, we can see the vicious repetitive cycle of education. Those who do not fall in line, fail, becoming those oppressed individuals that Freire talks about, all in order to become what society defines as educated.

Experience and Education

It's the either-or theory. You either go to school or work at a job that is seen as undesired by our society. You either follow the rules or get punished. Our education system is full of extreme opposites, but everyone must either conform, or fail. As John Dewey (1938) stated, philosophy of education is no exemption from this compromise of either-or's. Education is all the subjects that must be passed on to the new generations. These subject matters have been developed by those before us, and therefore by those who are more educated than the rest of us. This is the true aim of modern-day education. Today's students will be prepared, educated, and successful IF they follow the norms of the university.

The Idea of a University

Universities are said to be the place where true knowledge is learned. During class, I saw that some of my classmates claiming university was the best learning experience for them. I do not agree. If the university is the place where you have learned the most, then I do not believe you have lived this annoying, scary, wonderful thing that people call life.

First, the institution that is given the name university has to be comprised of students. There, already in the definition, the idea of authority comes back. A student, someone who needs to be taught, giving in once again to the norms and the repetitive cycle of the university. This definition of university also limits the accessibility of certain people to obtain its knowledge. It

says that it is an institution of "advanced learning", which limits who is able to attend. If you do not meet the level of knowledge that these authority figures consider to be advanced, they will not let you study at their institution. These same figures of authority are also the ones who tell you how much money you have to pay in order to receive the knowledge that their institution offers. By doing this, we are continuing to oppress certain groups of people. Does this mean that these oppressed groups now have no place where they can learn, since they are unable to attend the university?

We, as students, are told our whole educational lives that we have not sufficiently learned something if the proper knowledge cannot be regurgitated in an exam, or in the form of a 7-9 page paper. Guidelines, directions, and evaluative measures all hinder true knowledge and education. Why? Fear, competition, insecurity, just to name a few reasons. Students compare and ask questions in group chats among their classmates to make sure they are doing the assignment the same way as everyone else. Shouldn't the real learning be how each individual interpreted the assignment? If everyone conforms to one idea, where is the education? If I were a professor, I would not want to read 27 papers of the same exact information. Each student repeating back the same knowledge, citing the same articles, all for what? To prove that you are educated; you have learned something of importance from the person of authority. I would prefer to see how each student understood the assignment, creating and interpreting their own version of learning, while proving their knowledge in a way that is best suited for them. My ideal university would do these things. It would combine outside life experience to the in-classroom learning, not be evaluative, and be accessible to all.

Experience

Experience can be both a noun and a verb. As a verb it is something one undergoes, or encounters (Oxford University Press, 1989). As a noun, an experience is "practical contact with observation of facts or events" (Oxford University Press, 1989). Some of my personal experiences have taught me much more than I ever hoped to have learned in school. In my language classes I was taught vocabulary and grammar until we were blue in the face, but it was not until I went abroad that I really learned how to speak, how to use that grammar, and how to become proficient in languages. Through my father's terminal illness, I have learned how to be strong, even when I do not want to be. Through loss, I have learned that this life is too short to not be enjoying what you do every day. Through moving abroad, I learned not only about other people and other cultures, but about myself and how to live on my own. Through love, I have learned how to grow and feel. All these educational, learning experiences were done outside of the university setting.

John Dewey asserts that all human experience is social, and all people and things are results of previous human experiences (1938). He also claimed that organizing content into subjects gives students a harder time putting this knowledge into real life situations. Just because these international students are coming from other countries and have not been in the same education system that we have here, it does not mean they are not educated or knowledgeable. Dewey thought that presenting topics through everyday occurrences would give students a wider understanding of the world.

Another theorist with a hands-on approach, is David Kolb and his work on experiential learning. Kolb (2017) described the experiential learning cycle as a 4-step cycle that is applied to every experience: Experience – Reflect – Think – Act. He claims every concrete experience

requires a reflection, which leads to abstract thinking in order to reach conclusions, conceptualize the experience, and then act on what you have learned from the situation.

These two examples are just some of the reasoning behind my idea that a university is fluid and depends on the culture and education system of the country where one resides. Part of the issue of an international student's sense of belonging can stem from the American education system, and the academic success of these international students is at jeopardy because of this. I have seen firsthand in my job how students share professors being quick to shut them down, or compare to how things are done "in America." Instead of assuming that these international students are coming and knowing nothing, faculty/staff should take the time to get to know them because them being enrolled in an undergraduate program here in the states does not mean that they have not already achieved a PhD in their home country (which is actually the case with one student I work with currently). My thesis intervention looks at this sense of belonging, and all the factors that go into the education experience. An ideal university, in my opinion, would take life experiences into consideration, would combine "knowledge" and experience, and be a better, more inclusive experience for all students.

Student Experiences

International students from all over the world are coming to study in the United States, and they are coming from all different types of educational backgrounds. We know that they might be unfamiliar with our system here, therefore that is one of the exceptions to a visa regulation. During an international students' first semester, they are able to take less courses than the required full time if they are struggling academically due to unfamiliarity with the American Education System (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2020). We know that they have

different histories, different languages, and different cultures. They bring plenty of knowledge to the table, but we do not always look at them in the same way as we do our own family members.

The same as how international students can give us knowledge and talk about their experience, we can see the same from "uneducated" individuals here in the United States. I could call my grandfather and hear stories about his childhood both in Italy and as an immigrant here in the states. He would tell me all about the places he has seen and the life he has lived, his struggle and his success as a businessman. A 93-year-old man who is considered educated and has done it all through a life without a degree. If a university was not necessary for him to become a successful and educated individual, then why am I told today that it is the only place I can learn significant knowledge? It is ironic how things can change in such a short amount of time. What would happen if we just decided to change the norm? Would it be possible? Is the university really necessary, or are we all just stuck in this fabricated, business orientated, repetitive cycle?

Conclusion

The idea of a university, and the importance put upon education in the American education system can be off-putting to some students. We assume these international students coming to the United States are here to learn, but we do not take their experience into consideration. The ideals apply to everyone in our society. Take me for example. Here I am, writing a thesis because this is where I will get my opportunity to truly learn. I'm told this is the only place any learning of a significant manner can take place. Society says that even though I have spent 5 years working internationally and was hired full time at the job I am currently working thanks to my experience, I am not qualified for a job yet, and this master's program is necessary for me to get to where I want to be. In a program where I am required to write this

thesis of a certain length, proving that I have learned something from those who have authority over me: a professor and a thesis committee. Citing important articles and authors, who also somehow have more authority over me, all in order to play into this idea: the university is the only place one learns that matters.

What is Action Research?

As stated by Stringer (2014) "Action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (p. 1). In simpler terms, action research seeks to change. Anyone can be a researcher, and in action research, anything can be the subject. This is especially important in Higher Education and Student Affairs due to the always changing environment, and current issues found within and surrounding institutions.

Types of Research

Research in general is a type of investigation meant to understand something better. Research is used for even the simplest things such as: why did the pizza burn? The situation must be analyzed and the "researcher" can learn from what happened. All types of research are not the same though. Quantitative research is a systematic investigation and usually uses mathematical, or statistical techniques. Quantitative research "is intended to provide generalizable explanations that provide the basis for predicting and controlling events and phenomena through rigorous application of numerically based hypothesis-testing procedures" (Stringer, 2014, p. 5). Whereas action research is "based on the proposition that generalized solutions, plans, or programs may not fit all contexts or groups to whom they are applied and that the purpose of inquiry is to find an appropriate solution for the particular dynamics at work in a local situation" (Stringer, 2014, p. 6). Action research uses a wide variety of methodologies and can even mix methods. It can use

evaluative, investigative, or analytical research methods. It is used to help solve a problem in order to improve situations or look for change in something. "It uses continuing cycles of investigation designed to reveal effective solutions to issues and problems experienced in specific situations and localized settings" (Stringer, 2014, p. 1), which makes it the perfect research method for Higher Education for as argued by Stringer (2014),"action research seeks to build a body of knowledge that enhances professional and community practices and works to increase the well-being of the people involved" (p. 1).

Critical Action Research

While there are many different types of research, it is important to note Critical Action Research (CAR). Critical action research is just one tip on the umbrella of action research, and focuses on the world outside the individual. Elliot (2005) went deeper into each part of action research and broke it down. He said, "…critical action research serves the interests of emancipating people from oppression" (Elliot, 2005, p. 365). To continue, Greenwood (2012) states that action research is "intriguingly contradictory". It is contradictory due to the definition of the word. The word critical means to find fault or to judge. In critical action research, the goal is not to find fault and focus on it, but to find the fault somewhere and use it to improve a social situation. In this type of research, "participants aim to be 'critical' in a way that leads to finding out how particular perspectives, social structures and practices 'conspire' to produce untoward effects, with the aim of finding ways to change things so consequences can be avoided" (Kemmis, 2008, p. 125).

Purpose

Stringer (2014) claims that the purpose of action research is to investigate something and act upon the results in an effective way. Action research looks to investigate the people who are affected by some issue. This can be a more effective way of investigating than quantitative

research because you can more clearly understand their situations (Stringer, 2014). Action research has a basic routine, which we can see here:

Figure 1.1   Action Research Interacting Spiral
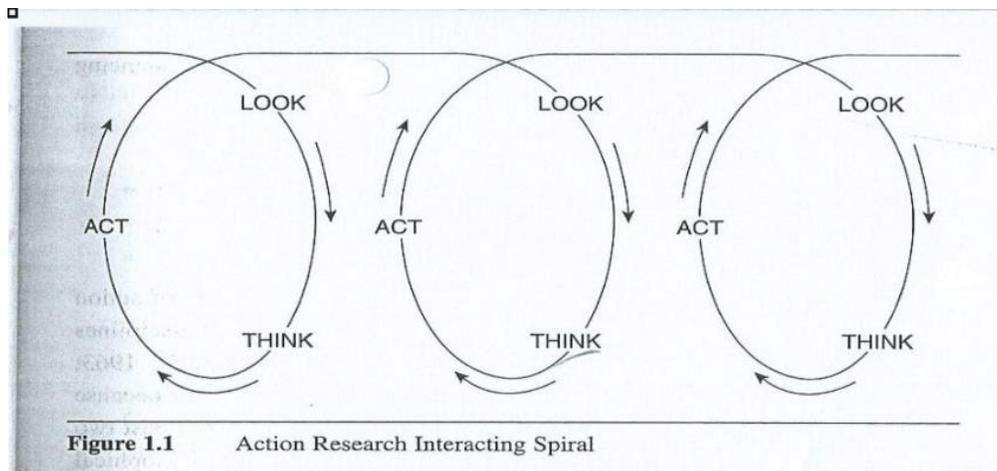
This image (Stringer, 2014, p. 9) shows a repeating pattern which participants and researchers can use. It shows how action research can be a complicated process, and one can repeat the cycle various times. As we saw with Greenwood and Levin, this has played a key role in the development and advancement of action research. Action research is not as precise, if one were to compare it to other types of quantitative research, but that does not make it any less effective. One could say that it actually makes for a more advanced way of research, since the researcher is getting specific answers from each subject, and is able to develop the study from there.

Relationship to Higher Education

Higher Education and Student Affairs is a field dedicated to student development services and activities. Most professionals start working in Student Affairs because they want to make a difference in in the lives of college students. On any institution's campus, one will find a variety of types of students: students of many different races, cultures, and backgrounds. It is imperative to always be in the know of what is going on in the world because what happens around us will affect students, and even the institution as a whole. Since this is a field dedicated to the students,

professionals must put bias aside and strive to make the institution a positive environment for students. As Samuel Museus (2017) argues, it is very important for a student to have a sense of belonging. It is the job of the Higher Education and Student Affairs professional to be open to students and be willing to work for them. Today, with current issues changing as frequently as they do, it is important to know how to investigate what needs to change at an institution. This is why action research is an important investigative measure to use.

CAR and Higher Education

Action research in general is not the only type of research that is important to consider in a Higher Education setting. Critical action research specifically is an important lens to consider for our thesis proposal because it is based on a theory "motivated by a deep concern to overcome social injustice" (Horkheimer, 1972). My thematic concern will look into international students and their sense of belonging on various campuses. The critical action research lens will help to bring awareness, find that fault and try to find a way to fix it. This lens is key to use because of how we can look at the issues, realize what is happening there, and act in an appropriate way to find a solution to make the experience better for this group of students. International students have been a group that has been marginalized throughout their time at American Universities, which I will go into more detail about in chapter three. My intervention is not the only area where critical action research can be applied. As mentioned in the above section and in the introduction of this paper, there is a plethora of current issues that bring injustice to our institutions and can potentially affect members of our international student community. Therefore, as Higher Education and Student Affairs professionals, we must use this lens and framework in order to try to better the life of our students.

Conclusion

Action research should play a critical role in the lives of Student Affairs professionals. Many researchers are stuck in the traditional ways of research and are not able to properly serve and help students, which is what this field is all about. As argued by Stringer (2014), "We therefore need to change our vision of service professionals and administrators from mechanic…to facilitator and creative investigator" (p. 3). Higher Education and Student Affairs professionals need to get creative, especially in today's society with all the current issues that occur every single day. If professionals study all these principles of action research, and take the time to evaluate what changes need to be made in the field, said professionals can help make great changes for today's students.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will look into the history of race in the United States, along with events that have affected groups who are defined as marginalized or other. Our country's history could be a larger part of the reason behind international students not having the same sense of belonging as traditional domestic students. Along with this country's history and activism, current policies and procedures in place for immigrants (or non-immigrant student visa holders for the purpose of this paper) also play a part in their life here. Going along with that, the history of their home country, and how students and individuals have been treated are important to look at. As someone who has travelled to 23 different countries, and lived/studied in 3, I have seen firsthand the differences in government systems, how race and ethnicity is perceived, and how languages and cultures can greatly affect individuals. I personally have been the "other" while living in Spain those first few years before I knew the language and customs better, and it was not always easy.

History of Racial Minorities in U. S. Higher Education

From the beginning of the system, race has had a great influence on American universities. The first documented American university was established in 1636 at Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts, before the United States was even a thought in anyone's mind,. At this time, only men were allowed to attend universities, and they were all religious institutions aimed at producing clergymen. As time went on, and more settlers came over from England, the University setting became a vicious cycle of reproduction. The young men went to school, and then became slave masters and started their own universities with the money from their plantations and slaves (Wilder, 2013). This is where American Higher Education institutions started, literally, on the backs of slaves. The men enrolled at Harvard were taught that "owning black people was a habit of 'most prosperous men'" (Wilder, 2013, p. 119). Even in

"the early eighteenth century, North Carolinians were using slavery to fund education, and leaving money, rents, and whole plantations to endow schools" (Wilder, 2013, p. 100).

Not only were today's universities funded by slaves, but they were also built by them. "By the era of the Civil War, [his] Presbyterian communion had brought the American college to the banks of the Mississippi River by carrying it on the backs of enslaved black people" (Wilder, 2013, p. 103). This continued on as more and more universities were founded, and education was used as a means of promoting slavery. As argued by Wilder (2013), "Princeton was a useful marketing tool. Founded to defend religious freedom, the College of New Jersey under Witherspoon forged intimate ties to human slavery" (p. 105). Even during this period of time in history, we can see the struggle of what can be defined today as peer pressure, when Wilder (2013) states that "faculty and officers often testified to the difficult lives of enslaved people, but not always sympathetically" (p. 135). This is an example of the moral battle that faculty faced during this time, since some individuals finally started to realize that slavery was wrong but did not want to lose their position at the university. We must remember that international students come from countries that have a history and relationship with slavery, and the implications that this could have on their view of the United States today, along with the affect this could have on their sense of belonging on an institution's campus while studying here. Particularly when international students are themselves racially marginalized in the U.S. university space, their experiences at universities with this history at their foundation can shape their experiences on predominantly white campuses.

Race and Higher Education Past and Present

Even after the abolition of slavery, however, U.S. colleges and universities continued to engage in policies and practices that created isolating environments for racially marginalized

students. One key example of this would be James Meredith. James was the first African-American to attend the University of Mississippi, and although he was an Air Force Veteran, the state of Mississippi took several measures to prevent his admission to their institution (*Meredith v. Fair*, 1961).

There are many events and moments that contributed to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Two key events that should be mentioned are *Mendez v. Westminster and Brown v. Board of Education*. The outcome of *Brown v. Board of Education* was a landmark case where a unanimous vote made racial segregation of children in public schools unconstitutional (United States Courts, 2022). This was a breaking moment in civil rights history, which established that separate-but-equal education was not really equal at all. These struggles of civil rights issues are key moments in history, that eventually led to Martin Luther King delivering his *I Have A Dream* speech at the March on Washington in August of 1963. According to Life magazine, somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 people were witness to his speech. Shortly after, in June of 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson pushed recently assassinated President Kennedy's Civil Rights Act of 1964 bill forward and it was signed on July 2, 1964. The Civil Rights Act made great progress as it prohibited discrimination based on race in colleges and universities. Still, many cases needed to be resolved in higher education around the issue of racial discrimination. Many factors in universities had to change, including enrollment practices, but even when they finally started to accept African Americans, schools were still in a transition to living up to the Act's Title VI, which stated that "No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Civil Rights Act, 1964).

Signs of Progress

The following data was released on public record by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. While the data is from 1999, we can see how Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has positively helped students of color in the post-Civil Rights era. Total minority enrollment at colleges and universities increased 61 percent between fall 1986 and fall 1996 (*Enrollment in Higher Education: Fall 1986 Through Fall 1994*, table 2, page 5; and unpublished data). Since 1990, the number of Latino students enrolled in higher education increased by 47 percent; the number of African American students increased by 20 percent; and the number of American Indian students increased by 30 percent (*Ibid).* More recently, "from 2000 to 2016, college enrollment rates increased for…Black (from 31 to 36 percent), and Hispanic young adults (from 22 to 39 percent)" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). These above-mentioned statistics are just some of the positive results of the Civil Rights Act education has seen since 1964.

Progress is Still Needed

Unfortunately, the signing of the Civil Rights Act was not a magic solution for racism and discrimination. Most minority groups have still faced many issues over the years, including many international students. Flash forward to today, for example, and look to the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement started in 2013 due to the acquittal of George Zimmerman after the shooting of Travyon Martin and continues today in 2022. While the Black Lives Matter movement has sought to bring issues such as police killings to the forefront of our public discussions, racially marginalized students in today's colleges and universities still experience discrimination and xenophobia. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, a professor from the University of Dallas was criticized for using the term "China Virus" in his syllabus (Flaherty,

2021). International students being from China is not the reason that we have COVID-19 in this country, and the fact that professors are stereotyping them is another example that we still have a long way to go in fighting for the rights of international students.

History does not need to keep repeating itself as it has with immigrant groups throughout the years. Then again, why have we eventually been able to accept Irish, Italian, and Japanese immigrants, but we are unable to accept Black and Latinx people? What makes these people different from the rest of us?

Relevant Factor: Student Activism and International Students

American students have been involved in political activities almost since the beginning of higher education in the United States (Altbach, 1971, p. 1). Student groups have participated in movements of student activism traditionally linked with society and not as much directly with the university. Even though student movements did not start to receive attention until the mid-1960s, when it received "national attention and serious analysis" (Altbach, 1971, p. 2), yet we can see examples of student movements dating all the way back to 1823 when a group of Harvard seniors were expelled due to participating in anti-conscription campaigns during the Civil War (Altbach, 1971, p. 2). Altbach (1971) noted that:

> student activism before 1960, however, had no major impact on national policy, and prior to 1900, no organized student activist groups emerged. There is a tradition of student involvement in politics in the United States, and many of the concerns of the activists of the sixties are reflected in the past. (p. 2)

It is important to note though, that the enrollment levels today are much higher than in the past, so there are bound to be more movements with more students as these numbers change.

History of International Student Movements

In a 1970 study of international and regional student organizations in political and education contexts, Altbach wrote of the importance of student activism for both institutions of higher education and governments. Altbach used a historical approach to provide a description of several international student organizations and analyze their effectiveness. The conclusion is that no international student movements emerged from the organizations that have functioned. As explained, "The student internationals were unable to make themselves relevant to the needs of activist student movements or even to the national student unions which they primarily served" (Altbach, 1970, p. 4). Altbach found that international student organizations tended to be linked directly to the politics of the Cold War, which was financially funded by either the United States or the Soviet Union. Two groups were analyzed in this study, the International Union of Students (IUS) and the International Student Conference (ISC). "The aims of both student internationals, and more particularly of their adult funding agencies, was to exercise such influence and in this regard, have both failed (Altbach, 1970, p. 8). Most of these international student organization groups were not specifically membership groups but were part of other organizations which is what led to them being even more isolated. We must also look at events across countries. The war basically ended any efforts put into international student cooperation across these countries when Germany invaded Belgium. Most student groups went underground during this time and ended up working as anti-Nazi groups in their respective countries. Because of relationships between countries, any type of international student union relationships can be tipped and turned at any given moment. We have seen this most recently with Chinese students and COVID. The number of attacks on Asians and Asian-Americans has increased in the past year, which has led to problems among these students on higher education institution's campuses. If we do not have

a good relationship between our countries, how can we fight for these students and their needs as a whole? How can we make sure that these students have the power that they rightfully deserve? With the current issues between Russia and Ukraine, how can we ensure that this does not happen again with our Russian students?

Comparison to Foreign Nations

The United States is today known for the freedom of speech and endless possibilities that are given to us as citizens. Yet after World War I it was a period of time that was "characterized by substantial repression; students with radical inclinations were often expelled from colleges, student newspapers were censored, and administrators often acted in a heavy-handed manner" (Altbach, 1971, p. 4). This is a very interesting quote and action, because it looks to be exactly what countries in South America were doing during and after their periods of dictatorship. I did not realize the history, and tragedy that occurred in other countries until my own personal experience studying abroad. I have seen how these countries suffered and are still suffering today from the actions of the not so ancient past. Censorship was invoked everywhere from books to films. Student activism was very controlled during the 60's in Argentina in particular. One example that is important to mention is La noche de los Lápices, The Night of the Pencils. In La Plata in 1976, students were fighting back against the government in order to get their student discount price for bus tickets. Under the new government, their student price was taken away from them. The students held their movements and protests, and it did not end well for them. The students who were known to be the "heads" of the movement were kidnapped from their homes in the middle of the night, brutally tortured, held captive for an unknown amount of time, and most of them killed. One survivor has talked about the events, and how it had affected him. The Argentinean government used these students to set an example for

the rest of the country. Showing who exactly had the power, and that the students were not able to do anything.

If these students come from countries that have previously been oppressed, or do not have the same freedom of speech as we do in the United States, how can these students be sure that they can fight for what they need without being reprimanded? Most recently, we have seen what is happening in Russia. There is one form of news that is acceptable, and anything else is considered treason. Upon talking to a personal connection, they explained to me how people in the United States do not understand what it is like. Because of our freedoms, because of our right to free speech, we have grown up privileged and unaware what censorship is like. From what I have experienced in my job, students do not want to impose. They are here to learn, and they will not fight back if something seems unfair to them because they are not used to doing that in their own country. If these students do not feel comfortable sharing when something is not right, or when something does not seem fair to them, then this is directly impeding their sense of belonging at the university, and therefore their experience here in the United States.

Relevant Factor: Policy Issues & International Students

Every single day, international students are put in a position of conflict. They honestly have no power because everything can be taken away from them in an instant. For this section, I spoke to a friend of mine who is from the town where I lived in Spain but living in Boston while getting her master's. We discussed how any little thing she does has to be approved by the university, and she has to be very careful about everything. She was offered a part time job with a company but needed to go through these steps in order to not lose her status. She must depend on other classmates or professors for a lot more than any traditional student does. When I asked her about the situation with Trump last summer, she said that she was extremely nervous. Her

institution has a lot of international students, and she knew that if she had to go back to Spain, she would lose her visa status. She also knew that if all her classes were online then she would not comply with the restrictions from the State Department on number of credits taken in person. She shared an email from the President of her institution with me, and it was great to see how they advocated for the international students, since they had no say and no way to fight back. Seeing what has happened to her, and what she has had to go through during this time has really opened my eyes to the disadvantages and lack of power that international students have. They want to fight back, but they fear their status. They know how to manifest in their home countries in a way that works with the systems that are in place, but that is not the case for them here. It is something that needs to change.

We have seen the changes from the Trump administration to the Biden administration in a quick turn of power. In an article from Inside Higher Ed titled *We Must Welcome International Students Again*, Robert A. Brown and Andrew Hamilton speak on the challenges that international students have faced over the past four year during the Trump administration, and how the Biden administration needs to change that. We want global leaders. We want students who are talented and hardworking and can bring something to the table. The article states how from 2006 to 2016 the United States saw an increase of over 80% for the number of international students studying here. Which all changed when the Trump administration started putting travel bans into place, made visa applications excessively difficult, and limited students' duration of statues (their time of stay here). The students who come study here can make a difference, hence the implementation of The U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, which will ease the path for these international students. The Biden administration needs to go one step further and reopen embassies in other countries in order for these students to finish their time in the United States and gain as much from their

experience as possible. The article says it best, "In the context of so many things that need fixing, international education nis relatively uncomplicated." We can do so much for these students just by being there for them. We, as professionals, are here and have the connections that these students need. The only thing that really must be done, is open the doors, and let the rest of the world know that their students are welcome here.

Visa Restrictions

There are many restrictions and rules holding international students accountable while here in the United States. It is a process in of itself in order to get all the required documents together, get an I-20 form from the institution willing to accept them, and then get a visa appointment. Even being accepted to a higher education institution here in the states does not mean that they will automatically get the visa. They must have a sponsor to provide financial documentation stating they will pay any and all living and tuition expenses for the student. Even if they get to the visa appointment, the embassy can still deny them for reasons unknown to us as the Designated School Official (DSO). Then, upon arrival, they must attend an orientation mandated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). While here, there are rules and regulations that a student must comply with in order to stay in valid student visa status. Students must inform the university of any and all changes in status, address, passport validity, etc. They must take a certain amount of credits, most of which must be in person, they must be at an accredited university, either have English proficiency or be taking English classes, and stay in good standing. Along with this, there are many ways that their visas can be rejected while here. The Department of State's website has a list of grounds for revoking a student visa, and potentially sending the student back to their home country. Some of these include health related

grounds such as mental or physical disorders or drug and alcohol abuse, and criminal and security issues.

An article in The Pie News titled *University at Buffalo terminates Chinese students' F-1 statuses* is a clear example of the potential visa issues and how sense of belonging can be related to this. The University at Buffalo terminated at least 30 Chinese students' visa status, which is currently deemed as the largest scale termination in a decade, per international education organizations (Stacey, 2021). This article brings up so many different laws and issues. First, yes, we as Designated School Officials have access to look up the student's I-94, but that is only if we are looking up the information as the student. This means we would have to take the student's name, birthdate and passport number and put it into the system to see if they are here or not. Legally, that is not something we are supposed to do. But the article goes on to talk about the student's answering emails. Unfortunately, I see that international students do not answer emails like American students do. I know from my experience abroad that they do not spend as much time working and embedded in their work emails as we do in the states, so maybe that has something to do with the lack of communication? Maybe the students aren't understanding. Needless to say, the implications of this are huge. These students now must leave the United States immediately if their SEVIS account has been terminated. I understand the frustration of working with international students, it is difficult when there are language barriers, or you have those same students who do not want to do things the way they must be done. There is something that needs to be done going forward. Maybe this can create a better system of logging this information, or the government will take into consideration how schools have access to the I-94, or maybe there will be a better communication system between universities and ICE.

Instead of terminating student records, this university could have reached out to the students to find out what is going on. Will it take extra time? Yes. But it could make a difference for a student. It is so hard to be in this functional area, especially when students from the same countries are always giving the same problems with paperwork and financials. I think as professionals, we all need to take a step back (especially during the pandemic) and remember why we are in this specific functional area. We need to remember that we can make a different for these students, and this is specifically the first step that needs to be taken in order to make a difference. Cancelling a student's status does not give them the feeling that they belong at a university.

Impacts on International Students in the U.S.

On one hand, we see how international students have little to no power once here in the United States due to the restrictions. But on the other hand, we can see how international students can hold some form of power by their choice of country where they want to study. This is something that has happened during the past 4 years. During the Trump presidency, because of the decisions he made regarding international students, our numbers of enrollment dropped. These students had to make a difficult decision, due to the choosing to study in Canada or Australia (two countries who have seen a spike in number of international students since 2016), instead of here in the United States. Our country will lose a lot of revenue if these students continue to study in other countries, and maybe that will lead our government to make some changes in order to give these students more power in our higher education system.

Relevant Factor: Higher Education as a Place to Help

Higher Education and Student Affairs is a field dedicated to student development services and activities. Most professionals start working in Student Affairs because they want to make a

difference in the lives of college students. On any institution's campus, one will find a variety of types of students: students of many different races, cultures, and backgrounds. It is imperative to always be in the know of what is going on in the world because what happens around us will affect students, and even the institution as a whole. Since this is a field dedicated to the students, professionals must put bias aside and strive to make the institution a positive environment for students. As Samuel Museus discusses in the article *The Impact of Culturally Engaging Campus Environments on Sense of Belonging,* it is very important for a student to have a sense of belonging. It is the job of the Higher Education and Student Affairs professional to be open to students and be willing to work for them.

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave these basic rights to students, it did not help them get accepted on the American university campus. These students have struggled since day one and continue to struggle today. We have seen throughout time that history is the result of struggle, but one must ask the question, when will the struggle for these groups end? From slavery to Black Lives Matter, and from Pearl Harbor to COVID-19, we can see how minority groups still face racism and discrimination today. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a key moment in Higher Education's history. It was a huge step forward for students of other races, colors, and national origins, but I do not believe we are where we should be just yet. These students are no different than white students and it's time we started treating them the same way. Stringer (2014) says, "We therefore need to change our vision of service professionals and administrators from mechanic…to facilitator and creative investigator" (p. 3).

As Higher Education professionals we must start to get creative in finding ideas to help these groups be fully accepted on the campuses of all colleges and universities. If our international students come from countries that have been oppressed in the same way as

countries in the Southern Cone of South America, we cannot expect them to participate in any type of student activism or movements. Even though the United States is supposed to be the better place for them, their countries histories could be so ingrained in their lives that this could be a main deterrence for them to fight for any type of power while studying in the states. Along with the lack of power due to visa restrictions mentioned above, most international students seem to keep their heads down while studying here in the states. They are motivated to get their degrees here and to find jobs with as little trouble as possible. We, as student affairs professionals, need to be sure to fight for these students in order for them to have all the resources and possibilities while studying here, because we have the power to make their time here as memorable and beneficial as possible.

How We Can Help

International students do everything in their power to come study in the United States. They want to be here, and we want them to be here, so why is it that we cannot make the adaption process easier for them? Granted, a lot of the restrictions have to do with the laws the government has in place, but we could still make the process of adaption smoother for them. We offer so many resources for traditional students, so why can't we make these resources more inclusive in order to help our international student community. I have investigated the different ways in which international students adapt, adjust, and come to see their time on an institution's campus. This next section will summarize my findings and look to propose a possible intervention for the university setting.

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Current State of My Concern

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Belonging has only recently been extended to studies of international students. Most recently, an analysis of the effects of belonging on international students' academic success and

cross-cultural interactions demonstrates large positive effects of belonging in mediating

academic and social outcome (Glass & Westmont, 2014). A sense of belonging increased cross-

cultural interaction between international and host country students, and it substantially enhanced

international students' academic performance (Glass, Gómez, & Urzua, 2014). A sense of

belonging, therefore, has practical benefits for international students, being that belonging is one

of the most frequently cited factors for college students' academic success (Hausmann,

Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Osterman, 2000).

International Students & Sources of Support

In a study by Becker, et.al (2018), the authors looked into stressors in international

students' lives. The results showed how international students underutilize professional support

services. The study showed that students with a stronger sense of belonging tended to turn to more

informal support systems, while those who struggled more moved more towards professional

supports. This article really reinforces my idea for a peer-mentor program. The article talks about

how international students do not seek help professionally, especially when they try to reach out

first to their social circles. If international students do not feel supported at a social level, then

they could think the wrong way about how professional help might benefit them.

Another important component of belonging is its relationship to faculty relationships. As

noted by Glass, Kociolek, Wongtriat, Lynch, & Cong (2015) international students will often

reach out to faculty/staff members first before seeking help from the university counseling center

or professional counselors. Academic goals are very important factors for international students,

and therefore professors are some of the most influential people in an international student's life.

Sense of belonging was the theoretical framework for this study and seeing how mental health is

strongly correlated to a psychological need satisfaction, we can see how professors are important

to international students. Surveys in this article show that international students are only somewhat satisfied with their friendships, so a good relationship with a faculty member could help them as well. The examples taken from this study are some that I think every faculty member can implement when working with international students. Sometimes it is something as simple as telling a student that they are able to speak to the professor after class, but for that international student, and maybe even traditional student, it can mean a world of difference just to see that small gesture of caring. International students from this study said they think that having positive relationships with professors can help their long-term career goals.

I believe this, and agree with it, because with the faculty as their role models, it gives them an example of someone to look up to in this country. I know I personally love finding a professor that I can relate to, and one that I feel like I have things in common with. I am not an international student and have a hard time opening up to people, and sharing when I am struggling, so I cannot imagine how difficult it must be for an international student to do so. We need to be mindful of these differences and remember that these international students might have a strained sense of belonging on campus, and as professionals we can help them feel a little more at home. This makes me wonder if international students could have a better sense of belonging if they had someone to share their stressors with, in a more casual setting than in a professional counseling center, or if having a peer-mentor could help encourage the international students to go to a counseling center in order to get help with their stressors. The authors noted that participants in the study had limited knowledge of how the university's counseling center worked, peer mentoring could be a way to combat this issue and further engage students in belonging.

International Student Development

Eldaba (2016) discusses the increase in international students here in the United States in conjunction with the social and academic challenges that they face in their studies here. The primary focus of this article is on the challenges that lead to international students' academic and social development while at institutions in the states. By using Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, and a logic model, the author was able to create a plan for both designing and implementing a program for international students' social and academic needs on campus. The article states how researchers found some challenges to be a) difficulty in establishing positive relationships, b) unfamiliarity with American social and academic environments which led to lack of participation in class activities, and c) a lack of confidence in their communication and languages skills. The author also stated that international students tend to rely on other international students to learn, which in the end could be a reason why they are not as confident. If we were able to have some type of peer mentor system, whether it be a traditional domestic student who has studied abroad, or even a student interested in international affairs, this could potentially help the international students' adjustment period. By following the needs assessment in this article, I think I could learn a lot about what could help the students.

Nguyen (2016) looked into the reasoning why there is not much information about international student leadership experiences on campus. We know that leadership and efficacy are good indicators of success in higher education, which is why this study focuses on international students' confidence in their leadership abilities while studying in a foreign country, in comparison to their domestic peers. The results showed that campuses and professionals need to do better at engaging international students in different leadership opportunities while also being culturally relevant. With all the international students that we

have in the United States, why is there so little research on their involvement on campus? We know that leadership is a good indicator to student success, which makes the involvement of international students an interesting topic here. If we can provide international students with the opportunities to be in a position of leadership, would they have a better sense of belonging? Would this give them more confidence in their studies, or with their English? This could be a very interesting part of a peer-mentor session. If we can partner international students with a mentor who is involved on campus, then maybe the international student will get involved in more groups and therefore have a better adjustment to life and school in the states. If we could advertise the leadership trainings and conferences better, I wonder if the international students would be interested in attending them. I am currently working with one of my international students in order to bring an honor society to our institution's campus, in the hopes that it will encourage sense of belonging for these students.

International Student Expectations

One common theme in the research was the issue of Hollywood and how film portrays the American college experience (Bourke, 2013). The dream is to come to the United States and study, to attend the parties, and have the best time. It portrays us as a nation that puts fun before work, which most of us know is not the case. Across some of these articles I saw how the expectations, both academically and socially, were not what international students thought they would be. Within the studies, we saw that students were struggling with adapting, with feeling accepted within the U. S., and with their overall language skills. These are all intriguing points, especially the language part. Students must have a proficient level of English in order to come and study here. So then why do so many of these articles talk about their fear of speaking during class due to language barriers? If these students are proficient, then is it because of the way that

traditional American students react to their accents that is causing concern? Discrimination is something that unfortunately happens all the time to these students, and I do not think that they have that struggle as an expectation when they are preparing to come and study here.

Relationships & International Students

Another common theme in the literature is the relationships that international students are able, or unable, to foster (Baba & Hosoda, 2014, Glass et.al 2015). Having a relationship with someone is extremely beneficial to an international student, as seen in the results of many of these articles. There are many situations where international students need a friend to talk to or get advice from, for any number of reasons. The relationships formed with faculty and staff are also incredibly important and helpful for these students because it gives them someone to look up to, someone to give them professional and personal feedback and help them in their studies in a way that maybe a peer would not be able to.

While some international students tend to stick with other international students, we have seen from these articles the benefits of having relationships with "traditional" American students. The psychological and physical help that these friendships give the international student is endless. We can see from the multiple of these articles that international students with friends of United States citizenship are more confident in their language skills, adapt better to the cultural differences, and are more involved in campus life. Therefore it is imperative to have some type of peer mentor or ambassador program for these students.

Orientation & International Students

A third theme in articles I have researched was orientation (Brunsting et.al 2018; Güvendir, 2018). Maybe we can better prepare these students, and have them start to adapt, by having a better orientation or a first-year experience type of course. Almost all of these articles

that I used for my annotated bibliographies show some type of research and investigation about how orientation actually does make a difference for these students. We need to make sure they have access to all the offices on campus, make sure they know where to go in certain situations. We also need to make sure that these offices where we are sending them are able to work with them. Most of these articles have also mentioned a staff orientation for working with international students, which I think can also be extremely helpful, especially since so many students look up to their faculty and staff members that they work closely with. The results show that students who have a positive orientation experience are more likely to be involved in campus organizations and eventually take up leadership roles, which is a crucial part to their adaption process. I have seen firsthand how some issues are not solved by just one orientation session, these students need more and we definitely have the ability to offer it to them. I have been advocating for us to leave up the digital video versions of orientation from last year, so that students have the video and website as a resource in case they forget or are confused about anything. We give them so much information all at once, and I think that could be in part where the stress comes from.

International Students & Housing

Another issue that stems from my personal work experiences, is housing. Many landlords will not rent to international students due to the fact that they do not have a credit score. International students do not have a social security number if they are not working. Due to this, they do not have a credit score. What landlords fail to understand, is that their I-20 document, which is the immigration document issued in order to prove valid visa status and enrollment in an institution, is actually proof of finances as well. On this form I-20, there is a finances section and the student's sponsor and exactly how much they have allocated for housing is listed. Many

landlords have a misconception, and therefore give information that is not helpful to international students. An international student does not need a social security number if they are not working, because these numbers are only for tax purposes. In an ideal world, it would be helpful to have an "international house" or some type of apartment complex where international students could live owned by the university in order to avoid the stress and trouble of landlords who do not understand the process.

International Students & Employment

Another issue and limitation I have seen firsthand in my daily work, is employment. As per their visa regulations, they are only allowed to work on campus, and for less than 20 hours per week. Any off-campus work must be authorized before employment begins by the Designated School Official. International students do have two opportunities for work that should be mentioned. Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a curricular practical experience that must be related directly to the student's field of study. The student must be enrolled in an internship or practicum course in order for this to be approved. Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit to the F-1 student visa that allows students to stay and work for up to one year after graduation. This can be completed once per academic level but is not always easy for students to find someone who will accept a worker for just one year. At that point, when their year is up they have three options. The first being return to their country. The second, would be to enroll in another degree-seeking program, or for the company to sponsor them for an H1-B visa. The easiest fix to this, would be if we could give all international students an on-campus job. This would be an easy way to get them involved with a department and earn money, but the big issue here would be funding and the budget of certain departments.

Legal Issues & International Students

Another common issue is all the legal ramifications that play a part in an international student's life. I mentioned previously how detailed and in depth the visa process is, and how many steps must be followed in order for international students on an F-1 visa to stay in valid status. As the Designated School Official, my training is limited to the legal scope of the F-1 non-immigrant student visa. I am not trained to talk about any immigrant visa types, which is something that international students want. These students have to plan for what to do after graduation, and sometimes the uncertainty of the "what is next" can be stressful. Immigration lawyers are not cheap, and neither is the process to stay in the United States after their F-1 studies and OPT work have finished. Students are always asking me "what if" when I hold our OPT workshop, and I unfortunately cannot give them the answers they are looking for. What could be helpful in this case, would be a pro-bono lawyer to work on campus for any legal situations that could occur during an international student's time here.

Personal Connections

In this chapter I have discussed how colleges and universities in the United States were built on racial inequality which provided a foundation that is not always welcoming to students who are racially and culturally marginalized, such as our international students. Their sense of belonging as an international student, however, is one of the most important factors that can play into their academic success while here in the United States. In spite of the above-mentioned issues that international students face at American universities, it is not hard at all to be a friend to someone. Our basic human nature wants us to help others in some way, so why not befriend someone who is not from here and needs help? I believe a peer mentor program for international students could help them in many ways, as mentioned in the above chapter. The research and

results are there, and it is also something that I have personally gone through while living and working in another country, so I know how fostering relationships can benefit a person in their period of adaptation and life in another country. If we are able to make these students feel more accepted, and like they belong, then maybe we can make their experience while studying here even better. I look forward to continuing to research articles on this topic and finding a way to make that difference in these students' lives.

Chapter Four: Program Design and Implementation

Belonging has only recently been extended to studies of international students. Most recently, an analysis of the effects of belonging on international students' academic success and cross-cultural interactions demonstrates large positive effects of belonging in mediating academic and social outcome (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014). A sense of belonging increased cross-cultural interaction between international and host country students, and it substantially enhanced international students' academic performance (Glass, Gómez, & Urzua, 2014). A sense of belonging, therefore, has practical benefits for international students, being that belonging is one of the most frequently cited factors for college students' academic success (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Osterman, 2000). My thematic concern addresses international students' sense of belonging, and what we can do in order to make students feel more connected during their time studying in the United States.

In this chapter, I will explain my Global Ambassador program and why it will be beneficial to international students. I will detail the components of my program and how it will provide a potential solution to the issue of lack of international student sense of belonging at American universities. I will look at the frameworks mentioned in chapter 2 and how they inform my program. I will also reference back to the literature discussed in chapter 3 and show how that has driven me to create this proposed intervention to make international students have a better sense of belonging in the United States. I will look at goals and outcomes, based on competencies in the field and I will use my daily work as the Assistant Director of International Programs at a university to showcase the reasoning behind the need for a mentorship program to help international students have a greater sense of belonging in the United States. I personally

lived abroad for five years, and I will reference personal experiences that have contributed to my idea for this program intervention as well.

Theory to Practice

As we can see in the research and literature presented in chapter 3, international student sense of belonging can and should be improved. Based on this research, a mentorship program would be beneficial to our international students. Becker (2018) discussed stressors in international students' lives and how they underutilize professional support services on campus. This research is the main reason for my idea of a mentorship program to enhance international student sense of belonging at American universities. International student development was studied by Eldaba (2016) and is also informed by Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). Using these examples, one can see how international students can depend on other international students to have that sense of safety needs, and security among others like them. Glass et al. (2015) discussed how international students tend to reach out to faculty members before using any professional resources, which is the rationale behind my third level of the mentorship program.

Looking at Dewey's (1938) pedagogy of learning, one can see that universities should cater curriculum to be relevant to students' lives. Learning is not only done inside the classroom, therefore a mentorship program is the perfect way international students can still learn about life in the United States, all while formulating a greater sense of belonging in their university and in our country. In chapter 2, I used David Kolb's (2017) experiential learning cycle, which informs my intervention and my claim that the university is not the only place students can learn. This cycle is a great example reassuring the need for a way international students can learn about

United States lifestyle and customs by having a mentor and creating a greater sense of belonging on their campus.

Professional Competencies

For this program, I will use the following ACPA/NASPA's Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs (2015) and share how they are related to my thematic concern and proposed intervention.

Competency Area	Description	Application
Social Justice and Inclusion (SJI)	Both a process and a goal which includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups while seeking to address and acknowledge issues of oppression, power, and privilege.	International Students come from all different backgrounds. By developing this competency, one can appreciate where the injustices and inequalities lie throughout the history of our country regarding immigrants.
Student Learning and Development (SLD)	Addresses the concepts and principles of student development and learning theory.	I have used student development theory in my research and will use this competency to address all different aspects of student development and learning throughout this program and during the students' time at my institution.
Advising and Supporting (A/S)	Addresses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to providing advising and support to individuals and groups through direction, feedback, critique, referral, and guidance.	In my daily work, I am currently advising and supporting both domestic students going abroad and international students coming to study here in the United States. This competency has been a driving factor for my research, and is also something that I will take into consideration while working and developing this mentorship program.

Program Proposal: Global Ambassadors

While some international students tend to stick with other international students, we have seen from the literature review in chapter 3 the benefits of having relationships with "traditional" American students. The psychological and physical help that these friendships give the international student is endless. We can see from literature that international students who build friendships with students of United States citizenship are more confident in their language skills, adapt better to the cultural differences, and are more involved in campus life (Baba & Hosoda, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative to have some type of peer mentor or ambassador program for these students.

There will be multiple ways students can be involved in this intervention. The basic level of involvement is that any international student can request and work with a mentor. In an ideal world, our domestic students who come back from studying abroad would be able to serve as mentors. I am proposing there could be various levels depending on what the mentee wants:

1) A first-year international student with an international student who has been here for more than 1 year.

2) An international student with a domestic study abroad student, i.e., someone who has studied abroad and knows what the experience is like to be in a foreign country at a different school and potentially not speaking the language.

3) Eventually, based on the previously mentioned research, it would be beneficial to have faculty mentors as well, and provide faculty members with resources on how to help international students they may have in their classes. I know professors have a lot going on already and might not be interested in taking on another project, but the

research shows how these relationships would be beneficial to international students'

sense of belonging and therefore their academic success.

In collaboration with International Student Association, and the institution's Center for

International Programs/Global Studies I would create a safe space for these groups to come

together. This space would allow both international and domestic students to interact in a casual,

informal setting. Events and workshops could be help in the space. The casual atmosphere would

help mentees relax and feel as if they were connecting with a friend vs a counselor.

In my experience abroad, once I had those friends and those casual relationships, I was

more willing to ask questions without fear of sounding stupid about not knowing something.

Even if after four years abroad, my best friend would eventually joke with me about my asking

questions or how I did not know something after so long in Spain, but he would always first give

me the answer and help me in any way that he could.

Goals

The main goal of this program is to give international students a sense of belonging, a

feeling of connectedness, and to give them an overall better experience during their time at an

American university. Chapter 3 highlights how sense of belonging leads to greater academic and

personal success. Therefore, a program of this style would benefit international students. This

program can provide a safe space for international students to ask questions and be able to learn

about American culture and practices without stress. International students will be able to have a

greater connection to their campus community and feel more at home during their time in the

United States. On the other hand, this program will also help the mentor, because no matter if it

is another international student or a domestic student who has previously studied abroad, they

would be able to learn about more cultures and countries which enhance their understanding of global citizenry.

Recruitment and Training

Mentors

To find the mentors for this program, I will reach out to domestic students who have previously studied abroad and from international students who have been here for more than one year. Before our domestic students go abroad, I will include the information about the possibility of serving as a mentor in their pre-departure orientation. Upon return, I would remind them of the opportunity in their post-trip debrief session. The training protocol will not be extremely time consuming since they will have the handbook in order to know where to direct students for on and off campus resources. The mentors will also have a training session with the international office in order to be informed of any cultural aspects to take into consideration, but this is not as big of a concern since all these students will have had an international experience. The main part of the training will be to make sure students can direct their mentees to the correct office on campus, or if they do not know the exact resource, they can direct the mentee to the international office for assistance.

As part of this intervention, mentors and mentees would have access to a resource handbook. This handbook would highlight all the departments on campus with their office number, website, and social media. I will reach out to every department to see if they would offer a point of contact person. I would work with the local Chamber of Commerce to include brochures and/or websites to showcase the area around the university so students would also know what they can do in the area. I would also include references to the local transit authority website with transit schedules so students know how they can get around the area. The final

piece of this handbook would showcase a list or a graph of the countries where our international students live. This map could allow them to quickly see where other students are coming from and see if there is anyone from their country or from a country that has a similar culture or language. I would also create a page for where our mentors are coming from and where they studied abroad.

Mentees

To recruit the mentees, I will start at new international student orientation. I would have the mentors in attendance so they can talk about how excited they are to participate and how willing they are to be a friend to these students. In order to pair the mentors and mentees, I would do a general interest survey with the following questions:

1) What is your major?

2) Where are you from/where did you study abroad?

3) Do you speak any other languages?

4) What is your favorite food?

5) What do you like to do in your free time?

6) If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go?

7) What do you hope to get from this mentorship?

Based on this information, I. would pair the students with their mentors. After they are paired, I would do a "speed dating" session so the mentors and mentees could get to know everyone else participating in the program. This way, the mentees can have other connections as well. I also would like to acknowledge that the pairing system would not be foolproof, and there is always a possibility that the mentor and mentee would not connect as would be expected. By having this

"speed dating" type of event where mentors and mentees could have quick conversations with each other for short periods of time, they might make a connection with someone else.

Events

Once the students have been paired, and made those extra connections, they will have the chance to meet on their own, and attend specialized programming through the international office and/or International Student Association. Each mentor and mentee would receive a monthly stipend of $50 in order to plan events. It would be suggested to plan one get-together per month outside of the international office and campus programming and workshops. These get-togethers could be one on one, or with another mentor and mentee. In the handbook, I would include suggestions of places where the groups could go, and ideas of things to do (e.g., local coffee shops, lunch at food trucks on campus, campus sporting events, etc.).

Along with the individual events that mentors and mentees can plan monthly, they would be able to join in on the events planned by the international office on campus and the International Student Association. The events planned by the international office may already include immigration workshops, so mentors would not have the burden of providing information about immigration rules or regulations. For any immigration questions, the mentors would know to direct the mentees to the campus Designated School Official (DSO). I have planned the following special events based on my current location, and the seasons that we have in the area where I am living and working:

Date	**Event(s)**	**Description**
August	- New International Student Orientation - Welcome (Back) event at Round1	The semester would kick off with New International Student Orientation where students would complete the mentor matching

		survey and be matched with a mentor. • Round 1 in a multi-entertainment facility with bowling, karaoke, arcade games and food. This would be a great kick start to the semester, and a great way for all students to start to get to know each other
September	• "Speed Dating" Event	• After students have been paired with their mentor, I would hold the previously mentioned "Speed Dating" event so mentees could get to know other mentors.
October	• Local Orchard Visit	• Apple/pumpkin picking is a very common activity in many areas in the U.S. Pumpkin picking and carving is largely associated with Halloween, which is a cultural holiday not celebrated in every part of the world. By going to a local orchard, students would be able to experience apple picking and pumpkin picking.
November	• Thanksgiving	• In order to celebrate Thanksgiving, we would have a potluck dinner within our program.
December	• Local Garden Or Holiday Light Show	• Something that I saw while teaching English in Spain, was the interest in

		American traditions that my students abroad would see in holiday movies. The idea of Christmas lights on houses and the decorations you see here is a very typical American thing to do. Even though all students are not religious or have different religions and celebrations in their home countries, this is something cultural about the United States.
January	• Welcome (Back) Event	• To kick off the spring semester, we would go to the local ice-skating rink to experience a typical winter activity. Some of these students are from areas that do not have snow or winter seasons.
February	• Super Bowl Party	• The Super Bowl is not only known for being the American football championship game, but it is also known for the commercials and the half time show. By having a Super Bowl watch party, we could eat typical American appetizers and let the students experience this cultural event.
March	Due to spring break, and the mandatory immigration workshops for OPT and CPT held by the international office, there would not be a set event in March. Students would be able to use their handbook to find local events in place of scheduled programming this month.	

April	• Washington, D.C. Trip	• In collaboration with the international office, we would take the students to Washington, D.C. for the day. This would allow the students to experience the country's capital, visit any museums, and also experience the cherry blossoms by going this time of year.
May	• Baseball Game	• Baseball is one of America's pastimes, therefore taking students to a baseball game would be a fun experience for them.
June	• Local Amusement Park	• Amusement/theme parks are something that are not as common in other countries. This could be a fun casual way for students to have an American experience in a fun setting during the summer months.

Students would be able to attend any on campus, or off campus, events with their mentor, and would work with the international office on campus in order to collaborate with their already planned events. By doing this, we can create a space that does not feel forced, like mentioned in my previous chapter's literature review. These interactions should not mirror a counseling situation, rather what this intervention is creating is a way for international students to develop a friendship with someone who can provide answers to questions or company over a cup of coffee. Events would be posted on social media (Instagram). I would also create a weekly newsletter in

order to showcase events happening around campus or in the local area that might be of interest to the students.

Finally, in order to get students to participate in a program of this nature, I would provide incentives for attending events. The students serving as mentors would already receive a stipend for events, but upon completion of the program they would receive $500 for their participation and dedication to the program. This grant money would also then incentivize mentees to later serve as mentors.

Faculty/Staff Involvement

In order to involve faculty, I will host additional events with faculty and staff guest speakers. I would feature a different campus department every month. The guest speaker events would allow students to get to know professors from different subject areas and potentially have them get to know a role model and possible mentor from the field they are interested in. In addition to faculty speakers, I would also bring in interested staff partners to speak about what they do on campus. I am aware that certain staff members have international experience and could be interested in serving and helping with this program as well. As seen in the literature review in chapter 3, international students' sense of belonging ties to their academic success, therefore having a professionally employee from the university in their corner could help their sense of belonging.

Campus Collaborations

In order to implement this program, campus collaboration is going to be key. All of the following collaboration ideas would be part of the program. Students would be able to attend any sessions hosted by any departments or functional areas on campus with their mentors, in order to create sessions that do not feel forced upon the international students. As mentioned,

international students are more receptive to help when it is coming from a more casual setting (Becker, et.al, 2018). I would like to work with the Digital Media Center on campus to create some short FAQ videos that could live on the institutions LMS page and on the international department's website. Current international students could share some of their frequently asked questions, and what they hope to get out of this program.

Another extremely important collaboration on campus would be the student union. I would like to create a room or safe space on campus where international students could meet with their mentor, and where international students could come and hang out with domestic students who have previously studied abroad. This room would be accessible only by students in the program or with permission from the international office. This space would have lounge chairs and sofas for students to relax in a casual setting, but would also have tables where they could do work. There would be charging stations and television with projection/HDMI capabilities for students to share their screens for any work or entertainment purposes. For decoration, the room would have a large corkboard map where students can put a push pin in where they are from.

Another office to collaborate with, would be the campus career center. We would work with students on networking and interviewing skills, all while sharing their experiences on how the styles are similar/different in their home countries. The career center could also be helpful to collaborate with, because as mentioned in chapter 3, international students have the ability to work for one full year after graduation as part of their visa benefits. Therefore, a career center could collaborate and have workshops on how to find jobs these students can pursue after graduation. The mentors could be beneficial at these workshops as well because there is a

possibility that some of them have had internships in the same field or have some type of connection to a company that would be willing to hire an international student.

This program would also collaborate with the athletics department on campus to encourage students to attend sporting events. During international student orientation week, we would visit a football practice, so international students could learn about this typical American sport. As mentioned in chapter 3, Hollywood has romanticized the American college experience, and international students are curious about the life they see on the big screen. Eventually, this could lead to further interest in sports, allowing students and mentors to attend sporting events throughout the year.

I would also like to work with student leadership and involvement, to see if we could implement an International Leadership Series to go along with this program. As mentioned in the research in chapter 3, Nguyen (2016) shared research showing how campuses need to engage international students more in different leadership opportunities. If we can create a more global leadership series on campus, this could possibly get more international students involved in campus organizations, therefore creating a greater sense of belonging.

Challenges

Student involvement would be the most significant challenge. International students have many questions, and by the time they come to an administrator, it is sometimes too late to solve their problem. If they were to have a more easily accessible person who could help them, then maybe they would be more inclined to be engaged on campus and attend events and workshops. Maybe they would join more clubs or intramural teams.

Another challenge is finding international students to participate. With the pandemic, we fewer international students than normal are studying in the U.S., and there are very few

domestic students on campus who have studied abroad. A small pilot group could be formed and grown over time as more international students arrive to study in the U.S.

The training aspect of this intervention could present a challenge. Unfortunately, as mentioned in chapter 3, the DSO of the institution is the only one legally allowed to advise these students on immigration topics as laid out by the Department of Homeland Security. The international students who are participating would know the rules and regulations themselves from our immigration workshops, but domestic students could know how strange it is to navigate public transport or purchase a cell phone in another country. The mentors would be trained to know the difference between a campus or academic topic, and an immigration topic. They would be trained and told how to direct mentees to the university's Designated School Official. The most important training for these mentors would be for diversity and inclusion, and the creation of a handbook for them to know where to direct these mentees if they have a certain issue on campus. One example would be if they are having issues with credits posting, they would be able to direct the student to the Registrar's office, or if they are having issues paying their bill, they would be able to direct the student to the Bursar's office, etc.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, this intervention is informed by my positionality discussed in chapter 1. In addition to that, this intervention is informed by the theories, frameworks, and research discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Finally, this is also informed by both my professional and personal experiences. In closing, I will discuss how my professional and personal experiences both in the United States, and in Spain, have led me to create this intervention.

Professional Experience

As previously mentioned, I am currently working in the field of international education. I currently serve as the Associate Director of International Programs at a university, where I advise and work with international students daily. I also work with domestic students who want to study abroad. Even though I have only been in the position for 9 months, I have seen firsthand the issues and problems that our international students are struggling with. I have seen how even though the research mentioned in chapter 3 claims orientation is helpful, we still spend the day giving students more information than is possible for them to retain. I have been able to digitize a lot of the information, but there is still something missing. I have also been able to talk with students about what they need and how we can help them, which has led to the creation of this mentorship program. Students report wanting to connect with other students for friendship and guidance.

Personal Experience

As discussed in chapter 1, I spent five years living abroad. My first year was not the easiest year because not only was I navigating a new country, and new job, I didn't know anyone, and I did not speak the language as well as I assumed I did. Having studied abroad in Argentina, the accent and many words were different than what I was using in Spain. I also had a hard time because I was a 22-year-old English teacher teaching in a school where my colleagues were all late 30s and early 40s.

 It was not until later that first year that I really made friends my own age and had that full sense of belonging. My colleagues were wonderful and are still some of my closest friends to this day but I was aware I needed friendship. Their children are also like nieces and nephews to me at this point. But, during that very first year, it was hard to navigate life and ask the right questions to the right people. I understand how these international students are feeling, because I have gone through it in a similar situation. I did not have to worry about laws regarding schooling, but I was

still an American on a visa in another country and had to abide by certain immigration laws and restrictions. I was limited in the work I could do, had to be sure to renew all my paperwork on time, and was not allowed to be outside of Spain for more than 90 days per calendar year. I know exactly what those stressors are like, and can say that from my personal experience I believe that a mentorship program will help these students have a greater sense of belonging, and therefore improve their experience both academically and socially here in the United States.

Chapter Five: Implementation and Evaluation

In this chapter, I will discuss the anticipated timeline for creating a program of this type. I will go over funding, marketing, and recruitment. I will reference theories and leadership models mentioned in previous chapters as evidence for how this program will function. I will discuss what assessment and evaluations will go into this program, and what I believe the degree of success will be for international student sense of belonging at American universities. Finally, this chapter will look at the factors I was unable to consider, and the countless possible events that could derail this type of program at a university.

Implementation

As mentioned in chapter 4, the implementation of this intervention could potentially take a few years, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Colleges and universities have not been able to send students abroad, and due to embassies still being closed, they do not have the typical number of international students in the United States. Because of this issue, I would start this program with a small pilot group to see if it works. I would focus on a smaller group of students to start and grow the program from there. This thesis is being written in spring of 2022 and I believe we could start the pilot group in fall 2022.

For the purpose of this thesis, conversations have already started with other departments on my current institution's campus for logistics about collaboration possibilities, as mentioned in chapter 4. The FAQ video filming would take place over the summer when the university's Digital Media Center is less busy. Since many offices and departments are not student facing over summer session, planning and creation could happen in order to implement these events during the following academic year. Collaboration with the university's international office and International Student Association would be imperative in getting students together. This

program would work closely with the international office, giving us access to the new incoming group of international students and the current domestic students who are studying abroad. Since we would be starting with a smaller pilot group, we would be able to work out any difficulties with implementation in order to better the process for a larger group of mentees.

Recruitment and Marketing

Marketing and recruitment for this program would start at international student orientation for incoming students and will be advertised to domestic students upon their return from studying abroad. These two groups will be important to specifically approach since this is a program is designed to meet their specific needs. I do not believe it will be difficult to gain interest based on my current experience. Personally, studying abroad changed my life and my life abroad has influenced who I am today. I understand not everyone will have the same feelings as I do, but I believe a lot of domestic students will be willing to serve as an ambassador.

International students come to this country not knowing anyone, and that sense of belonging is crucial to their academic and personal success (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Osterman, 2000). Therefore, I imagine a program like this would be appealing to them. I do not expect to have to market extensively. In terms of marketing plans, I would post information on the department's social media page, get the International Student Association involved, as well as the international student orientation team. I will create flyers on Canva, t-shirts, buttons, stickers, and magnets in order to promote the program. Additionally, it would be easier to recruit students after the pilot group, because students will have firsthand experience to talk about the program, how it benefitted them, and what they enjoyed about it. For future years, I will have testimonials and student videos explaining why they enjoyed participating in the

program, and what they learned from the experience as well. As mentioned in chapter 4, I

wanted to create a general logo that we can use in conjunction with the logo for the

global/international programs office on campus. An example of this logo can be found in

Appendix A.

Budget and Funding

In order to start this program and obtain funding, I would collaborate with Alumni

Affairs. I would reach out to former alumni who have studied abroad and previous international

students to see if they would want to donate back to a program of this type. I personally know

that when I am asked to give back to my alma mater, I always choose to donate to the study

abroad fund so that students can have a once in a lifetime experience like I did. An example of

this letter can be found in Appendix B.

I would collaborate with the university's foundation for funding, as well as with the local

businesses for donations of food for events. I would also investigate external funding, and

maybe grants, in order to start a program of this type. Since many of the events will take place

in collaboration with the institution's international office, a portion of the event budget will be

split with them. A sample budget can be found in Appendix C.

Assessment & Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation are key points to a successful program. "Part of the

responsibility of student affairs professionals is to meet the needs of students so that they can be

successful in their college careers" (Henning, 2016, p. 69). Assessment and evaluation are great

ways to discover what is and is not functioning for the students we are working with daily.

Henning (2016) also states that various types of assessment should be implemented over time

for any manageable program. We do not want to take all the assessment at once, rather

gradually in order to see the changes over time and evaluate how that can impact our students. Assessment and evaluation are, in my opinion, two of the easiest ways to discover our students' needs. We can see that student needs today will vary from students' needs five years ago, mostly in part because of the current COVID-19 pandemic. If we are continuously evaluating and assessing our programs, we will continue to have successful programs that serve our students.

The assessment and evaluation of this program will be easy to facilitate. I will use mixed qualitative and quantitative methods in order to review the success of this program. We will know very clearly if the program is working, because students would be willing to serve as mentors after they have been mentees. This program will be mostly self-sufficient in recruitment and evaluation of success, because students would continue to participate. This participation would tie into the sense of belonging for the international students and hopefully inspire them to want to give back in the same way.

Surveys would be sent to mentors and mentees after every event to gauge their perception of the event/workshop, and to see if it was beneficial to them. By using these questions (Appendix D) after events and workshops, I can determine if the sessions and workshops were beneficial to the student and if there is anything else I could take into consideration moving on throughout the semester.

As I am getting information during the semester from post events/workshops surveys, I will also ask students to participate in focus groups at the end of the academic year, to determine their feelings and opinions on the success of the program. Focus groups would be a key way of evaluation. The literature review in chapter 3 showed how international students are more comfortable in a casual setting (Glass et.al, 2015), therefore focus groups would be a way

for them to talk in a more relaxed setting. The aim of the end of semester focus group is to explore the students' experience in the Global Ambassador Program. In focus groups, students would be able to build off each other and we will obtain helpful data of their experiences. Some of the questions that will be used to start can be found in Appendix E.

Finally, I would like to use artifact elicitation as a type of unstructured interview for students to connect with others about their experiences. Traditional semi-structured interviews do not always allow students and participants to answer the questions proposed in deep and meaningful ways (Douglas et.al, 2015). Since we are now living in a digital culture, qualitative researchers have had to explore the material and digital products used today. My aim is for students to use the social media platform Instagram in order to share their experiences about participating in this program. I would allow them to do an "Instagram Takeover" where they could document a day in their life and can talk about their experiences in the program. This measure would give us information about the students' experiences in the program and serve as a marketing and recruitment platform as well. In analysis of the students' social media posts, we would look for common themes regarding what they highlight as meaningful in their experiences in the program in order to identify important aspects to emphasize, improve, and expand for future mentors and mentees.

Leadership

Leadership is many different things, depending on who you ask. People can be conditional leaders or relational leaders. Sometimes leaders can be role models. Views of leadership also depend on where you are living, what field you are looking at, and the social aspect of the roles. The status of leadership can change, depending on the situation. We can see a lot of these variations over the years, as depicted in Northouse's (2019). Leadership: Theory

and Practice. This book offers a comprehensive overview of key leadership concepts and how different styles can change and play out. One example of how leadership can change, is from the pandemic. If you visit LinkedIn, you will see numerous posts of how workers discussing how they would rather see a leader/manager who allows employees to leave to pick up their children, adjust hours and remote workdays, and is understanding that life happens. In the past, this was not always the case.

My Leadership Experiences

My own idea of leadership varies depending on what situation I am in. At work, a leader is someone who can take charge in a positive way and help us through tasks. In class, a leader is someone who speaks up, and tries to engage others in the group to talk and share. Generally speaking, a leader is positive, hardworking, and enthusiastic or passionate about what they are doing. I have been in many work, school, and sport situations that have had terrible leaders because it turned into more of an authoritarian. A good leader is someone who is willing to do all the things they will ask you to do. When I am working with students, I think a good leader should not ask them to do something that they themselves would not want to do. Being open is another important quality of a good leader. You want to inspire a shared vision, and make sure that you are not going to blindside the team or cause any problems by hiding information from your colleagues.

I have experienced many different types of leaders in my life. From playing sports, to working in a winery, I have been led by both incredible and difficult bosses, peers, and colleagues. I have been a leader as well, and I am sure to some people I was a great leader, and others may have a different perspective. I have had managers that have been right there next to me climbing into a dumpster instead of just making me do it, and I have had managers who

have sat by while I did all the work that they were supposed to be doing. Throughout the years, I also think that what leadership style worked for me has changed. I used to shy away from critical feedback, but now I embrace it, seeing as I really look to better myself and my work. I have been in the position of having a leader yell at me for doing something wrong, and ones who have come to me to explain the difference in how something should have been done. I think generally we need to think about how we would want to be treated in a position, and make sure that we are leading our teams, students, peers, in a way that we would expect to be treated by someone with "authority" over us.

Effective vs. Transformative Leadership

Effective leadership is something that is going to look different to each person. What is considered effective leadership to me, might not be the same leadership style that works for someone else. In my experience, an effective leader in a higher education setting would most likely be a manager. Managers build their teams to find a common goal and tend to the strengths and talents of their team members.

On the other hand, transformative leadership is leadership that inspires, and does not only rely on the strengths and talents of their team. Transformative leaders serve their team and challenge them to step up to make a difference (Northouse, 2015). Transformative leadership, in my opinion, is generally a better leadership style for the higher education profession, and for this program implementation, since we are trying to inspire and motivate our students. Despite their differences, I think both types of leadership can be successful in higher education, especially when the person in the position of leadership is actively encouraging their team or their students to be better, to make a change, and to better the university where they are currently.

Something important to consider regarding leadership is the ACPA/NASPA (2015) competencies mentioned in chapter 4. These competencies are a great way to evaluate and reflect on our own leadership styles, and the evolution and success of our efforts to lead in our respective offices. I would rather have a person in a position of higher authority than me tell me where I can improve and better myself rather than letting me slide by. These competencies have, and will, help me with my thematic concern. By looking at these leadership competencies, I have been able to gauge my own leadership style. I have been able to think and reflect on where I can thrive, and where I need to improve. For me, getting feedback is always helpful. This will play into my role and this intervention because we will need to constantly adapt and get feedback from the students we are working with. The following Leadership (LEAD) competency foundational outcomes will be key to my program implementation and leadership style.

Foundational Outcome	Description	Application
Engagement	Identify and consult with key stakeholders and individuals with differing perspectives to make informed decisions.	Students will come from different backgrounds and cultures, and will have different opinions. By using this outcome, I will be able to adapt my leadership style and position to impact what is needed.
Education	Identify institutional traditions, mores, and organizational structures (e.g., hierarchy, networks, governing groups,	The structure of an institution will play a role in a program implementation of this style, and being educated on said areas will

	technological resources, nature of power, policies, goals, agendas and resource allocation processes) and how they influence others to act in the organization	only improve the leadership and connections necessary for a program of this nature.
Development	Use reflection to constantly evolve and incorporate one's authentic self into one's identity as a leader.	This area will be key, seeing as there is so much that we can learn from these students from different backgrounds. By working with them, and constantly reflecting and evolving, we can become better leaders and better serve our students.

My Leadership Style

In order for this intervention to work, I need to be a transformative leader. I think that this style should not be too difficult for me, because I have the experience of living abroad and having to find someone to help me and mentor me in order to adapt as well as I did. I still think back to the friends I made, and how they inspired me and moved me to get involved in certain things in my town, like running for the "queen" of the local wine festival. If it had not been for my friends and colleagues showing me the "ropes," and their passion for their culture, I probably would not have been as involved as I was. I even saw the differences firsthand of myself versus the other three Americans in my town who only spent time with each other. They were not integrated as well as I was. From this experience, I know that I need to share my passion for international education and experiences international students can have while here in

the United States. I also need to share that passion and influence the rest of the international office, as well as with these Global Ambassadors.

The type of leadership I need for this intervention to work is not only transformative, but also democratic. I need to take ideas from what the international students tell me that they need, and make the final decisions on my own. For this program to be successful, international students need to participate and give their ideas and feedback to the intervention that I am proposing. Most importantly, I need to offer feedback and guidance. If students are feeling like they do not belong, and they need more support from our office in order to feel accepted, then I will listen to their suggestions and try to make their time here the best possible. As mentioned in the article *Striving for Success: Academic Adjustment of International Students in the U.S.* (Bastien, Seifen-Adkins, & Johnson, 2018), a major component of the acculturation process is acculturative stress. The want to adapt to the new culture, but the fear of losing your home culture is something that is a constant struggle for international students, and something I know I struggled with living internationally. A democratic leadership position would let me listen to these struggles and stressors that the students have.

Limitations

As we have seen the past two years, our lives can change in an instant. I have mentioned in this thesis how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected our ability to send students abroad and has limited the number of students who are able to come study in the United States. I mentioned how laws and regulations have changed between presidencies, which will always be a potential limitation depending on who is in the seat of power in this country. Another limitation, and something that I was not able to fully consider, is war. Halfway through writing this thesis we watched Russia attack Ukraine. World events are almost impossible to predict and account for,

in turn making certain situations a limitation for a program of this type. I would argue, however, that given this unpredictability, of which international students often bear the brunt, programs to support them are even more necessary to the overall health and equity of the university community.

For the purpose of this thesis, I am basing my proposed intervention on a medium sized public institution located in the suburbs of a large city. I know the implementation of this thesis could vary depending on institution type, size, and location. I am also basing the reasoning for this intervention on an international office that houses both international student services and education abroad, therefore bridging the gap between both sides of an office with this type of program implementation. International programs offices will have a variety of structures which will impact the scope and delivery intervention. I am also basing my knowledge, reinforced with the research found in this thesis, on my day-to-day work and what I am seeing that international students need on my home campus. The current institution where I am working is located in a suburban area with many opportunities for dining, shopping, etc. A more rural institution may need to adapt this intervention to fit their circumstance.

From my personal experience, I know mentorship programs can have benefits and challenges. I was paired with an incredible mentor in my master's program when I was a first-year student in the program. She was, and still is, helpful and a great resource. On the other hand, when I was ready to give back and serve as a mentor, I was paired with someone who was not interested. I made a connection with someone else in the cohort below me and now have a great relationship with them and love helping them whenever I can. Because of the mixed success of mentorship programs previously, I am prepared to mitigate any negative feedback I receive for a proposal of this type. That is why implementing this proposed intervention now, at

the same moment we are returning to "normal" operations in a post-pandemic world makes sense to me.

Conclusion

This thesis has been my life's work for the past two years. From the moment I made the difficult decision to leave Spain in the middle of the pandemic, I knew that I needed to stay engaged in international education, and what better way to do it than by getting a master's degree where I can study and be involved with something that I am so passionate about. International education is such an important piece of our world, and international students do everything in their power to come study here in the United States.

In today's society there is so much conversation about diversity and inclusion. We need to be sure that international students are being included in the conversation. I know that there is a plethora of possibilities for international students, and we can make a difference in their lives by increasing their sense of belonging at American Universities. There is a strong future for international education, and I look forward to continuing my research and work in this field to help international students feel a senses of belonging so they can thrive and be successful.

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Appendix A

Marketing – Logo

Appendix B

Solicitation Letter

Dear Friend of International Programs,

After almost two years of travel restrictions, the Center for International Programs is taking off again. We have been working tirelessly to ensure safe trips for our students going abroad and trying to work with embassies across the world to bring our international students to campus. There is so much happening in the world, and we are looking to launch a new program on campus for our international community.

I know that you had a great time as a student in our department. From studying abroad, to on campus events, I hope that this international experience made a difference in your life. If you are anything like me, it probably did. We are looking for contributions to our new Global Ambassador Program. This program will be able to provide domestic students returning from experiences abroad the opportunity to mentor an international student from another country. This program will also give our international students a sense of belonging and connectedness to our campus. I'm sure you can remember how difficult it was at times, living in another country and not knowing who you could turn to for advice or what to do in certain situations! It can be stressful.

This program will provide training to the mentors and let both mentors and mentees go on trips and experience typical American culture. Your donation will allow us to take them places like amusement parks, holiday light shows, and to Washington, D.C. It will also allow us to give students a monthly stipend to grab coffee or dinner in town with their mentor/mentee. We would appreciate any contribution.

Thank you in advance for your contribution!

Warm regards,

Emily Rooney

Associate Director of International Programs

Former study abroad student (Argentina – 2012 & 2014)

Appendix C

Sample Budget

Expenses	Description	Cost	Total	Category
Materials/Supplies for marketing and recruiting	• Paper • Posters • Flyers • Buttons • Stickers	$200	$200	Marketing
T-Shirts	T-Shirts for program participants	$10 (Quality T-shirt with multiple colors)	$300	Marketing/Operating
Monthly Stipend	Students will get a stipend to spend on events outside the program or international office events.	$50 (30 students, 10 months)	$15,000	Operating
Events	Food, refreshments, busses, entrance tickets	$30,000	$30,000	Operating
Compensation	Students will receive money for successful completion of serving as a mentor.	$500 (15 mentors)	$7,500	Operating
Total : $53,000				

Appendix D

Qualtrics Event/Workshop Feedback Survey

Q1 My expectations of the workshop were met

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

Q2 The timing of the workshop worked well with my schedule

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

Q3 I was enjoyed the content of the workshop

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

Q5 I would participate again in the future

◯ Agree

◯ Disagree

◯ Possibly

Q6 Please provide any additional feedback or comments here

_____

End of Block: Appendix C - Event/Workshop Feedback Example

Appendix E

Focus Group Questions

1) What was your favorite part about participating in this program?

2) Where do you think the program can improve?

3) On a scale of 1 to 5, how important do you think this program is?

4) What do you think the strengths and weaknesses of this program are?

5) Why did you decide to participate in this program?

6) How would you describe this program to others?

7) Is there anything else we haven't touched on today that you would like us to know?

Appendix F

Glossary of Terms

Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO): University representative with the Department of State to assist in matters dealing with J-1 affairs.

Belonging: A sense of identity for a member of a certain group or place.

Critical Action Research (CAR): Research used to find fault and improve a social situation.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): Temporary employment authorization for a F-1 student. The student must be enrolled in an internship course and the work must be related to their field of study.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS): U.S. federal executive department responsible for public security

Designated School Official (DSO): Individual who represents an American institution in matters dealing with F-1 affairs.

Domestic Students: Students from the United States and are classified with United States citizenship.

F-1: Non-immigrant visa that allows students to stay in the United States for their period of study.

Form I-20: Proof of enrollment in a program of study at a United States university.

H1-B: Work visa that allows temporary employment.

I-94: DHS arrival/departure record issued to visitors.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE): Federal law enforcement agency to protect from cross-border crime and illegal immigration.

International Student: Any student coming to study in the U.S. using a foreign citizenship.

J-1: Non-immigrant visa for individuals participating on a short-term exchange visitor program.

Optional Practical Training (OPT): One year period of time where a student may work after graduation.

Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS): Web based system that DHS uses to maintain information on schools, and students.

Theory of Student Involvement: Explains how desirable outcomes for institutions of higher education are viewed in relation to how students change and develop as a result of being involved co-curricularly.

Visa Status: Formal immigration classification in the United States as indicated on the I-94 record.

Visa: conditional authorization issued to a foreigner that allows them to enter or remain within its territory *note, visa is the physical sticker in the passport.