

Students Studying Abroad What They Encounter and What to Expect

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Abstract—Because of the increased cross border movements of students to pursue their academic education, university educators in many contexts are worried about a lack of interactive engagement among students from different cultural backgrounds. This article deals with what foreign students encounter in the new environment, hesitation before going abroad and exchange programs.

Keywords—students, abroad, culture.

Introduction

Perraton, 2017 did a study on Foreign students in the twentieth century. The study reviewed the development of international student mobility in the twentieth century as exemplified by Britain, France, Russia or the Soviet Union, and the United States. It summarises data on international student numbers and describes the development of policy at an institutional and national level in these four countries. Conclusions are drawn and related to current policy debates (Perraton, 2017). Rao, 2014 stated that of late, over half the Ph.D.'s awarded in economics in the United States have gone to foreigners. At the same time, time to completion of a Ph.D. has risen. The presence of many foreign students in graduate economics programs may provide some insight for this longer duration. Rao explored this relationship and offered an explanation for the large number of foreign students studying in the United States (Rao, 2014).

What the Foreign Student Faces in the New Environment

Foreign student must learn to communicate in an unfamiliar language. Often there is a long period of stress before he or she can use English with facility. The student may also have to become accustomed to new kinds of food and habits of eating.

Foreign student must become oriented to a new educational system: administrative complexities, grading, study methods, classroom procedures, the presentation of papers, reports, quizzes, and examinations. Perhaps the student must discipline him- or herself to daily class attendance--something not required on the higher education level in most countries. The foreign student must accommodate him- or herself to different social mores, and must form new friendships and, in some cases, overcome homesickness (Sasnett 1962).

Zhou and Todman, 2008, conducted a study on Chinese students who come to study in the UK and

their UK teachers have to adapt to cultural differences in their experience of and expectations about teaching and learning traditions and practices. Qualitative and quantitative data were obtained for Chinese postgraduate students and the staff teaching them in two Scottish universities to investigate the extent of their shared perceptions and their reciprocal adaptations. Students, especially those coming in groups, tended to deal with problems among themselves, which resulted in their teachers having limited awareness of their students' difficulties. Several themes that emerged in relation to reciprocal adaptation are discussed (Zhou and Todman, 2008).

Discussion

Foreign students who go abroad should have academic training adequate for entrance into the program at the university in which they plan to enroll. They should expect to have openness to new experiences, a positive attitude to cultural differences, ability to make friends without too much difficulty, personal independence, and security. Failures, when they occur, are occasionally due to professional incompetence, but much more frequently the factor of personality. In the case of married persons, such factor regarding the spouse may be equally predictive of success or failure.

The informality characteristic of most American universities may be confusing and disturbing to foreign students accustomed to a more respectful attitude toward the professor and no interruption in class. They would be less confused if they knew in advance, and were helped to realize the manner in which an American professor perceives and fulfills the teaching role in that culture.

As for learning in advance what to expect regarding the culture as a whole, the difficulty of obtaining the necessary information is often greatly magnified. The "culture shock" would be reduced if the foreign student knew more about general norms or standards of behavior. Without some preparation the student may remain puzzled and confused. A Latin American said,

"I could not get any help from the American consulate, only books. There was no information available, except what I learned from the municipal library." An Asian commented, "I did not have anyone to ask about American colleges except one friend."

Another foreign student said, "They [the American Embassy] told me something about universities, but they did not tell me anything at all about what life in

general would be like" ("Foreign Students in the United States, a National Survey").

This kind of preinformation, which is of major importance, is often lacking. In my opinion, foreign students themselves have to try to find information about the place they will go to as hard as they can. They should also try to get it from different available sources: from the school they will go to, from friends, teachers who have been there, from their governments, from the American embassies, and other sources.

Despite that, I think they would experience the culture shock and face a few problems even if they read about the country, its education system, and its lifestyle. Advance knowledge will not solve any problem, but it makes adaptation somewhat less traumatic.

The problem of finding adequate lodging can be one of the most troublesome. Students vary so much in their tastes and preferences with regard to housing that it is difficult to set up any housing scheme calculated to satisfy all foreign students.

However, it should be possible to give them more help in finding lodging, in indicating what is available, the available alternatives, the prices, the nature of the installation, the people involved, etc.

The first contacts with the university could be painful if the student has difficulty in learning the ropes, the details regarding registration for courses, discovering where to go and when, what library to use, and so on (Klineberg, 1979).

Students coming from a developing to a fully developed country may have had the same kind of education, but not enough of it. They may have been judged more leniently in their own country than they will be abroad. As a result, they may undertake a course of study which is beyond the limit of their understanding. This may be no means related to their level of competence or expected achievement, but it may result in failure because of lack of experience with the academic level which they are now required to meet. Therefore, the process of preparation of these students for their foreign sojourns requires information not only regarding the nature but also the level of the university system into which they are planning to enter. One technique which might be used to solve this problem is to enroll new students who need it in a preliminary period of schooling before they enroll in the university on a regular basis. Such training may take many forms depending on the nature of the deficiency shown by the students concerned. Usually it will include language training, it may consist of several basic courses considered to be requirements for the more advanced work which these students are planning. As a result, many foreign students will have to increase the period of time which they estimated as necessary for the completion of their planned course of study.

Some items of culturally determined behaviors should be taken into consideration and not misinterpreted. For example, Americans and Canadians use first names easily and quickly on slight acquaintance, and visitors may feel that they have been admitted to a close friendship, only to be disillusioned when they discover that nothing more is involved than casual acquaintance. A kiss on the lips is much more serious to the Italians or Spanish than to the English or American girls. In Spain and much of Latin America, the tendency is to offer a guest any object in the house for which the visitor expresses admiration with the expectation that it will be equally politely refused. This gesture may be sometimes misinterpreted as a genuine gift. Americans, whose homes are relatively easily opened to strangers, may resent not being invited into the homes of French or Mexican friends, not realizing that the threshold of a house may constitute a much greater obstacle for some people than for others.

Table manners differ widely. The Indian picks up his food with his hands, the Frenchman mops up his gravy with his bread, the American may hold his sandwich in his hand instead of using a knife and fork (Eide, 1970). These examples, many of which have been reported in interviews with foreign students as among the sources of misunderstanding, regarded as representative of the complexity of the problem of preparation for a foreign sojourn.

Hesitation Before Going Abroad

The opportunity to go abroad for study is not, however, an unmitigated blessing. Usually the considerations that are uppermost in students' minds when making their decision to go abroad are the implications of being away from the family for a long time; travel and living costs; and doubts about one's own ability to meet the academic standard of the proposed courses. Prospective overseas students do hesitate, because of fears about lack of fluency in English, racial and religious discrimination, and social isolation to which they may be subjected in their host countries, and because of possible loss of contact with their own cultures (Rao 1979).

Also, foreign students put in their minds that they will be asked many questions about their experience upon their return or even at their schools abroad. Questions such as Did you get what you came for?

Did you pass your examination or receive the degree that you wanted? Did you enjoy your sojourn abroad? What difficulties did you encounter, and could they have been avoided?

Did you grow, in experience or in personality? Did your foreign study help you when you returned? Did it have a favorable influence on your career? (Klineberg 1976).

Programs for Intellectual Exchange

It might be helpful to foreign students before they decide to go study abroad to become involved in student exchange programs. Such programs generate interaction between cultures, increase awareness and understanding of other cultures, and give information about special elements of a culture, such as values, customs, and beliefs. The aim of intercultural programs is to make international exchange smooth and easy, and every activity should have a set-up goal and purpose. Programs that enrich understanding, awareness, open communication, and cultural sensitivity contribute to the personal development of students, both domestic and international. Such programs should be part of students' education because it provides information and promotes value clarification.

Although a broad range of programs is desirable, the types, number, and frequency of international programs will depend on a variety of factors, including institutional size, foreign student population, human and material resources, community support, and institutional commitment to intercultural exchange. Some of the factors can be influenced, others cannot. For example, through a well-organized, systematic effort, community support can be increased. However, it may not be possible to secure an increase in institutional funds for international activities. Careful assessment of the existing situation and conditions is a prerequisite to international programming (Pyle1986).

Recommendations

➤ United States institutions of higher education that enroll students from abroad should view receipt of foreign students as a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge. Foreign students are eager to contribute to the learning of American students, but find them unreceptive. Attitudes of the administration can foster more receptive attitudes on the part of the students. When the administration believes mutually beneficial exchange can take place, greater imaginative effort will be put into finding ways to realize the benefits of exchange.

➤ It is not realistic to expect all desirable prerequisites to be met before the entrance to the United States institution. Where remedial services are available, language and other deficiencies could be worked on before entrance into the regular curriculum. By using this device, the institution will assure the foreign student of a reasonably adequate preparation for pursuit of his regular career. Also, the student will overcome many of the problems resulting from insufficient language preparation, inadequate laboratory skills, etc.

➤ Standard of academic quality must be maintained in the interest of the reputation and integrity of U.S. higher education and in the best interest of the foreign student and his or her home country.

➤ United States institutions of higher education have a great need for much more information about the education systems of countries from which they receive large numbers of students.

➤ More attention should be accorded academic advice as an area of need among foreign students.

➤ Establishment of additional English language centers might be taken into consideration. Some universities unable to provide adequate language training and have the unpleasant choice of compromising performance standards or dropping the student. In either case, both the student and the university fail in their educational mission. Language is unquestionably fundamental to both academic success and personal adjustment.

➤ Information about United States education, both qualitative and quantitative, must be made more readily available to foreign students before they leave their home countries.

➤ The foreign student adviser must be an integral part of the international activity team at his institution.

Working with foreign students cannot be a successful venture if carried on in isolation. The foreign student's adviser does not have to be the central figure in an institution's international activities, but he or she must be kept advised of the total range of international educational activities in order to see the foreign student program in appropriate perspective and to relate that program meaningfully to other programs (Higbee 1961)

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