NASPA
Global Division
RESEARCH & PRACTICE
VOLUME 1 – 2026



Creating Global Community

NASPA

WELCOME

Dear student affairs and services professionals around the world:

Welcome to the inaugural Global Division Research and Practice Publication: *Creating Global Community.*

The student affairs and services (SAS) work looks fundamentally different from one country to another and at times from one institution to another within the same context. SAS on the international stage gives us a lens into the different models, practices, and programming adopted to each country or cultural context. From professional development structures, pipeline programs into the SAS work, to student success models, there is a breadth of practices and knowledge to gain from SAS practitioners across the globe.

Coming into the role of NASPA's Global Division director, one of my primary goals was to examine and spotlight SAS practices around the world and foster a tight-knit global community of SAS professionals. I am ecstatic that my idea of creating the first ever NASPA publication focused on global SAS, came to fruition supported by NASPA and the Global Division Board.

At a moment of immense global shifts that impact SAS like many other professional spaces, it is critical for us to listen and learn from one another. Featuring over forty articles from contributors representing 12 countries, this publication embodies and exemplifies what is most needed in this moment: identify, understand, and learn from global SAS tools and best practices. From student wellness, the role of AI, to international students targeted programs and professional development opportunities, this publication sheds light on the most significant trends facing SAS today and for years to come.

My hope is that you find the inaugural NASPA Global Division Research and Practice Publication informative and thought-provoking. Take a moment to share this resource with a peer, colleague, or mentor. Thank you for your time and commitment to students and one another, and we hope you consider joining us in building a global community by being part of the second edition.

Happy reading!

Omneya Badr, MBA
NASPA Board member and Director of NASPA Global Division (2024–2026)

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NASPA Global Division

FORWARD

This inaugural NASPA Global Division Publication provides relevant, engaging information about student affairs and services (SAS) issues and concepts from around the world. It contains research and promising practices from countries presenting various cultural approaches to critical topics facing those doing SAS work globally. With the emergent trend of nationalism across the world this monograph is needed now more than ever to demonstrate the power of collaborative learning and sharing toward the creation of a truly global SAS community. It is a glance at hot topics impacting a large segment of colleagues doing this difficult work of supporting students for their educational success. Please join us in Creating Global Community!

Publication Philosophy

The publication was designed to balance the ability for newer authors to have a publication outlet with a high-quality writing experience and outcome. Each article received rigorous editorial review with several iterations between authors and editors. This publication is an excellent example of how we can bring together knowledge and perspectives from around the globe, in one place, in less than a year.

The volume of submissions to this publication exceeded our expectations with an almost overwhelming amount of manuscripts from both seasoned and novice authors, oftentimes partnering together for cross-institutional and cross-cultural nuance and benefit. The quality of the articles is top notch and their length helps make them quick reads to gain valuable information in a short period of time. Authors have done an outstanding job substantiating their arguments and situating them within the relevant literature for their topics. For a complete list of authors and their home countries, please see the separate author list that follows.

NASPA/ACPA Competencies

The NASPA/ACPA competencies (2016) highlight the core elements of SAS work. The competencies were created through a collaboration between the two leading United States SAS professional associations. They attempt to describe the complex nature of SAS work and provide tangible standards to guide and align practice and professional development. The Global Division has employed these competencies in prior programming and assisted with their translation from English into Arabic and Spanish. The competencies have been revised and updated several times and rubrics developed to help gauge progress and support professional development.

FORWARD

Monograph Structure

This monograph uses the NASPA/ ACPA competencies as an organizing construct. Authors selected relevant competencies that guided the content of their articles. All articles fell out somewhat evenly across four primary groupings of competencies. Many articles address Student Learning & Development (25%) and Social Justice (25%), with articles also addressing the Technology, and Advising & Support competencies (25%). The rest of the articles fell into the various remaining competency areas, which are outlined in the table of contents.

Throughout this monograph you will find research packed articles illuminating critical concepts from across the globe. From innovative supports for international graduate students to administrative approaches to providing mental health services there is a wide range of perspectives and promising practices included.

Acknowledgments

A most sincere thank you to the dedicated team that worked tirelessly on this monograph to achieve these lofty, inaugural goals. It took a dedicated group working closely together to coordinate submissions, editorial feedback, and administrative processes. We hope that you will enjoy learning about SAS issues of importance and prominence across the globe in this first-ever Global Division Publication, and join us in creating and sharing global community.

Your editors,

Brett Perozzi
Heidi October
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As an educator, Omneya enjoys giving back to the profession and is interested in creating professional development opportunities for global student affairs professionals and encouraging research and sharing knowledge among counterparts around the world.

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Promoting Global Citizenship Education through Civic Engagement – A Higher Education Perspective

Akshay Anil, Community Coordinator, University of Mississippi, USA

ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, political movements have reshaped democracies across the globe. As higher education institutions (HEIs) become more international, with increased student mobility and cultural exchange, they carry a social responsibility to contribute to the common good. Civic engagement—through service-learning, political advocacy, and community involvement—provides students with opportunities to engage deeply with both local and global communities while promoting democratic values. This paper explores how civic engagement helps students develop civic identity, intercultural competence, and a sense of global responsibility. It also highlights the connection between internationalization and global citizenship, arguing that civic engagement should be integrated into institutional/organizational missions and possibly curricula. By supporting civic engagement, HEIs can play a key role in creating inclusive, globally-minded communities and preparing students to be agents of change in a diverse, interconnected world.

Introduction

In the first quarter of the 21st century, the world has witnessed numerous events that have had a profound influence on the global order, such as the financial crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing global conflicts. Dissemination of knowledge is not the sole purpose of Higher education institutions (HEIs); rather, they have a moral responsibility as institutions to nurture students for the public good (Braskamp, 2011). With increased internationalization and student mobility opportunities, HEIs are global spaces with diverse identities and opinions, highly influential in shaping the future generation (Bowman & deWinter, 2021). In this context, civic engagement emerges as a powerful educational tool, and when combined with Global Citizenship Education (GCE), it can be transformative for students and the global society.

Civic Engagement and Global Citizenship Education

Civic engagement is different from civic education as it encompasses both education and practice, helping students immerse themselves in the communities and larger societies they live in through volunteering and service-learning activities. It involves developing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that students need to participate in their communities and contribute to positive social change (Grad & van der Zande, 2022). Civic engagement is more than volunteering—it is transformational in purpose. Bobek et al. (2009) outline four key aspects of civic identity and civic engagement: social trust and reciprocity, civic knowledge and skills, pro-civic attitudes, and active participation. At Virginia Tech, civic engagement activities are primarily hosted by VT Engage: The Center for Leadership and Service

Learning. Here, students can get involved through Alternative Breaks and Weekends, where they choose to contribute to national and international communities, or participate in the Civic Democracy Leadership Initiative, a student-led program to encourage voting in elections, and through many other projects (Virginia Tech, n.d.).

In the contemporary world, globalization is not merely a "powerful economic force" (Guadelli, 2016, p.15), it is also an educational force that has propagated a strong wind of student mobility across different states and regions, nationally and internationally. Global citizenship is not bound by the government or sovereignty of any nation, rather it is the awareness and engagement in world affairs that makes someone a global citizen. Researchers have identified intercultural competence, and social identification with a global community (Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2024) as characteristics of a global citizen.

Relevance in Higher Education

Civic engagement is not restricted to the communities where the institution is located, as HEIs transcend local, regional, and national boundaries in their educational objectives. HEIs must create communicative educational spaces that open up new ways of "knowing the world more intimately" (Guadelli, 2016, p. 27), helping students see themselves as participants in a shared global future. Curriculum updates, extracurricular activities, writing centers, interdisciplinary programs, and elective courses are effective ways to embed GCE into academic learning (Bowman & deWinter, 2021). These programs encourage the development of critical thinking, cultural awareness and interaction, and civic expression—skills that are important for global citizenship.

Globalization has been one of the greatest advantages that has accelerated the impact of GCE in higher education. Internationalization through student mobility and internationalization of curriculum promotes global knowledge and cultural awareness (Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2024). In the United States, many universities have study abroad opportunities and foreign exchange programs for students to pursue part of their degrees in different countries (Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2024). HEIs also tend to collaborate with international organizations and non-governmental organizations to build service-learning projects for their students (Bowman & deWinter, 2021). This allows students to practice civic engagement on a global scale and to become a global citizen. One such example at Virginia Tech (n.d.) is the annual Global Alternative Break in the Dominican Republic where they collaborated with Community Service Alliance, a nonprofit partner to improve the local population's standard of living. By engaging in civic engagement activities in different locations, students gain an understanding of life in different countries, their culture, and history. These experiences can contribute to greater global awareness and help make the world a better place, contributing to the central idea of HEIs' responsibility to serve the society (Braskamp, 2011).

"Global citizenship is not bound by the government or sovereignty of any nation, rather it is the awareness and engagement in world affairs that makes someone a global citizen."

Carefully designed programs and activities to achieve the desired outcomes from GCE can create educational experiences that are socially relevant and impactful. Civic learning cannot remain an inaccessible opportunity; it must be built into both the curriculum and co-curricular experiences so that all students can engage in democratic and global learning (Braskamp, 2011). However, institutions face challenges in terms of funding and location limitations due to various administrative factors. In such cases, "internationalization at home," (Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2024) is a great strategy, which refers to integrating global and intercultural perspectives

into classroom content and pedagogy and providing students with opportunities in their local communities to learn similar skills as they would by traveling to a different destination. This approach is beneficial for reaching students who may not study abroad but can gain exposure to global citizenship concepts.

One of the goals of civic engagement is to produce global citizens who can think beyond their community and country (Simpson, 2021). This is the key objective of GCE as students develop a deeper appreciation for ethical responsibility, to contribute to their community, and to the larger society. A study of Worcester Polytechnic Institute alumni found that students who participated in off-campus international project centers reported broader worldviews through increased cultural understanding and awareness of complex global issues (deWinter, 2021). Becoming a global citizen requires individuals to understand different cultures, countries, political systems, and issues that affect other parts of the world (Guadelli, 2016). By combining the theoretical foundations of GCE with the hands-on practice of civic engagement, students are better equipped to apply their knowledge in diverse, real-world settings.

Conclusion

By integrating civic engagement with GCE, HEIs can create transformative learning experiences that prepare students to navigate and contribute meaningfully to a complex, interconnected world. This empowers students not only to think critically about global issues but also to act with purpose and responsibility in their local and global communities.

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Using Co-Curriculum to Create and Assess Global Community: The Case of Yale-NUS College

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ABSTRACT

Co-curricula that integrate global learning outcomes are an essential part of creating comprehensive living-learning communities at liberal arts campuses. In 2020, Yale-NUS College in Singapore introduced a co-curricular framework grounded in holistic student development and designed to support students as they move in, move through, and move out of their time at the College. This article presents the Yale-NUS co-curriculum and associated rubrics as an adaptable framework for other global liberal arts contexts. We explore foci on Community Living and Engagement, Intercultural Engagement, and Wellness from planning and development to implementation and assessment and provide rubrics in an appendix. The authors include a scholar of global liberal arts practice and the campus' former Dean of Students, Residential Education Coordinator, and Senior Residence Life Officer.

Introduction

From its inception, Yale-NUS College in Singapore was envisioned as a truly global liberal arts institution. The interdisciplinary academic curriculum was crafted from the ground up, weaving together Eastern and Western intellectual traditions. Equally important was the goal of creating a co-curricular experience that complemented this global mission—one that would extend global learning beyond the classroom and foster student development through daily life in community. The impact of Yale-NUS College continues beyond the 2025 dissolution of the Yale and National University of Singapore joint campus partnership through the legacy of the College's graduates and co-curriculum, which we present here.

While elements of a strong co-curricular experience were present from its earliest days, the College initially followed a traditional "programming-first" model. As the campus matured, it became clear that a more intentional and holistic framework was needed to guide global learning outside the classroom.

As the former Dean of Students, Senior Residence Life Officer, and Residential Education Coordinator of Yale-NUS College, and scholar of global liberal arts colleges and universities (Bowling, 2023; 2025), we introduce the Yale-NUS co-curriculum. We share the model and resources (see Appendix), its planning, implementation, and assessment, and discuss applications for campuses interested in adapting it to global contexts.

Planning and Development

Key foundational texts (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006; Brown, 2023) affirmed that a holistic co-curriculum could be well suited to Yale-NUS, however, it required substantial collaboration across campus to shift from ingrained programming habits and competing responsibilities to overcome structural inertia. To launch the effort, the Dean of Students brought in residential curriculum expert Paul Brown (2023) to guide a retreat-style planning process that engaged professional staff, faculty, and senior leadership in visioning and concrete planning. By the end of the retreat, the team had established the three core pillars of the co-curriculum, rooted in the College's mission and values: (1) Community Living and Engagement, (2) Intercultural Engagement, and (3) Wellness, consisting of resilience, mental health, nutrition and exercise, financial wellness, and careers and interests.

Subcommittees were formed for the pillars, each led by a chair and composed of relevant staff and faculty. These groups articulated clear learning outcomes at each stage of students' four-year educational experience and mapped developmental milestones, with programming and interventions outside of the classroom strategically aligned to outcomes. In some cases, existing initiatives were refined to better meet learning goals; in others, new programs and experiences were created. Branding created a sense of coherence for the launch.

Implementation and Assessment

The co-curriculum was primarily implemented through three residential colleges, each with its own distinctive character. These integrated living and learning communities offered students a strong sense of belonging and identity within the broader institution. Each was supported by a multidisciplinary team comprising an Assistant Dean (AD), Residential Life Officers (RLOs), and senior student Residential College Advisors (RCAs). ADs and RLOs participated in preparatory training before the start of each semester on insights into student trends, emerging areas of concern, best practices in student support, and co-curricular alignment.

Similarly, the RCAs underwent week-long training prior to the start of the academic year with a refresher before second semester that included the co-curriculum, event planning, crisis management, and peer support. Each RCA was assigned a group of students living in the same cluster and functioned as peer facilitators, fostering community integration and engagement. RCAs conducted regular one-on-one and suite-level discussions with residents to capture insights into their evolving interests, challenges, and aspirations, which served as the basis for developing contextually relevant programs. RCAs documented key themes for their RLOs, who would, in turn, highlight concerns to the AD to ensure a closed loop system of support. The RLOs provided ongoing mentorship and oversight to support implementation of the co-curriculum, utilizing tools such as readings, rubrics, and facilitation guides (see **Appendix**).

Global learning was infused throughout but specifically through the Intercultural Engagement outcome to "develop a relational and other-oriented framework….to engage comfortably in difference and allow for the presence of multiple truths/different viewpoints." One example was the Phuket Vegetarian Festival, where students engaged in dialogues on food accommodation and accessibility, as well as cultural diversity and awareness. Following a program, RCAs submitted

Appendix

The following are available to view, download, or make a copy through Google Drive:

- Student Learning Outcomes and Rubrics
- Co-Curriculum Sequence Worksheet, with tabs by year and month
- Program Facilitator Guide Exemplar

post-event reports that captured key outcomes, participation levels, qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the program's effectiveness, and future suggestions. This feedback process was a dynamic reflective improvement cycle, enabling RCAs and RLOs to co-create an evolving residential curriculum within the co-curriculum.

Co-curricular global learning can be both proactive and responsive. Over time, the co-curriculum became a tool to address challenges that emerged in the living-learning environment. One challenge Yale-NUS faced was managing cancel culture following harm within the community. Identifying the Community Living and Engagement outcome, "to engage in successful conflict resolution with others and identify ways to have meaningful relationships with others," the Student Affairs and Services Office hosted "A Conversation with Brotherhood" to learn from the journeys of two formerly incarcerated men and witness the transformative power of community, justice, accountability, and healing. Students who were previously resistant to alternatives to cancel culture became open to conversations that espoused applicable values and extended beyond their day-to-day lives on campus. In this case, the co-curriculum informed programming goals and led to a solution that bridged beyond the campus community.

"Co-curricula empower cross-divisional strategic planning and alignment with campus priorities, ensuring that global learning is holistic, intentional, and continuously improved."

Applications

From our combined experience and observation across global liberal arts campuses, we view a co-curricular approach (Brown, 2023; Kerr et al., 2020) as essential to embedding global learning in community. Co-curricula empower cross-divisional strategic planning and alignment with campus priorities, ensuring that global learning is holistic, intentional, and continuously improved. Student affairs and services can come to be seen as a key partner in accomplishing the institutional mission through engagement with other campus stakeholders in the design and implementation of a global learning co-curriculum.

As the sun sets on Yale-NUS College, we invite others to learn from, use, and adapt its co-curricular model to their own institutional mission and needs. We suspect that the global learning outcomes identified by Yale-NUS's group process may have resonance for other campuses and share forward the following resources in a spirit of advancing the common good. We invite teams to first understand their administrative framework then adapt relevant models and practices contextually to their unique organizational structures, national settings, and student populations, including creative interpretations among decentralized and non-residential campuses. We look forward to seeing how others adapt the co-curriculum to create global community.

Acknowledgment

The authors wish to acknowledge Paul Brown's contributions to the creation of the Yale-NUS co-curriculum.

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Access and Opportunity Revolution: Global Learning, Intercultural Fluency, and Career Readiness

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ABSTRACT

Graduates today must be prepared with skills that extend beyond subject-matter knowledge, including the ability to navigate cultural differences and adapt to global contexts, to demonstrate career readiness. With growing demands for accountability in higher education, colleges and universities are called to show how their programs foster these outcomes. Emphasizing global learning and intercultural fluency equips students to engage responsibly with societal challenges while building professional versatility. Embedding these elements into academic curricula not only enhances employability but also empowers students to contribute meaningfully in diverse communities and workplaces. This article examines approaches for integrating these evidence-based practices into educational experiences to better position students for long-term success.

Introduction

Global learning, intercultural fluency, and career readiness are vital to the success of graduates. In the current climate, educators are re-evaluating pedagogical approaches to ensure students acquire industry-specific knowledge, and the skills necessary for global citizenship and career success. Additionally, it's important that students learn to be good stewards, advocates, and change agents who are self-aware, mission-driven, and willing to help positively influence and contribute to global and societal issues.

As higher education faces increasing scrutiny regarding return on investment, institutions must demonstrate how programs prepare students to thrive in a diverse, interconnected workforce. Integrating global learning, intercultural fluency, and career readiness into curricula can foster competencies that not only enhance employability but also empower students as global citizens. This article will highlight strategies that foster the attainment of requisite skills and competencies needed to maximize student success.

Review of Literature

Key Competencies for Workforce Success

As the workforce continues to evolve, the competencies needed for success have become more complex. While traditional skills, such as communication, leadership, and teamwork, are an integral part of proving readiness for the workforce, globalization and digital technology have increased our interconnectedness and elevated the need for additional competencies and experiences that prepare graduates to achieve career success in the diverse, ever-changing workforce.

According to Attanasio (2020), intercultural fluency has rapidly become one of the most definitive global skills for success in our interconnected world. Intercultural fluency is defined as the ability to "value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions" (Attanasio, 2020). Research implies that students who consistently engage in learning and reflection of their intercultural skills, gain an understanding and foundation of intercultural knowledge, and receive feedback on their development in this vital area, are better prepared to lead and succeed in diverse environments (Attanasio, 2020).

Preparing Students for Global Citizenship

For centuries, there's been a need for common understanding and mutual respect for the varying identities, values, cultures, beliefs, and traditions that fundamentally shape who we are as individuals and contribute to the collectiveness of our society. Though this idea is not new, the term global citizenship, established in 2011, is still fairly new (Akkari & Maleq, 2019). Global citizenship refers to "an individual's awareness, understanding, and sense of responsibility towards the global community" (Atkas, Korkmaz & Yildirim, 2020, p. 45). Global citizenship can increase awareness, appreciation of cultural diversity, influence positive social change, and action toward a more just and equitable world. The value of global citizenship and the positive impact it can have on individuals, groups, and society, demonstrates the need for global learning as part of curriculum and student experiences.

"Integrating global learning, intercultural fluency, and career readiness into curricula can foster competencies that not only enhance employability but also empower students as global citizens."

According to Atkas et el. (2020), it's essential for students to form an understanding of global issues and the need to participate actively and responsibly as global citizens is now stronger than ever. As educators, we are now faced with the challenge and opportunity to present this concept as an important part of academic and learning experiences. The skillset and growth mindset that comes from global learning and developing understanding through global citizenship is vital to career success and the future of our world. According to Atkas et al. (2020), global citizenship is cultivated through education, and the production of a global citizen is a shared responsibility between society and educational systems.

Theoretical Frameworks and Evidence-Based Research

Theoretical frameworks and evidence-based research have guided the development and implementation of strategies for promoting global citizenship.

Global learning is defined as "critical analysis of and an engagement with complex, interdependent global systems and legacies and their implications for people's lives and the earth's sustainability" (Landorf & Doscher, 2023, para. 1).

Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that "advances equity and social justice by centering and valuing students' cultures and identities" (Saucedo & Jimenez, 2021, p. 3).

Career Readiness is defined as "a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success in the workplace" (National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], n.d., para. 1).

Implementation Strategies

Through evidence-based practices, research, and assessment, we've built programs that provide students with unique experiences that expand their minds. In establishing these programs, we

utilized institutional values to ensure alignment of programs with overall strategy and to gain buy-in. Through data driven decisions, we've successfully implemented global learning through a variety of initiatives, with demonstrated success in enhancing student outcomes.

Curriculum Integration and Professional Development

Professional development must evolve to meet the demands of our increasingly interconnected and global society. The commitment to excellence in curriculum and professional development extends beyond traditional pedagogical approaches to encompass the addition of global learning, intercultural fluency, and career readiness into educational frameworks.

To ensure students gain valuable skills needed for global citizenship and success, we've implemented key curriculum and professional development initiatives that are immersive in nature. One such initiative is our Annual Inclusion Symposium. The Symposium is a transformative experience that prepares students for the global workforce. With a focus on professional development, career readiness, and inclusion, the symposium equips students with the tools needed to succeed, while fostering a commitment to creating inclusive and equitable workplaces. The Symposium provides students with an opportunity to engage in professional networking, gain insight on workforce readiness skills, and understand the value of inclusion in the global workforce.

Additionally, curriculum integration is important in ensuring students are prepared for global citizenship. Establishing a First Year Experience Course, Professionalism in the Digital World, allows students to explore global themes, identity, inclusion, and belonging in connection to their professional journey. This course helps them better understand the impact of interconnectedness and our responsibility as global citizens.

Industry Partnerships

Industry partnerships have emerged as a transformative force in higher education for enhanced global learning, intercultural competency development, and career readiness (Letukas & Moran, 2025). Strategic collaborations between institutions and industry represent a fundamental shift in how universities prepare students for meaningful participation in an increasingly interconnected, global workforce. Ultimately, the combination of global learning and employer partnerships creates a dynamic educational ecosystem that enhances student outcomes and prepares graduates for success.

Our experiential learning program equips students with essential industry and career skills by engaging in real-world projects through collaboration with businesses and non-profit organizations. These partnerships allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, enhancing their ability to work within and lead global teams. In partnership with global Fortune 100 companies, students have the opportunity for professional networking and building connections that enhance their employability for the global workforce.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the importance of global learning and highlights the value of key competencies needed for workforce success to elevate career readiness amongst students and graduates. As our world continues to evolve and become more interconnected, higher education must equip students with the necessary skills for success.

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Fostering Growth: A Peer Buddy Program for Autistic College Students

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ABSTRACT

To support the academic, social and personal development of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the Counseling Center at the University of Kuwait (AUK) launched a structured Buddy Program. This initiative pairs ASD students with peers from the Social and Behavioral Sciences and Anthropology (SBSA) major to foster friendships and enhance essential life and social skills. Prior to the program's launch, counselors conducted comprehensive assessments to identify individual needs and goals. Weekly meetings between buddies promoted gradual social growth, while regular check-ins with counselors allowed for tailored interventions, including buddy reassignments and structured support sessions. Although progress varied, many ASD students demonstrated meaningful improvements in social engagement. Challenges such as stagnation and buddy motivation were addressed through consistent supervision and flexibility. Overall, the program highlights the importance of peer support and professional collaboration in addressing the social needs of neurodiverse students in higher education.

Introduction

The population of college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is increasing significantly (White, Ollendick, & Bray, 2011), prompting higher education institutions to implement comprehensive support systems that foster academic achievement and degree attainment (Accardo, Kuder &Woodruff, 2019; Roberts & Birmingham, 2017). When transitioning to college, many ASD students lose access to the structured supports they had in high school, including specialized education services and tailored classroom accommodations. In response, colleges are increasingly establishing resources like informal mentoring, academic tutoring, and other support systems to help ASD students adjust to the demands of college life (Adreon & Durocher, 2007; Honan et al, 2023).

These initiatives complement the legally mandated accommodations that public colleges must provide to ensure equitable access to education for students with documented disabilities.

In an effort to support the social and personal development of students with ASD, the Counseling Center at AUK initiated a Buddy Program. This program aims to foster friendships and build essential life and social skills among neurodiverse students by pairing them with peers from the Social Behavioral Science and Anthropology (SBSA) major. The Buddy Program reflects a global movement among universities to support neurodiverse students by providing them not only with academic support but also with a structured, supportive environment where they can build social skills and forge connections.

The specific goals of the Buddy Support Program are four-fold:

1. **Enhance Social Skills:** Provide tailored social support to help students improve their interaction skills in various settings.
2. **Foster Friendships:** Create meaningful connections between students to reduce feelings of isolation and increase campus engagement.
3. **Promote Inclusivity:** Cultivate a more inclusive campus environment where all students feel valued and supported.
4. **Reduce Disruptive Behaviors:** Help ASD students to manage their emotions and to control their impulsive behaviors.

Program Structure and Approach

1. **Student Pairing and Counselor Involvement**
   Eight ASD students were selected and each one of them was assigned a "buddy" from the SBSA major. Buddies were selected for their relevant academic background, trainings, and involvement in different clubs or organizations on campus or outside. Additionally, each counselor at the Counseling Center was paired with an SBSA buddy, enabling consistent follow-ups and progress assessments for each ASD student in the program. This counselor-buddy partnership ensures that every buddy has access to professional guidance throughout the program.

2. **Initial Assessment**
   Before the program's launch, counselors conducted a thorough social and life skills assessment for each student on the spectrum. This assessment comprised 7 sections: 1) Self-care, 2) Time Management, 3) Technology, 4) Health and Safety, 5) Money, 6) Self Determination, 7) Community. These data provided a detailed understanding of each student's current skills and highlighted specific areas for growth. By identifying these developmental targets from the outset, the team could tailor support efforts and set realistic goals for each student.

3. **SBSA Student Orientation and Training**
   To prepare SBSA students for their roles as buddies, each counselor shared the results of the pre-program assessments with their designated SBSA student. These meetings were structured to discuss the skills and social tendencies of each ASD student, equipping SBSA buddies with insight into their ASD student's specific challenges, strengths, and possible resistance to new social dynamics. A disclaimer was also provided to SBSA students, emphasizing that ASD students may demonstrate rigidity and reluctance toward building new friendships, preparing them for potential challenges and the need for patience.

"The Buddy Program reflects a global movement among universities to support neurodiverse students by providing them not only with academic support but also with a structured, supportive environment where they can build social skills and forge connections."

4. **Weekly Meetings**
   SBSA buddies and their assigned ASD students met at their own pace. These consistent interactions provided a framework for relationship-building and progressive social engagement. SBSA buddies were instructed to meet with their respective ASD students 4 hours a week. Meetings can be anywhere on campus (indoor court, students lounge, library, outdoor places, diner...). SBSA buddies were also advised to encourage ASD students to attend events on campus and to join students clubs and organizations.

   Counselors and SBSA students had weekly 1-hour meetings to discuss the ASD students' progress—counselors highlighted the importance of patience and consistency, reminding SBSA students that such rigidity and hesitancy were natural and anticipated.

5. **Interventions and Adjustments**
   Throughout the program, the Counseling Center monitored each buddy pair's progress. When necessary, interventions were made to address challenges in certain pairings:

   - **Formal Meetings:** If an ASD student struggled with the informal structure of buddy meet-ups, counselors organized formal meetings to provide a more comfortable and structured environment.
   - **Buddy Reassignments:** In cases where resistance was particularly pronounced, counselors reassigned buddies, matching students to different SBSA peers to encourage fresh dynamics and renewed engagement.

Program Outcomes and Observations

1. **Progress and Positive Developments**
   Progress has been observed across the majority of buddy pairings. Several ASD students have shown noticeable improvement in social interactions and comfort with their buddies. One of the key indicators of the program's effectiveness is the increased social engagement of ASD students. Before participating in the Buddy Program, many students reported feeling isolated or disconnected from campus life. However, through their interactions with their SBSA buddies, ASD students gradually built meaningful relationships, gained confidence, and became more involved in campus activities and student organizations. Beyond promoting social integration, the Buddy Program also supported the academic and personal success of ASD students, with counselors reporting improved emotional regulation, reduced anxiety, and greater adaptability to university life.

2. **Moments of Stagnation and SBSA Student Challenges**
   While some ASD students progressed quickly, others showed limited or inconsistent growth, leading to periods of stagnation. SBSA buddies have at times expressed discouragement, finding it challenging to maintain motivation when tangible progress was slow. Counselors responded by reaffirming the anticipated difficulties of the program and providing ongoing support and encouragement to SBSA buddies, emphasizing the importance of resilience and adaptability in their roles.

3. **Counselor Interventions and Tailored Support**
   The flexibility of the program has allowed counselors to make adjustments as needed. By conducting formal meetings or reassigning buddies, counselors could maintain engagement and address specific difficulties on a case-by-case basis. These adjustments have helped sustain the program's momentum and provided additional support where needed, ensuring that ASD students received the necessary accommodations to continue their participation.

Conclusion

While it is still early to fully assess the long-term impact of the Buddy Program, the foundational elements for success are firmly in place. Initial feedback suggests the program is already making a positive difference in the well-being of autistic college students including noticeable improvements in their social interactions, comfort in social settings, and increased participation in campus events.. As we continue to monitor and refine the initiative, we are optimistic that these early outcomes will translate into lasting benefits.

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Student Success and Mental Health: What Comes First? – A South African University's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the intricate relationship between student success and mental health within South African higher education, drawing on the case of Stellenbosch University's Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD). Framed as a "chicken or egg" dilemma, the study emphasizes the bidirectional dynamic whereby compromised well-being undermines academic performance, while academic stress exacerbates psychological strain. Evidence highlights how socioeconomic inequalities, and pre-existing conditions compound these challenges. The paper argues that traditional, counselling-only approaches are insufficient for the scale of student needs. Instead, it advances a systemic, whole-university model that embeds wellness within academic policy, curriculum, and institutional culture. Through multi-level interventions—ranging from psychoeducational workshops to curricular integration and institutional planning—the CSCD positions mental health as central to retention, resilience, and equity. By promoting environments that foster thriving rather than survival, this approach offers a blueprint for higher education institutions to advance both individual well-being and student success.

Introduction

In the contemporary higher education context, the intricate relationship between mental health and student success resembles the "chicken or egg" dilemma. This mutual dynamic necessitates a holistic, systemic approach that addresses both simultaneously. As universities face growing complexity, success must be redefined beyond academic performance to include well-being, resilience, and meaningful engagement. Mental health can no longer be seen as the sole responsibility of counselling centres—it must become a core institutional priority.

This article examines how Stellenbosch University's Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) integrates mental health promotion with student success. By embedding wellness within broader success strategies, the CSCD fosters environments where students can thrive personally and academically.

Understanding the Bidirectional Relationship

South African students experience the dual pressures of societal expectations and institutional demands, often resulting in heightened anxiety and compromised academic performance. As Barbayannis et al. (2022) note, this creates a vicious cycle where poor mental health impacts performance, which worsens emotional well-being.

“The Okanagan Charter (2015) urged universities to become health-promoting settings by embedding wellness into policy, teaching, operations, and leadership.”

Socioeconomic challenges compound the issue. According to Begum et al. (2024), students from disadvantaged backgrounds face barriers such as limited support and financial instability, which impact both academic success and mental health. Pre-existing mental health conditions further shape academic trajectories.

Research confirms that mental health conditions like anxiety and depression impair memory, focus, and executive function, which are essential tools for academic success (Bettis et al., 2017; Thomas & Charles, 2022). Conversely, students with strong mental well-being are more engaged, socially connected, and resilient in the face of setbacks (Thomas & Charles, 2022).

This dynamic highlights the need for a supportive institutional culture. As Broglia et al. (2018) and Simpson & Ferguson (2012) argue, embedding wellness institutionally enhances student retention, persistence, and achievement. A healthy learning environment functions as a protective factor, enabling academic and personal flourishing.

Mental Health as an Institutional Responsibility

Historically, campus counselling centres bore the responsibility of addressing student mental health (Gallagher, 2015; Broglia et al., 2018). Originally intended for academic and career guidance, these centres expanded into therapeutic roles as demand increased. However, the growing complexity and scale of student needs have overwhelmed traditional service models (Feeny et al., 2025).

A broader institutional response is now widely advocated. The Okanagan Charter (International Conference on Health Promoting Universities and Colleges, 2015) urged universities to become health-promoting settings by embedding wellness into policy, teaching, operations, and leadership. Similarly, the University Mental Health Charter (Hughes & Spanner, 2024) promotes a whole-university approach, recognizing that mental health is influenced by curriculum, assessment, and institutional culture.

Earlier still, Pinder-Amaker and Bell (2012) proposed a systems-oriented model that factors in academic pressures, financial stress, peer support, and broader campus climate.

Adopting such holistic frameworks requires moving beyond isolated counselling interventions. Institutions must shift toward structures that promote wellness throughout the student lifecycle, fostering collaboration, equity, and sustainable support. This shift benefits not only individual well-being but also enhances retention, throughput, and long-term student development.

From Research to Institutional Practice

Stellenbosch University’s CSCD embodies this systemic approach. It operates not as an isolated service provider, but as a strategic partner influencing academic and co-curricular life. The Centre’s work is organized across three levels: centre level, curricular/co-curricular level, and institutional level.

Centre Level
The CSCD's role extends far beyond therapy. It offers academic development, career guidance, personal counselling, and transition support for students entering the workforce. Prioritising prevention, it offers group interventions, psychoeducational workshops, and lectures, broadening reach and proactively addressing emerging needs.

Curricular and Co-Curricular Level
CSCD collaborates with faculties, departments, and co-curricular spaces (such as residences and student organisations) to create environments conducive to wellness. Notably, the CSCD is involved in curriculum design. In the Being and Becoming a Health Carer module of the Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) program, the Centre supports content development that integrates academic skills with psychosocial competencies.

Staff co-design interventions explicitly link mental well-being with academic resilience. Peer-to-peer training is also central. CSCD supports student facilitators who are often the first to notice struggling peers and can refer them to appropriate services.

Institutional Level
At the institutional level, CSCD professionals contribute to systemic change. They co-authored the university's Mental Health Plan, advise on institution-wide responses to mental health, and serve on critical committees such as the Concession Assessment Committee and the Readmissions Appeals Committee.

The CSCD's Disability Unit champions universal access, working to ensure inclusive environments for students with disabilities. The Centre also plays a vital role in the Institutional Student Success Initiative, a coordinated effort to improve performance outcomes across diverse student groups. By embedding wellness in academic policy and practice, the CSCD demonstrates that mental health is not an optional service—it is a vital enabler of student retention, equity, and graduation.

Promoting Thriving, Not Just Survival
The CSCD's approach reflects a sector-wide shift: aligning wellness promotion with student success. Interventions that help students understand stress, build coping strategies, and strengthen relationships also bolster academic engagement. As Hughes and Spanner (2024) assert, thriving students are not merely surviving their studies—they are engaged, motivated, and supported across all areas of their university experience.

Conclusion
The relationship between student success and mental health is reciprocal and inseparable. Higher education institutions must move beyond reactive support models and embrace systemic, embedded strategies that promote wellness at every level. Stellenbosch University's CSCD provides a compelling case for this integrative approach. By situating mental health as central to academic success, the CSCD supports environments in which all students can thrive. Such models offer institutions a blueprint for advancing both individual well-being and broader educational goals, including retention, progression, and achieving equity.

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DECLARATION

We declare that AI-assisted tools (ChatGPT-3.5 Free Version and Grammarly BETA Version) were used to support writing and to edit content originally written by us in this manuscript. These tools were also used to condense sections to meet word count limitations. No content generated solely by AI has been included.

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Building Global Community Through Commuter Student Engagement at Stellenbosch University

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ABSTRACT

The Commuter Student Community (CSC) model at Stellenbosch University (SU) provides belonging and integration for the 75% of students who commute from off-campus accommodations. Organized into fourteen CSCs (11 undergraduate and 3 postgraduate), each community sustains a distinct identity and peer-led initiatives shaped by value-driven management rather than centralized instruction. CSCs are further integrated into SU's eight geographic clusters, linking commuters with residential students through shared hubs, dining halls, study spaces, and recreational facilities. This structure enhances academic engagement, fosters social cohesion, and expands access to university infrastructure. A discursive analysis of institutional documentation and practices illustrates how student affairs practitioners in the Commuter Student Communities Unit (CSCU) collaborate with students to reduce barriers to participation, strengthen agency, and advance equity. The CSC model demonstrates how commuter students can be empowered as intentional architects of community, contributing meaningfully to a transformative student experience and inclusive university ecosystem.

Introduction

As Higher Education institutions globally contend with diverse student populations, the imperative for inclusive, responsive, and sustainable engagement structures have intensified. At SU, where 75% of students reside in private accommodation, the challenges of integration, belonging, and equitable access to support services are particularly pronounced (Stellenbosch, 2015). Anchored in a residential approach to student life, SU's historic engagement structures were ill-equipped to meet the evolving needs of its commuter cohort. In response, the university systematically reconfigured its non-residential engagement, establishing a values-driven Commuter Student Communities (CSC) model, co-created by students and managed by student affairs practitioners. Unlike residence-based systems, the CSC model centers peer governance, contextual support, and community integration through curated engagement mechanisms.

This article examines SU's shift from what they termed Private Student Organizations (PSOs) to the CSC model, using discursive analysis of institutional documentation and practices to show alignment with broader transformation agendas and global student affairs priorities.

Historically considered a residential institution, SU's student communities centered around residences, which served as vehicles for leadership development, social integration, and co-curricular engagement (Stellenbosch, 2015). To accommodate

non-residential students, in 1973, SU created PSOs, geographic wards grouping commuter students by neighborhood. While a necessary step toward inclusivity, the PSO framework gave rise to persistent challenges including a lack of administrative cohesion, incorporating a more robust system of institutional recognition, and adequately addressing the structural and psychosocial barriers faced by commuter students (Stellenbosch University, 2009; Stellenbosch University, 2022). Internal reviews and student feedback consistently highlighted shortcomings, ultimately catalyzing a substantive redesign of commuter student support geared towards student success.

The present CSC model represents a strategic evolution of the PSO framework, with the transition to "CSCs" not only signaling a rebranding, but a reimagining of commuter student engagement aligned with global discourse and grounded in institutional accountability.

A key reform under CSCs was a randomized student allocation policy. Instead of geographic wards and walk-over practices, students are now automatically assigned to one of 14 nongeographic, fixed CSCs (11 undergraduate, 3 postgraduate), promoting demographic balance and stability. This structural shift addressed disparities and allowed for equitable distribution of peer support and resources.

Equally notable are CSC leadership structures. Built on remnants of the earlier PSO framework, CSC leadership has been formalized and expanded by the Commuter Student Communities Unit (CSCU), a dedicated student affairs and services (SAS) team. Each CSC is governed by a constitution and is served by a democratically elected house committee. Two executive leaders, a Primarium and Vice-Primarium, lead this team and are accompanied by a team of peer mentors. Together they manage portfolios such as wellness, finance, virtual engagement, sport, and academic support. These student leaders organize orientation, social events, study sessions, and other initiatives to foster community through values-driven management. Serving as an experiential platform, the CSC leadership structure develops students' competencies, reflective skills and applied knowledge while ensuring programs are strategic, developmental and sustainable.

"The CSC model demonstrates how commuter students can be empowered as intentional architects of community, contributing meaningfully to a transformative student experience and inclusive university ecosystem"

The CSC model also integrates a hybrid engagement strategy informed by commuter digital practices and the university's COVID-19 pivot. Informal student use of WhatsApp, MS Teams, and Instagram was formalized by the CSCU into a 60% in-person, 40% virtual model, enabling flexible participation for commuters (Keva, 2021c).

This hybrid approach underpins accessible programming such as virtual orientation and asynchronous community engagement. Research highlights psychological and contextual factors shaping commuter student success, including *mattering* (Hallam, 2023), home-community ties (Smith et al., 2023), and flexible, technology-supported environments (Buckenmeyer et al., 2016). The CSC model responds with relationship-

rich, digitally enabled engagement supporting inclusion, integration, and success beyond face-to-face interaction.

Further to the above, the CSC model emphasizes layered developmental support through peer-led structures. Macwele (2024) highlights the importance of holistic, scalable peer frameworks for commuters facing barriers. CSCs function as ecosystems offering, interdisciplinary interaction, peer networks, and leadership pathways. Roles from general membership to executive leadership are scaffolded by the CSCU through training, portfolio guidance, and transcript recognition equipping students to lead within their communities, the broader university structures, and beyond.

This foundation is further strengthened through SU's Cluster system, which connects smaller individual communities, CSCs and residences, into a larger shared community. Through Clusters, commuters form bonds and co-create with their residential peers while gaining access to university resources, including study hubs, dining halls, recreational spaces, and organized Cluster events such as Cluster sport. This integration fosters community and inclusion. Kingram and van Zyl (2021) show in their evaluation of the SU amaMaties Cluster that shared environments improve students' sense of belonging and integration, reinforcing SU's commitment to equity and transformation.

Conclusion

As global scholarship interrogates commuter student experiences, from commuting strain (Kaushik et al., 2024) to overlooked strengths supported by digital infrastructure (Turner et al., 2024), the SU CSC model presents a compelling response. It addresses structural constraints and psychosocial needs through developmental opportunities, hybrid engagement strategies, and peer-led, values-driven leadership.

In doing so, CSCs counter deficit-based narratives operationalize SU's Vision 2040 and Transformative Student Experience agenda in a globally relevant way.

Importantly, this transformation was neither immediate nor absolute. The shift from PSOs to CSCs was driven by institutional reviews, student advocacy, and adaptive learning. These changes underscore institutional responsiveness and the need for ongoing recalibration when addressing diverse populations.

CSCs at SU exemplify how institutions can reconfigure engagement frameworks to align with contemporary realities while remaining rooted in local context. Through deliberate structure, inclusive practice, and reflection, CSCs represent a model of commuter engagement that is scalable, sustainable, and globally instructive. As higher education evolves, CSCs offer a compelling case for building community across boundaries toward a more equitable and connected student experience.

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Someone Invested in Me: Global Fair Trade Learning Experiences in Support of Student Retention and Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The concept and practice of fair trade learning (FTL) – defined as global educational partnership exchange that prioritizes reciprocity in relationships through cooperative, cross-cultural participation – is a promising practice within higher education settings. This article explores how FTL can be implemented, institutionalized, and modified to fit specific locations with respect to local culture. Some lived experiences of program alums who share reflections on the transformative nature of their experiences are also highlighted.

Introduction

The goals of economic equity, equal partnership, mutual learning, cooperative and positive social change, transparency, and sustainability are central to FTL. The practice explicitly engages the global civil society role of educational exchange in fostering a more just, equitable, and sustainable world (Hartman, Morris Paris, & Blache-Cohen, 2014). As a high-impact practice contributing to overall student engagement, study abroad experiences – and more specifically, fair trade learning programs – help retain students and contribute to their long-term success (Bell et al., 2023).

Intersections and overlaps between the fields of community engagement, sustainable development, high-impact practices and experiential education exist naturally and offer opportunity. Particularly with respect to global education, "[it] should only be undertaken within a robust understanding of how the programming relates to the continuous learning of the student and community-defined goals of the host community" (Hartman et al., 2014, p.112). The push for reciprocity as both an aspirational goal and reasonable standard sets the stage for concepts like FTL to take root.

The promise of FTL is that new knowledge, relationships, and outcomes can emerge for all partners involved. Generative reciprocity can sit at the heart of equitable relationships between universities and communities, often blurring the artificial lines between them. Leading FTL scholars suggest that "as a function of the collaborative relationship, participants who develop identities as co-creators become and/or produce something new together that would not otherwise exist… the collaboration may extend beyond the initial focus as outcomes, as ways of knowing, and as systems of belonging evolve" (Dostilio et al., 2012, p.19-20).

Case in Point Methodology

This inquiry into practice employs a qualitative interpretive lens and aims to develop an

understanding of individual experiences of phenomena – student and alumni experiences of global FTL in higher education. This inquiry draws upon a case in point approach to understand a given phenomenon. Frameworks of action research (Stringer, 2007) and practitioner inquiry (Ravitch, 2014) were drawn on with the intent of producing practical and actionable steps that could improve the professional practice of individuals who engage in the specific context of FTL in higher education. The iterative and flexible process of action research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and drawing on experience as data through practitioner inquiry (Green, 2023) lend themselves to integrating practice and knowledge generation.

Student reflections and general demographics

In line with the case in point approach, three students who have participated in FTL programs at the university over the past eight years, were interviewed. These students traveled to a variety of locations – Jamaica, Northern Ireland, Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Puerto Rico. All three students had been involved in leadership education, civic engagement, student government, and advocacy-based student organizations. They were all highly engaged student leaders with a strong interest in community-based learning, all with a strong sense of purpose.

To gain a general sense of their FTL experiences, they were invited to talk about the ways in which the relationships they built in the community had shaped their future decisions regarding career involvement, social justice causes, and overall global awareness. The actual questions were intended to create an open-ended space for self-reflection. All three students identify as minorities from African American backgrounds and various socioeconomic backgrounds; all three students classified themselves as first-generation students.

Emergent Themes

From these informal café-style interviews with student participants, some emergent themes emerged. These themes tend to cut across the experiences of each of the students and focus on concepts like cultural humility, critical thinking, and global citizenship. Using the language employed by the students expresses the overall quality of their lived experiences.

Theme 1: "My friendships have lasted."

Several of the student participants noted that the relationships they built – both with local community members and other program participants – have persisted over time. In fact, one of the stated goals of their global programs was to form cross-cultural friendships that would help shape and broaden their own cultural perspectives. These friendships came to be built upon trust, collaboration, and a certain sense of shared humanity. Work by Kuh (2008) and others (McDaniel & Van Jura, 2022) point to the importance of cultivating safe and supportive communities for students, and high-impact practices, by nature, allow this intimacy to happen. These relationships ultimately help students feel part of something larger than themselves, something that is meaningful.

"Generative reciprocity can sit at the heart of equitable relationships between universities and communities, often blurring the artificial lines between them."

Theme 2: "It taught me to reflect on myself."

By experiencing the jolting effects of cross-cultural immersion, deeper self-reflection was a natural result for some of the students. They had the opportunity to reflect on their own cultural upbringings, what they assume and take for granted, and how they relate. And, they compared and contrasted their experience in the context of safe and supportive relationships. This was helpful perspective-taking for these students, many of whom had limited travel experiences of this nature. The hope is that this practice continues after their programs finish, and that they continually realize the value of

blending experiences across differences with regular reflection.

Theme 3: "Someone invested in me."
This was a powerful statement that underscores the importance, from these students' perspectives, on the need for barriers to be removed for these types of immersive experiences. Helping students find accessible pathways for cross-cultural programs – particularly when international travel is often viewed as out of the realm of possibility for many underserved and first-generation students – is critical for successful outcomes. Knowing that there were professionals who had a strong interest in ensuring these students' participation, and knowing the overall transformational value of these programs, was an important factor in how seriously they viewed the opportunities. Now, they see themselves as individuals – particularly as emerging professionals – who can pass along knowledge and invest in others.

Theme 4: "It helps me empathize and understand."
Lastly, a common sentiment expressed by student participants speaks to the idea that they came away from these programs with a greater sense of empathy and cultural understanding. Similar to perspective-taking, the students reflected on their own realities at home after meeting and engaging with community members in other countries. The value placed on in-person, sensory experiences – where they frequently felt uncomfortable and "out of their element" – was notable for these students.

Next Steps and Further Inquiry

These types of programs can be significantly impactful in the lives of students. Building community among diverse peers, cross-cultural friendships, sense of global citizenship, confidence, and resilience to explore new cultures were all outcomes. Further studies could shed light on the quality of relationships and how they impact all community members. In fact, some international education scholars place high value on these types of global experiences, noting that "volunteer tourism may have the capacity to contribute to the values of global peace, understanding, and solidarity if it can avoid being co-opted as a lucrative niche market" (Hartman et al, 2014, p.110).

Research questions around the strategic value of putting resources into fair trade global learning programs are critically important. As displayed through the student reflections, relationships and reciprocity are of paramount importance; these values last long after the end of a program. Experts comment on the potential for misaligned outcomes if careful preparation and partner development are not viewed seriously, suggesting that "these initiatives may subvert their stated purposes and reinforce inequality, dependency, and/or ethnocentric thinking" (2014, p.110). The key values of equity, reciprocity, and cultural humility must be foregrounded if fair trade learning programs stay true to their original intent.

Conclusion

From these case in point examples and analysis of emerging themes, university leaders – in close partnership with fair trade learning community partners – can identify potential action steps to consider for deeper FTL integration. At the same time, leaders would do well to consider how these types of programs can be woven into broader university-wide retention strategies involving high-impact practices, linking theory to practice to promote student success.

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Empowering Generation Z Through Career Readiness Competencies: A Cross-Campus Approach

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the American University in Cairo (AUC) Career Center's approach to embedding career readiness competencies across campus, using the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies as a framework for preparing Gen Z students for the workforce. By creating the Competencies Campus Integration Project (CCIP) model, to embed and integrate competencies in curricular and co-curricular experiences, students will be equipped with a practical framework to identify and articulate career readiness competencies across their college or university experience and bridge the gap between higher education and industry expectations. The article examines how the Career Center infuses these competencies into experiential learning programs, ensuring alignment from program announcement to assessment. It also highlights the importance of cross-campus collaborations between faculty and staff in integrating career competencies into academic and co-curricular experiences, providing students with a comprehensive pathway from campus to career.

From Campus To Career: Is Gen Z Ready?

Global expectations demand an answer to the age-old question, "What's next?" For Gen Z, the path forward is anything but straightforward. Linear careers are becoming the exception, with the average person expected to change careers multiple times (The University of Queensland, 2023), and the pressure to make the "right" choice can feel overwhelming. Some envision a conventional 9-to-5 job, others research or academia, while many aspire to entrepreneurship or freelance work. Amid these challenges, the real question is not about choosing the next step. Instead, Gen Z is asking: "How can higher education truly prepare us for the global workforce?"

To engage Gen Z, employers are reimagining talent strategies through human-centric innovation, as Deloitte's Global (2025) reveals Gen Z's "trifecta" of priorities: financial security, meaningful work, and well-being. Moreover, global employers' hiring practices are shifting; the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (2025) indicates that for the third straight year, more employers are hiring based on competencies, and only less than 40% of employers are still hiring based on GPA.

The Competency Gap

Yet, a gap between employers' ratings of the importance of competencies and students' demonstrated proficiency exists. Employers consistently rate the importance of competencies

higher than students' demonstrated proficiency, as shown by global data in **Figure 1** and local data in **Figures 2 and 3**.

Higher education faces an urgent imperative: To demonstrate the distinctive value it provides in preparing students for an increasingly competitive global market. A need exists for colleges and universities to empower Gen Zs with a practical framework enabling them to develop and articulate their competencies as a result of their college experience.

NACE Competency Framework

As an intervention, NACE (2022) launched its Career Readiness Initiative in 2015, with a task force of higher education career services professionals, and employers to articulate the competencies that constitute career readiness. Between 2018 to 2021, NACE partnered with SkillSurvey to identify observable behaviors, making the framework actionable and measurable. By 2024, NACE introduced the Competency Assessment Tool and established the current competencies: Career & Self-Development, Communication, Critical Thinking, Equity & Inclusion, Leadership, Professionalism, Teamwork, and Technology. Both the competency framework and the assessment tool transformed career preparation from an abstract concept into a tangible student experience, establishing a shared global language for career readiness among students, educators, and employers.

Figure 1. Importance of vs. Proficiency in Career Readiness Competencies by Percent of Respondents (NACE, 2023)

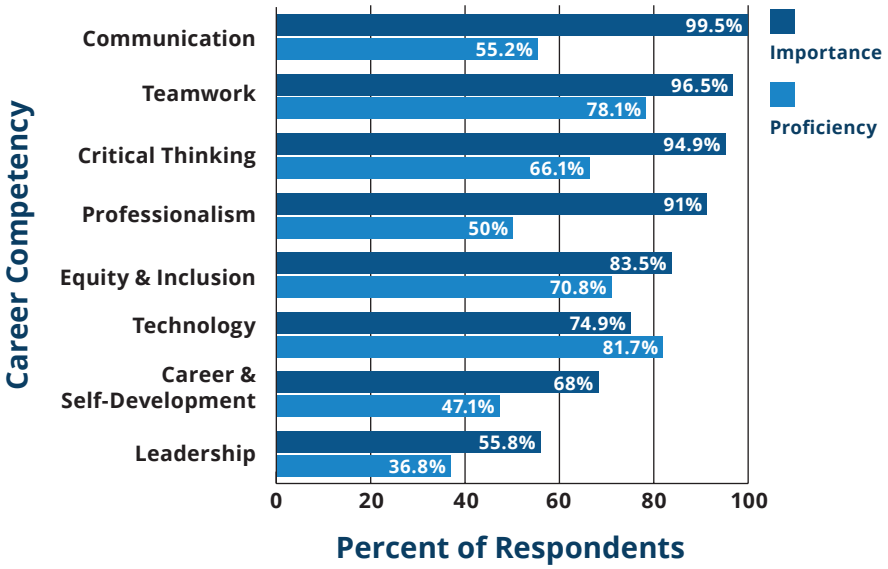


Figure 2. To What Extent are the Career Readiness Competencies Important? (AUC Employer Satisfaction Survey, 2023)

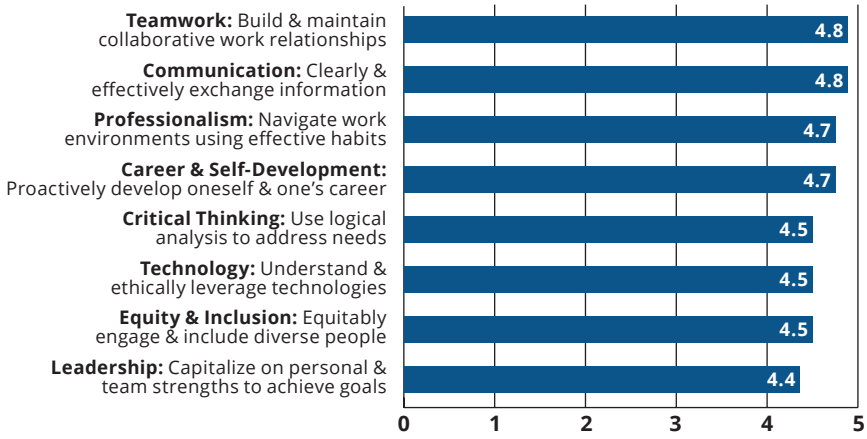
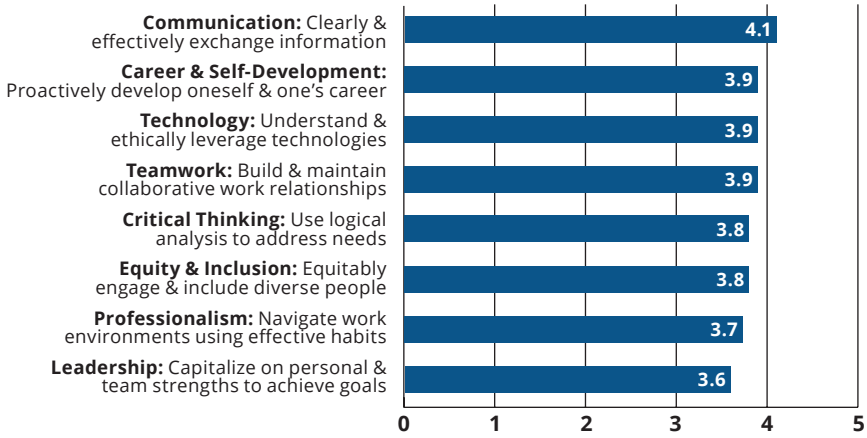


Figure 3. To What Extent Do AUC Graduates Demonstrate Proficiency in These Competencies? (AUC Employer Satisfaction Survey, 2023)



AUC Career Center's Competencies Integration Project

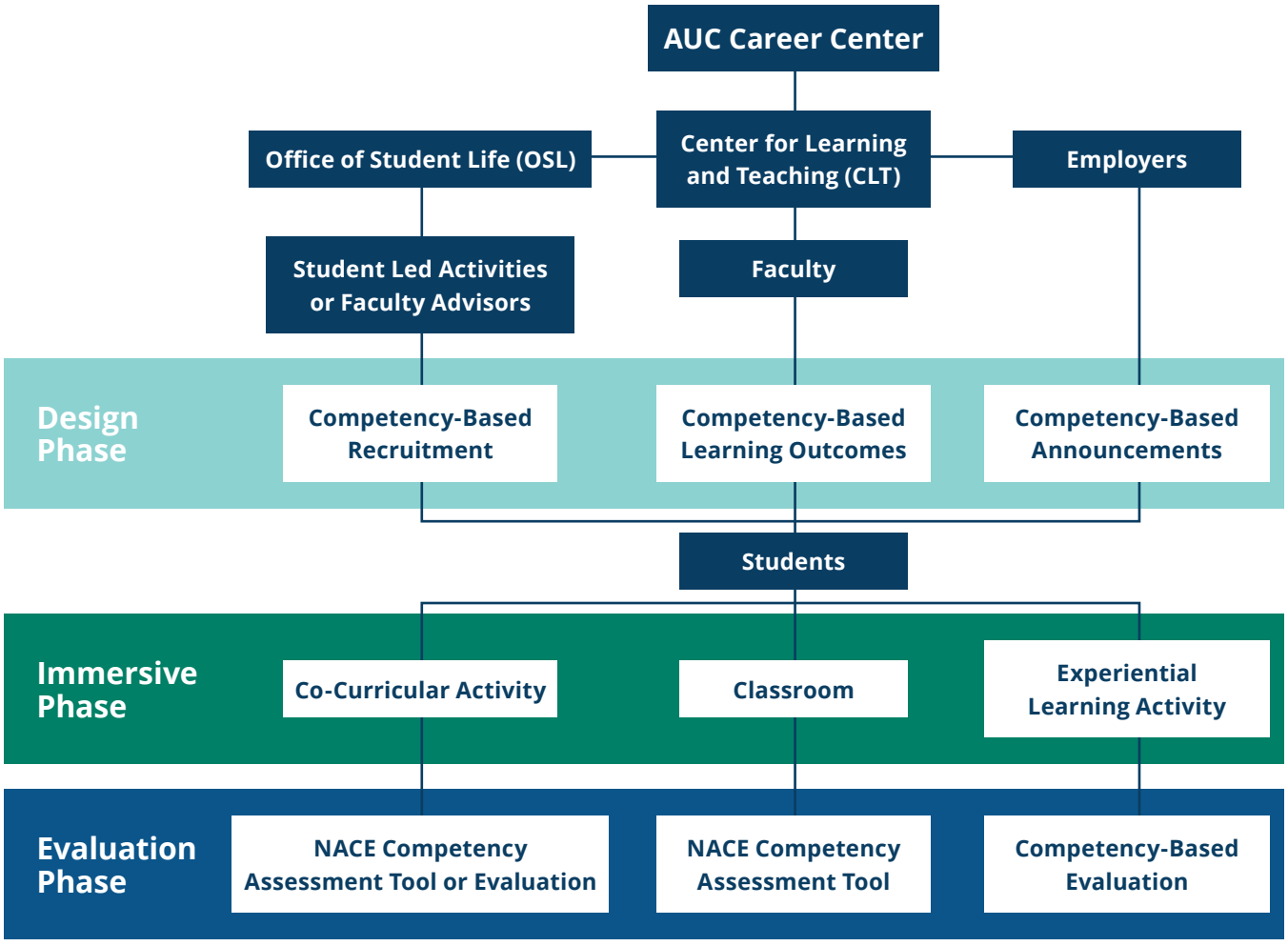
To bridge the gap between higher education and the labor market, AUC's Career Center designed and created the Competencies Campus Integration Project (CCIP) model, to embed the competencies framework into students' curricular and co-curricular experiences to create an interconnected ecosystem that cultivates a common experience. The CCIP model in **Figure 4** is a phased project comprising: the Design, the Immersive, and the Evaluation Phases.

The project began with the Career Center evaluating its current experiential learning programs as a foundation for embedding competency development. To achieve this, the competencies were specified in experiential learning announcements, enabling students to see the competencies they are expected to develop before any immersive experience. Reflection is a key component for experiential learning and for the success of the CCIP, and therefore, the internship evaluation process prompted students to reflect on their overall experiences and how these experiences have contributed to their competency development.

Cross-Campus Collaborators

Pivotal to the success of CCIP is identifying collaborators, and key to this initiative are the faculty. According to the Faculty Attitudes & Behaviors Survey by NACE, National Association of Colleges and Universities, & Society for Experiential Education (2024), 92% of faculty report that students have asked them for career advice, and 44% regularly advise their students making the classroom a unique intersection where professional and academic development converge.

Figure 4. Competencies Campus Integration Project (CCIP) Model



The AUC's Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) serves as a key partner with extensive experience in faculty collaboration and organizes professional development institutes for them. Implementing the CCIP model as a framework, the Career Center partnered with CLT to incorporate a session presenting the competencies framework at the annual Experiential Learning Institute. As an outcome of the institute, the Career Center delivered an in-class pilot session to undergraduate students, after which they submitted reflection papers. Students reported a greater understanding of competencies and their relevance to career success. Reflection during class and written assignments indicated that students were able to connect coursework, co-curricular activities, and career-related experiences with competency development and identify next steps. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the framework helped redefine employability as a holistic and practical process, as highlighted by this sophomore student:

> The lecture shifted my perspective on employability by emphasizing how these competencies are intertwined with personal growth. It reminded me that my time at AUC is not just about earning a degree but also about becoming a well-rounded individual who can adapt to the demands of the workplace. (R. Yasser, personal communication, December 2024)

Following the successful completion of the pilot, it became clear that competency integration among students, faculty, and staff is essential. Career centers are uniquely positioned to drive this transformation by equipping students with the ability to articulate the competencies in the global market's competency-based language.

Aiming to scale, and after a scan of the global universities' best practices, the Career Center is introducing the Career Champions Program, a comprehensive competency-based initiative designed to embed career readiness within the classroom. By participating, faculty will be equipped to guide students, ensuring that graduates make confident career choices and develop the lifelong skills necessary for effective career management as they transition from college.

What's Next For CCIP?

The next phase for CCIP involves leveraging the Career Center's proximity within student affairs and services (SAS), which offers a dynamic environment for developing and demonstrating competencies. By collaborating with the AUC's Office of Student Life (OSL), effective ways to integrate student activities into the competency framework can be identified. This approach exemplifies that collaborative initiatives with campus partners are the way forward to build a competency-based ecosystem.

Conclusion

By embedding career readiness competencies into all campus experiences, colleges and universities empower students to recognize and develop competencies valued by employers, moving beyond traditional measures such as GPA, toward a more holistic model of student success. These efforts foster a mindset shift among students and educators while ensuring that graduates are equipped with the practical tools and confidence needed to thrive in a rapidly changing global community.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Since 2014, Caroline Nassar has been empowering students and alumni through their career journeys via services integrated in AI tools, disability inclusion strategies, and labor market insights to foster success in diverse cultural contexts. A certified Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) and Facilitating Career Development Instructor (FCD-I), Caroline is championing initiatives to empower resilient, and meaningful career paths.

Since 2012, Leidya Boutros has led pioneering career services training in Egypt and the region through a funded university grant. She delivered courses for Egypt's Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Om Habiba Foundation under the Aswan Skills Development Program, and Saudi professionals via a King Saud University–NCDA initiative. Leidya holds CCSP, MBTI, SII, HNCP, and Strengths Profile credentials. Boutros, an NCDA, NACE, and NSEE member, previously served in Egypt's diplomatic and U.S. public diplomacy sectors.

With nearly two decades of experience in higher education, Maha El Moslemany leads career services at The American University in Cairo, overseeing employer engagement, advising, and experiential learning. A certified Career Development Facilitator Master Trainer, she has championed innovative programs that enhance students' employability and career readiness. Her purposeful passion is empowering Millennials and GenZs to become the best version of their professional selves, while contributing to the wider career development ecosystem in Egypt and the region.

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Reflection to Action: Advancing Student and Social Responsibility through the BtC Program in South African Higher Education

Deidre Potgieter, Senior Manager: Research and Leadership Development, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Matthew Wawrzynski, Professor, Michigan State University, USA

ABSTRACT

The Beyond the Classroom (BtC) program at Nelson Mandela University is a voluntary personal development initiative that supports students in moving from personal reflection to meaningful action. Rooted in the South African higher education context, BtC promotes leadership, social responsibility, and global citizenship by encouraging students to critically engage with community needs through structured reflection and service. Initially delivered in person, BtC transitioned online in response to the pandemic, retaining its core methodology—reflective learning, group collaboration, and a compulsory 20-hour volunteer requirement. The program's online structure enables inclusivity and adaptability while emphasizing self-directed learning and civic engagement. BtC aligns with global student affairs and services (SAS) priorities by fostering holistic, student-led engagement beyond the formal curriculum. This article examines the program's implementation and outcomes, highlighting its capacity to cultivate socially conscious, community-oriented graduates, and offers insights for institutions seeking to embed student development and civic responsibility into co-curricular frameworks.

Introduction

This article explores Beyond the Classroom's (BtC's) relevance within the South African higher education context and outlines how the program contributes to transformation, graduate readiness, and community engagement, offering insights for SAS practitioners seeking to embed civic learning into student development. The (BtC) program at Nelson Mandela University was designed to enhance student engagement and foster holistic development in the evolving needs of South African higher education. By emphasizing global citizenship, community engagement, and reflective practice, BtC supports the development of socially responsible graduates equipped to contribute meaningfully to society. Recognized on students' Co-Curricular Records (CCR), BtC affirms the value of holistic learning and aims to develop graduates who are academically capable, socially conscious, and civic-minded.

Context

South Africa's higher education landscape, shaped by its apartheid history, continues to face challenges such as unequal access, low graduation rates, and youth disengagement. Many graduates lack the soft skills and civic awareness needed to thrive in today's world. In this context, institutions are called to go beyond academics, cultivating leadership, ethical reasoning, and social consciousness. BtC represents an intentional institutional response, complementing formal curricula through structured reflection,

community engagement, and global citizenship education. Grounded in the university's graduate attribute framework, BtC supports critical thinking, teamwork, and civic responsibility. Its alignment with national priorities—such as the Department of Higher Education and Training's focus on student development (DHET, 2013) and the National Development Plan 2030 (NPC, 2012)—underscores its broader relevance and potential impact.

"By integrating reflection, service, collaboration, and inclusive participation, beyond the classroom (BtC) supports students in developing intellectually, emotionally, and ethically."

Program Design and Methodology

BtC promotes holistic development through accessible, student-centered learning beyond the classroom. The program design reflects Astin's (2002) Input–Environment–Outcome model, integrating reflection, service, and collaboration to create an influential developmental experience. BtC was developed to align with the Learning and Development Outcomes from the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) (2015). Launched in 2009 as a face-to-face program with 29 students, BtC has become an inclusive, voluntary, free, eight-month co-curricular program open to all Nelson Mandela University students. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, BtC is delivered in a blended format—primarily asynchronous with optional in-person sessions.

BtC's three key components:

- **Reflective Learning:** Integrated throughout the program. Online modules include guided prompts aligned with NMU graduate attributes (e.g., social awareness/responsible citizenship, critical thinking, intra/interpersonal skills, creativity and innovation, interdisciplinary knowledge, and adaptive expertise). Students complete pre- and post-program evaluations to track growth in these and areas like, self-awareness and ethical reasoning.
- **Group Collaboration:** Peer learning occurs through online forums and group tasks, building communication skills, and accountability.
- **Community Engagement:** A 20-hour verified volunteer requirement reinforces social responsibility and bridges theory with practice.

From Reflection to Action: Student Learning Outcomes

BtC consistently demonstrates positive developmental outcomes. Longitudinal evaluation via the Student Experiences Survey, developed in partnership with Michigan State University, confirms participants report growth in areas aligned with the CCR and CAS domains.

Top Learning Outcomes:

- **Self-Awareness and Development:** "I started to believe in myself and gained confidence in everything I am doing."
- **Independence and Responsibility:** "BtC reminded me of important things… I now take responsibility for my actions and growth."
- **Appreciation of Diversity:** "BtC taught me the power of listening and sharing in a respectful space."
- **Civic and Social Responsibility:** "BtC is the soil that holds everything together… It taught me to care and act."

These outcomes reflect a developmental arc—from reflection to action—anchored in ethical and civic engagement.

Building a Global Community through Local Engagement

BtC demonstrates how local service builds global citizenship. Through volunteer service and guided reflection, students connect local challenges (e.g., poverty, inequality) with global systems. Exposure to diverse communities enriches empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a sense of shared humanity. As one participant noted: "*BtC made me question my values, ideals, and impact in this world. It made me become a better person*." Group-based tasks further develop cross-cultural communication, inclusive leadership, and civic agency. BtC's accessibility across faculties ensures a diversity of voices, reinforcing the principle that global citizenship starts with local action.

Implications for Practice

As more institutions recognize the role of co-curricular programs in shaping ethical, engaged graduates, BtC offers a values-driven, adaptable model for integrating civic learning into student development (Schreiber & Yu, 2016; Wawrzynski & Naik, 2021).

Key Practices for Embedding Civic Responsibility:

1. **Structured Reflection:** Central to BtC's pedagogy, guided reflection promotes ethical reasoning and integrative learning (Eyler, 2002; Ash & Clayton, 2009).
2. **Purposeful Volunteerism:** The 20-hour service requirement, paired with reflection, enhances civic agency and social commitment (Mitchell, 2008).
3. **Inclusive Design:** Open, free, and blended delivery makes BtC accessible, particularly in contexts of inequality and digital divide (Bozalek et al., 2014).
4. **Formal Recognition:** The CCR validates developmental learning and helps students articulate competencies for employment or further study (Kinzie, 2012).
5. **Global Relevance:** BtC's framework aligns with international best practice in SAS and is adaptable to varied institutional settings (Schreiber & Yu, 2016).

In an era of democratic decline and widening inequality, BtC reaffirms the civic mission of higher education. As Kuh et al. (2005) argue, intentionally designed co-curricular initiatives are powerful tools for developing ethical, globally engaged leaders.

Conclusion

BtC exemplifies how co-curricular engagement can advance holistic student development and civic responsibility. By integrating reflection, service, collaboration, and inclusive participation, BtC supports students in developing intellectually, emotionally, and ethically. Its alignment with CAS frameworks and responsiveness to South Africa's unique challenges make BtC both locally grounded and globally relevant. The program affirms when students are meaningfully engaged and empowered to reflect and act, they evolve into agents of change—prepared to contribute to a more just and interconnected world.

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Deidré Potgieter is a higher education professional at Nelson Mandela University with over 20 years of experience in student affairs and student development. Her work focuses on leadership learning and holistic student development beyond the classroom. Her interests include inclusive student engagement, reflective practice, and integrating developmental theory into co-curricular contexts to enhance student learning and civic capacity. She has conducted international research in collaboration with Michigan State University, contributing cross-cultural insights on student engagement.

Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski is a Professor of Educational Administration at Michigan State University with nearly 35 years of experience in higher education. His work focuses on noncognitive influences on student learning, contextually and culturally relevant frameworks in student engagement, and the value of assessment in student affairs practice. He has engaged in international collaborations across seven countries for almost two decades. In 2019, NASPA recognized him as a Pillar of the Profession.

Autoethnography Abroad: A High-Impact Practice for Cultivating Global Citizenship, Student Success, and Community

Phillippa Thiuri, Assistant Vice President of Student Access and Success, Rochester Institute of Technology, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how autoethnography as methodology and pedagogy transforms study abroad into a practice of global community formation. Focusing on a faculty-led program in Ghana for diasporic Black women, the study challenges Western-centric models that position marginalized students as outsiders. Instead, participants were centered as knowledge producers whose lived experiences and ancestral connections enriched collective learning. Through reflective journaling, narrative writing, and visits to historically significant sites, students cultivated bonds of belonging that extended across continents, histories, and identities. Drawing on endarkened feminist epistemology and Black feminist pedagogy, the program fostered spaces where vulnerability, healing, and mutual support generated authentic community rather than individual cultural consumption. Assessment revealed that participants experienced not only heightened self-awareness and academic empowerment but also enduring relational networks that exemplify global citizenship rooted in solidarity and shared meaning-making. This model demonstrates how study abroad can be reimagined as a site of liberation and genuine global community formation.

Introduction

In a globalized world where higher education aspires to be inclusive and intercultural, there remains a persistent gap in how study abroad programs engage special populations, particularly diasporic Black women. Traditional study abroad models often perpetuate Western-centric frameworks that position marginalized students as cultural outsiders rather than knowledge creators. This paper examines the *Research in a Cultural Context* program, a three-week faculty-led study abroad course to Ghana that integrates autoethnographic research methodology to fundamentally challenge these dominant paradigms. Through intentional reflective inquiry, deep cultural immersion, and spiritual engagement, participants explored complex questions of identity, belonging, and epistemic resistance while building authentic global community that transcends conventional academic boundaries.

Context and Student Population

The program primarily serves Black women from the United States who have historically had limited opportunities to explore cultural identity through international education. As members of historically marginalized communities, these students often encounter global education experiences filtered through multiple institutional barriers and cultural misrecognition that systematically position them as outsiders to international learning spaces. Traditional study abroad programs frequently

emphasize assimilation into host cultures rather than celebrating the rich cultural knowledge students bring with them. By intentionally centering these students as active knowledge producers rather than passive consumers of cultural experiences, the program fundamentally acknowledges and validates the unique ways diasporic students navigate study abroad, particularly when visiting spaces connected to ancestral heritage and complex histories of displacement and return.

Autoethnography as Pedagogy and Community Building

Autoethnography served dual purposes: as both rigorous research methodology and transformative pedagogical approach. Students engaged in systematic reflective journaling, facilitated group dialogues, and intentional narrative writing to critically explore their evolving identities within Ghana's rich cultural and complex historical contexts. This methodological approach draws explicitly from endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2000) and Black feminist pedagogy (Collins, 2000), theoretical frameworks that courageously affirm spirituality, ancestral knowledge, and lived experience as legitimate and powerful sources of academic learning and knowledge production.

Site visits to Elmina Castle, the W.E.B. Du Bois Centre, and local communities provided embodied connection points that transcended conventional tourism. These experiences became catalysts for reflection on shared histories of colonialism, resistance, and diaspora, fostering what Toni Morrison calls "re-memory"—the process of reclaiming collective memory.

Building Global Community Through Healing and Connection

Creating authentic global community requires courageously acknowledging the complex histories and ongoing impacts of displacement that connect African diaspora communities across continents and generations. Students frequently described Ghana not simply as a foreign destination, but as a profound space of homecoming and healing—a transformative place that invited authentic self-expression without the exhausting cultural code-switching often required in predominantly white academic spaces. The program created brave spaces where students could explore questions of identity, belonging, and cultural connection without judgment or the pressure to perform respectability politics.

One student's reflection captures this transformation: "*Ghana didn't ask me to change. It held space for me to be whole*." This sentiment illustrates how the program fostered diasporic belonging that was simultaneously intellectual, emotional, and spiritual.

The collective experience proved equally transformative. Participants formed a learning community characterized by vulnerability, mutual support, and shared meaning-making. Through group processing sessions, students named and questioned dominant narratives about race, identity, and the African continent while supporting each other's growth, exemplifying bell hooks' (1994) concept of "education as the practice of freedom."

Outcomes and Transformative Impact

Program assessment revealed multiple dimensions of student transformation. Participants reported heightened self-awareness and confidence in their cultural identities, with many describing the experience as life-changing. Students felt more empowered to challenge epistemic marginalization in U.S. classrooms and assert their perspectives as valid knowledge. Many returned with renewed commitment to academic achievement and community leadership, viewing themselves as change agents. The peer relationships formed during the program continued post-return, creating lasting networks of support and collaboration.

Implications for Global Student Affairs Practice

This model offers key insights for practitioners building inclusive global communities. Beyond diversifying study abroad demographics, institutions must fundamentally rethink the epistemologies and pedagogies embedded in global learning experiences. Programs should position students' lived experiences and cultural knowledge as assets, particularly for historically marginalized populations. Systematic reflection through autoethnographic methods helps

students process complex identity negotiations inherent in global learning. Global education cannot be politically neutral; programs must intentionally address histories of colonialism, displacement, and resistance that shape student experiences. Meaningful global citizenship emerges through relationships, shared vulnerability, and collective meaning-making rather than individual cultural consumption.

Recommendations for Practice

Practitioners adapting this model should consider: introducing autoethnographic methods in pre-departure preparation; selecting sites that facilitate meaningful connection rather than superficial exposure; building regular opportunities for individual and group processing; partnering with local educators for authentic cultural context; and creating mechanisms for continued learning integration post-return.

Conclusion

The integration of autoethnographic methodology into study abroad programming offers a powerful model for transforming global education from cultural tourism into community-building and healing practice. By centering the voices and experiences of diasporic Black women, this program demonstrates how global learning can become a site of empowerment, resistance, and authentic community formation.

This transformative approach challenges higher education institutions to move courageously beyond surface-level diversity initiatives toward fundamental transformation of global education paradigms that have historically excluded or marginalized certain voices. When students are intentionally positioned as knowledge producers and their rich cultural identities are affirmed as valuable assets rather than deficits to overcome, study abroad becomes a powerful practice of liberation that strengthens both individual students and the authentic global communities they join. This model demands that we reimagine what it means to create truly inclusive global learning experiences that honor the full humanity and wisdom of all participants.

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Let's Talk About Sex (Ed): Peer-Led Sexual Wellness Programming

Swee-Yang Ashley Yong, Care Team Director, Semester at Sea, Spring 2026 Voyage, Singapore

ABSTRACT

For the past eight years, Yale-NUS College has hosted an annual Sexual Wellness Week, a peer-led initiative designed to address the diverse sexual health needs of our student body, which comprises individuals from more than 30 countries. Recognizing the varying levels of comfort and understanding surrounding sexual topics, especially within the context of our conservative cultural environment, the program uses strategies to foster open, inclusive, and informative dialogue. By leveraging peer education, we created an environment that encourages student engagement and promotes a comprehensive understanding of sexual wellness. This article explores the development and implementation of sexual wellness programming, highlighting the challenges and successes encountered in navigating institutional and cultural sensitivities and meeting the needs of a multicultural student population. Our experience demonstrates that, even within conservative settings, thoughtfully designed peer-led programs can effectively promote sexual health education and contribute to a more informed and respectful campus community.

Introduction

Yale-NUS College, a residential, liberal arts college in Singapore, has brought together Eastern and Western tradition since the College welcomed the first class of students in 2013. As the College grew to represent students from more than 70 nationalities, so did the rich cultural diaspora and the need for culturally-aware, comprehensive sexual health education. The average class of students, approximately 60 percent Singaporean and 40 percent international, collectively brought a wide range of awareness, education, and levels of comfort regarding sexual health, consent, and related topics. Staff believed the most effective way to reach students around sensitive topics like sex and relationships was through peer education and accessible programming.

Peer-Led Sexual Wellness Education

Debates surrounding whose responsibility it is to educate adolescents on sexual health persist and vary greatly by culture and norms (Leung et al., 2019). In its sexuality education curriculum, the Ministry of Education Singapore (2025) promotes abstinence before marriage and teaches disease prevention and "consequences of casual sex" (para. 4). Other countries represented at the College, such as the United States and China, take different approaches–some more progressive and others more conservative (Leung et al., 2019).

Wong et al. (2018) found that peer sexual health education at the tertiary level could "fill the gap for students in countries without comprehensive sexual health education in high school/secondary school and provide students with important sexual

health knowledge and skills they did not receive earlier in their education" (p. 663). Additionally, the authors found that peer sexual health education was effective for increasing sexual health knowledge, changing some sexual behaviors, and increasing self-efficacy around communication with sexual partners.

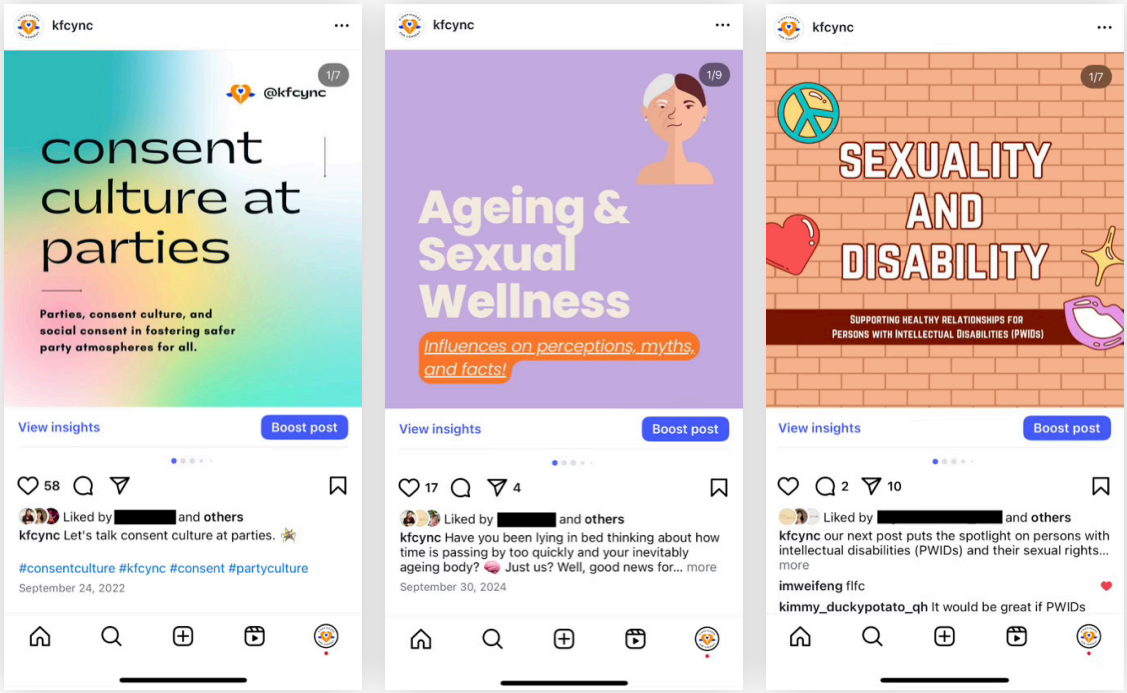
In 2018, the Kingfishers for Consent (KFC) peer educator group was formed to provide resources and education that promote healthy relationships, sexual wellness, and consent culture. The group was composed of 4-8 students committed to the mission of ensuring programs and awareness campaigns were inclusive, engaging, and represented and addressed the community's needs.

Investment in the peer educators' training and education was critical. Intentionally blending Eastern and Western approaches to sex education, the advisor sought opportunities for the group to learn from both international and local experts. In 2023, the group read *Sexual Citizens: A Landmark Study of Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus* by Jennifer S. Hirsch and Shamus Khan and discussed how to relate the U.S.-based content to the uniquely diverse campus context (Hirsch & Khan, 2021). One question created for the discussion posed, "The authors assert that consent is connected with notions of time. Does this exist at Yale-NUS? Around what events? How should KFC intervene, if at all?"

Peer educators also attended workshops and trainings hosted by the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), a non-profit advocacy organization working to end violence against women in Singapore. This engagement with Singaporeans outside of the campus bubble allowed the peer educators to network with local experts and discover resources to support their peers' sexual health beyond college.

Program Planning and Development

Each spring since 2018, KFC hosted the annual Sexual Wellness Week (SWW). The first SWW included bystander intervention training, a dialogue on queer sexualities, a contraceptives conversation, and more. As SWW evolved over the years, some programs became recurring, popular events—particularly the STI Testing Van and Sex Trivia Night.



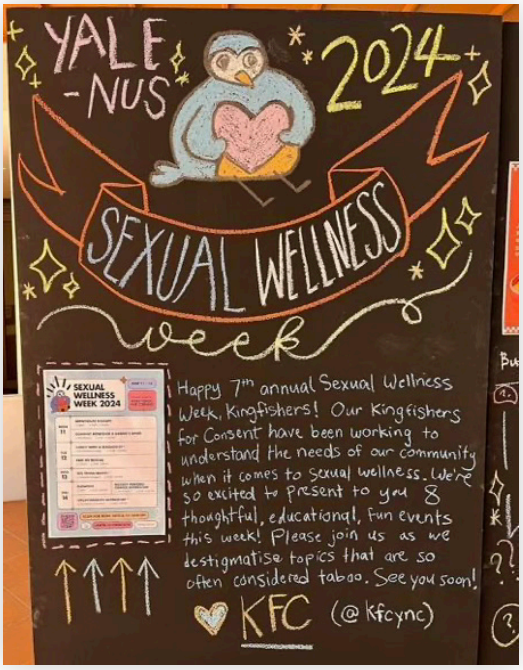
Key to the success of SWW, and the College's sexual wellness programming broadly, was an intimate, transparent understanding of what the student body wanted and needed regarding sexual health education. Peer educators collected this information, primarily through a casual activity at the on-campus cafe that allowed students to anonymously submit what they wanted to learn. The key themes that emerged from the submissions included menstruation, sex therapy, STIs and vaccination, consent in non-sexual situations, and healthy masculinity.

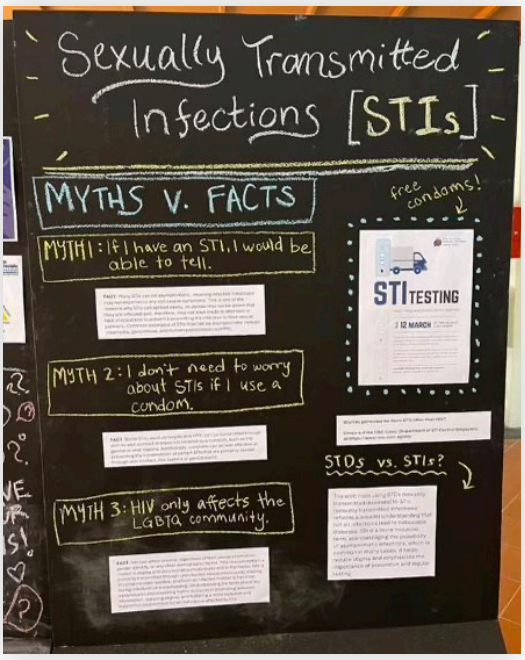
Peer educators also observed engagement during events to better tailor programming to student preferences. For example, attendees of a "situationships" workshop during SWW 2024 asked few questions during the Q&A portion with the facilitator. After the event, several students stayed for more than an hour to individually ask the facilitator questions. Peer educators noticed that students were more comfortable asking questions directly to the facilitator when they were not in the group setting. In response, the KFC hosted an event for SWW 2025 that allowed students to have individual conversations with a sexologist. Responsiveness to students' preferences, needs, and wants was particularly effective in keeping them engaged, attending events, and inviting their friends.

As crucial as the programs themselves, passive programming proved to be beneficial in starting conversations on sex and relationships among students. Peer educators researched and compiled information for social media to reach students who did not regularly attend events.

Additionally, blackboards were displayed throughout SWW at a central location on campus. The blackboards contained information related to each event during the week to pique curiosity.

The peer educators shared that, from the anecdotal evidence they gathered, most students who discussed sex and relationships did so in the evenings in the comfort of their suites with their suitemates. To reach students during these moments of connection, KFC developed a conversation card deck that included prompts for students to discuss with their friends. The three levels (Exploration, Feelings & Experiences, Intersectionality & Intimacy) allowed students to build trust and vulnerability through conversation.





Challenges and Applications

One challenge KFC faced and other campuses may encounter is the same students coming to events and difficulty reaching other students. To mitigate this, staff and peer educators must consider the barriers to entry, have a diverse range of topics to attract a wide array of students (e.g., men, queer students), and provide alternative ways to engage with the content, such as anonymous polls and passive programming. Another challenge is public and senior leadership perception of sexual wellness programming. Senior leadership, who are tasked with protecting institutional image and considering how the larger community beyond campus perceives campus activities, may view certain topics as inappropriate, restricting which topics staff and peer educators can explore.

The author recommends schools interested in implementing sexual wellness programming and a peer educator program to consider the following:

1. Prioritize peer educators' education and training. Partner with local organizations and seek international resources to incorporate knowledge beyond what campus staff can provide.
2. Meet students where they are. Understand their needs, wants, and preferences when it comes to conversations and education on sexual wellness, especially for students coming from more conservative environments. Build education up so that regular attendees are not having the same conversations about consent they had during their first year.
3. Utilize passive programming, which allows students who find sex taboo to learn and engage on their terms.
4. Build global community through sexual health education. Create a space for students with different beliefs about sexual wellness to gather and discuss. Give a platform to students to reflect and share how their culture views sex.

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See Me, Support Me: Centering Belonging for International Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

International graduate students arrive on U.S. college campuses with diverse backgrounds, responsibilities, and expectations, yet institutional approaches to belonging often rely on one-size-fits-all models. This article examines barriers that quietly undermine wellbeing and persistence, shifting attention away from commonly acknowledged challenges like homesickness or visa restrictions to less visible stressors like culturally relevant food access, health system literacy, and family pressures. These challenges influence students' physical health, financial stability, and academic engagement in ways seldom addressed in professional practice. For divisions of student affairs and services, the strategies offered here provide actionable ways to support environments where international graduate students feel genuinely seen and supported. By framing belonging as a series of intentional practices rather than an abstract ideal, the article underscores the role of student affairs in affirming the complex realities of international graduate life while advancing a mission of inclusion and holistic student wellbeing.

Introduction

As international graduate student enrollment increases across U.S. institutions, belonging efforts must center around their unique experiences. Promoting their wellbeing aligns with the mission of student affairs and services: to enhance student development and success. Students who receive adequate support and feel a sense of belonging are more likely to persist, succeed academically, and have higher satisfaction rates (Kuh et al., 2005). This article briefly highlights three challenges that can affect international graduate student belonging: access to culturally relevant food, health insurance and health care literacy, and family pressures. This does not diminish the significance of challenges like homesickness, socialization, visa restrictions, or mental health concerns; however, greater attention must be given to challenges that may be less visible to faculty, student affairs and services staff, and fellow students within the campus community.

Culturally Relevant Food Access

Access to culturally relevant food remains a significant, yet often overlooked, challenge for international students living in the United States. When host cuisine differs significantly from students' native diets, dissatisfaction and food aversion increase (Brown, 2016). This disconnect can lead to disrupted eating habits and poor nutrition. Students who altered their diets reported negative health outcomes such as weight gain, elevated blood glucose and cholesterol levels, and mental distress (Alakaam et al., 2015). Limited access to familiar foods, coupled with a high cost

of imported ingredients, can heighten financial strain and emotional discomfort, especially in areas without ethnic markets (Amos & Lordly, 2014). Without adequate support, food becomes a source of cultural disconnection.

Recommendations

Improving access to culturally familiar foods can significantly alleviate acculturative stress and promote well-being (Wright et al., 2021). Institutions should collaborate with local supermarkets to stock ingredients commonly used in students' home cuisines. Establishing predictable, student-informed market days with suppliers, particularly in geographically isolated areas, can provide reliable access to essential foods. Aligning these events with student pay periods may further enhance affordability and participation. For example, Jackson Street Market in Macomb, Illinois, home of Western Illinois University, successfully introduced Indian food items after coordinated efforts with international student groups, benefiting not only Indian students but also others with similar culinary preferences. On-campus dining services can also accommodate dietary restrictions and cultural observances. Columbia University incorporated a halal dining section to serve its Muslim student population.

Health Insurance and Health Care Literacy

Navigating the U.S. health care system can be a significant challenge for many international students. Although they are often required to have health insurance, this does not ensure they understand how to effectively use the coverage (Adegboyega et al., 2020). Many struggle to understand insurance terms like *copay* and *deductible*, causing confusion about their financial responsibilities and sometimes delaying medical care. These difficulties can lead to students underutilizing preventative care or relying on self-treatment with medication from their home countries or online self-diagnosis (Liu et al., 2023). Individuals with limited health literacy are more likely to experience frequent hospitalizations and challenges with medication adherence and understanding health-related instructions (Berkman et al., 2011).

Recommendations

To improve health care literacy, which Adegboyega et al., (2020) note is essential, Liu et al. (2023) recommend providing culturally responsive training for health center staff, collaborating with international student services to share insurance information before arrival, including a health insurance overview in orientation, and involving experienced international students to share their experiences. Additionally, institutions can enhance accessibility by adopting a universal design approach that provides multilingual materials and resources.

Family Pressures

Graduate students, often over the age of 25, face compounded stressors when accompanied by spouses and/or children, such as securing affordable and culturally appropriate childcare, balancing multiple roles, marital strain from assuming primary legal, financial, and social responsibilities for the family, and the isolation of non-student spouses, particularly those restricted from employment due to visa limitations (Myers-Walls et al., 2011). They may also closet their parental identity. Hiding this identity may create ongoing stress and affect their participation in academic life, weakening their sense of belonging. They may keep this identity from their faculty, advisors, and classmates, which could result in them feeling isolated (Long et al, 2024). Moreover, female students frequently bear a triple burden as breadwinners, caregivers, and scholars (Myers-Walls et al., 2011).

Recommendations

To help students avoid closeting, faculty and advisors can initiate conversations that go beyond academics and demonstrate empathy through their interactions (Long et al., 2024). International friendship programs can enhance communication and ease cultural adjustment. A list of childcare and recreational services in the community and stress and time management programs can ease the transition to a new home as well as help student parents balance their multiple roles. University subsidized childcare and allowing spouses to be covered by health insurance could also aid in alleviating financial and mental stress (Myers-Walls et al., 2011).

Conclusion

As the number of international graduate students in the United States continues to grow, we must deepen our understanding of their unique experiences. Challenges like access to culturally relevant food, navigating health insurance and health care, and coping with family pressures are often underappreciated. Each student's journey is shaped by unique circumstances and needs. We must honor their individuality and support them in finding where they belong.

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Global Connections, Local Impact: Transformative Onboarding for International Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

As global talent becomes increasingly mobile and higher education shapes future leaders, institutions must offer intentional support for international graduate students navigating complex transitions. At Duke University, the Duke International Student Center (DISC) and Graduate and Professional Student Services (GPSS) deliver a hybrid onboarding experience for 2,000 students from 90 countries with culturally mindful excursions and local activities sparking connection and intercultural learning. Through cross-departmental collaboration, peer engagement, and high-impact, low-cost initiatives, Duke's model supports cultural adjustment, academic success, and social integration. This article examines how early outreach, local partnerships, and continuous program assessment create a replicable framework for building inclusive, global onboarding.

Introduction

Over 500,000 international graduate and professional students attend U.S.-based programs annually, (IIE, 2024) yet institutions remain fragmented, primarily serving undergraduates with centralized student affairs and services (SAS). While best practices emphasize central coordination of graduate student orientations in partnership with embedded graduate school counterparts and SAS (Kinder et al., 2022), services often remain siloed within specific academic units. Despite tailored academics, many programs overlook non-academic support critical to student success, leaving graduate students to become overwhelmed with logistics and lacking access to resources and networks essential for belonging and retention (Clarke, 2023; Pascale, 2018).

Graduate school transition presents unfamiliar personal, cultural, and institutional environments, with international students navigating additional factors such as complex visa processes, unfamiliar housing systems, and limited social networks. With 4,000 international graduate and professional students among a total population of nearly 11,000 (Duke University, 2024), plus limited staffing and staggered academic timelines, no single Duke office could support the full range of necessary, personalized support for incoming students. In 2023, DISC completed an ambitious restructuring endeavor with innovative approaches to integrate essential resources, address practical needs, and foster community and routine.

Support Without Structure

Some Duke programs offered robust, multi-day orientations; others provided brief academic welcomes, leaving students unsure what to prioritize or how to build cross-disciplinary community. DISC's orientation relied on generalized presentations and the International

Guide (I-Guide) peer program, which lacked structure and training to meet evolving needs. While trained and well-coordinated peer mentors like I-Guides positively affect transitions into graduate programs and increase students' sense of belonging (Liu et al., 2022), friendly faces eased nerves but could not replace sustained, practical support in navigating daily responsibilities.

Duke's Centralized Model and Key Strategies

In response, a new onboarding model was created, grounded in embracing students as whole people, acknowledging the interconnectedness between students, families, and communities, prioritizing belonging, and honest conversations about transition (Shokirova et al., 2022). While institutional contexts vary, these strategies offer replicable approaches:

Early, Coordinated Outreach

Outreach upon admission, plus a central SAS unit, can bridge departmental silos and deliver consistent messaging, resource access, and assessment to affirm students' early inclusion (Lee et al., 2024). DISC, GPSS, academic units, alumni, and student leaders distributed costs, fostered buy-in, and clarified roles. Event invitations and low-lift involvement encouraged faculty and staff participation. Virtual engagement to reduce anxiety and build early confidence began in April with the GPSS Summer Transition Series, a hybrid program covering housing, health insurance, budgeting, and Durham, North Carolina (USA) regional culture (Briant & Valdovinos, 2022). This coincided with the launch of *Guidepost,* a centralized online hub providing consistent access to cross-departmental resources. Co-created newsletters offered curated content, and by June, students joined informal I-Guide Zooms.

Bridging Global and Local

DISC used the city as a classroom, partnering with vendors for scavenger hunts, sporting events, and resource fairs to introduce local services, food, and traditions. These gatherings embedded social activities in practical, off-campus contexts. One student noted, "It was a great event, highly resourceful. I got to know about Durham and its culture/the places that I can explore." Pre-arrival virtual forums like Slack and Teams connected trained peer mentors and incoming international students worldwide, reducing isolation and fostering global community before arrival. International alumni and students hosted region-specific sessions to demystify U.S. academics and build trust.

Inclusive, Experiential Learning

Continuous onboarding extended beyond a one-time orientation through hands-on, inclusive activities. Peer-led excursions, interdisciplinary mixers, a variety of local activities across diverse interest areas, and intentional, structured icebreakers fostered practical knowledge and community across cultures and programs, allowing students to connect with their university and ease transition (Lee et al., 2024; Yardley et al., 2012). One participant shared: "Thank you for allowing us to meet so many fantastic peers that are challenging to get in touch with due to schedules and locations. This event made a difference, allowing me to call Duke home!"

Designed for Real Life

DISC offered free programs with transportation, dietary accommodations, and activities designed for the students as well as their families. Flexible, asynchronous content and locations addressed differing academic calendars and arrival times while written and in-person guidance on necessities like obtaining a license or accessing groceries helped students manage personal life responsibilities, reflecting DISC's commitment to holistic support and early engagement (Pascale, 2018).

Continuous Assessment and Impact

Feedback collection across six events for incoming international graduate students reinforced a culture of assessment. DISC collected over 649 surveys submissions and shared outcomes to demonstrate how student input refined programming. Over 85% reported gaining new tools to thrive at Duke; over 88% made meaningful connections beyond their academic program or culture. A dinner with

254 attendees from eight of ten graduate schools had 55% strongly agree that they connected with someone from another culture; 53% strongly agreed that they felt a sense of belonging. Students shared:

This is the first event I participated in at Duke. I came alone, knew nobody, I was nervous at first. I'm looking forward to the next event!

This event helped me connect with people beyond my own program and feel part of a wider Duke community.

I really enjoyed being there, talking to not just business (sic) but law school, bio, and engineering students... it felt really nice to share information about living in Durham.

Future Considerations

International graduate students face significant challenges, but intentional, collaborative onboarding transforms their experience. Students deserve more than outdated checklists or a one-time coffee hour. They need a community that acknowledges them, provides ongoing support, and evolves in response to their needs. Effective onboarding requires creativity, coordination, and shared commitment. When institutions thoughtfully respond to students' needs and priorities with early engagement, local integration, and ongoing inclusion, the global community takes shape as students arrive prepared and empowered to succeed in their new home.

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The Importance of Counter-Deficit Practices for Global Communities in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on two years of data and findings from a peer tutoring program for Latin* students to argue that "counter-deficit" approaches are necessary to promote global communities and engagement in higher education. First, physical spaces should validate and reflect the cultural diversity of the student population. Second, institutional values should not only espouse, but also enact, the sociocultural values of global and local communities. Third, students should have opportunities to serve in college leadership roles to feel invested as partners, rather than simply as "customers."

Introduction

Higher education institutions throughout the world—particularly those which have missions of open access, workforce development, and affordability—are serving increasingly diverse student populations. Unfortunately, the perceptions and actions of instructors and administrators are too often influenced by deficit-based assumptions and beliefs about minoritized student populations (Herrera & Lanford, 2024; Lanford, 2020). For example, both authors of this article have witnessed and published instances of instructors referring to student language as "slang" and/or employing tutoring practices that fail to embrace culturally relevant pedagogy.

This article draws on two years of data and findings from a Latin* peer tutoring program at a community college in the Southeast United States that has been designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. It argues that "counter-deficit" approaches are necessary to effectively promote greater equity in open access institutions such as community colleges. This argument will be grounded in the following three propositions. First, physical spaces should validate and reflect the cultural diversity of the student population. Second, institutional values should not only espouse, but also enact, the sociocultural values of global and local communities. Third, students should have opportunities to serve in college leadership roles to feel invested as partners, rather than simply as "customers" as often argued in neoliberal visions of the higher education experience (Mintz, 2021). Our argument is that these conditions are necessary so that students' diverse strengths can be validated and viewed as worthy of value creation—and the campus environment can be conducive to developing trust and social networks that enhance student success (Hypolite, 2024).

Propositions and Discussion

1. Physical Spaces Should Be Validating

Research has long focused on the critical role physical space plays in educational settings; however, much of this research focuses on the functionality and productivity of space, rather than on issues of educational equity. Our findings indicate the importance of validating learning environments for racially minoritized student populations. In particular, the physical space of an academic support center often impacts student usage and effectiveness.

Study participants detailed how their help-seeking behavior avoidance could be attributed to previous invalidating educational experiences. While students of privileged identities may be able to rely on networks to understand academic support center processes, minoritized students may experience uncertainty or discomfort when initially seeking support. Therefore, spaces must be free of environmental microaggressions to ensure an ecologically validating experience (Kitchen et al., 2021).

2. Institutional Values Should Not Only Espouse, but also Enact the Values of Global and Local Communities

Values exist as the ideals espoused and enacted on campus, often revealing institutional beliefs of what works, what is worth investing in, and how rewards are distributed. However, the institutional culture of an institution is often negatively impacted when espoused values and enacted values are in direct conflict (Tierney & Lanford, 2018). For example, although an institution's stated values may encompass a commitment to educational opportunities for all, fiscal resources may be allocated for initiatives prioritizing students with privileged identities.

Institutional leaders have frequently expressed the infeasibility of action without "new money" (Jones & Wellman, 2009, p. 3). However, new fiscal resources do not ensure that organizations will shift their perspectives or fund novel initiatives that embrace global and local communities (Lanford & Tierney, 2022). Our research indicates that institutions may achieve a deeper alignment between espoused and enacted values by reshaping the student role. Institutions should establish students as partners in advancing educational practice, as opposed to reinforcing traditional power dynamics that portray students as passive vessels waiting to be bestowed with knowledge. Institutions can redefine student roles by (a) amplifying student voices, (b) validating students' diverse strengths and knowledges as worthy of value creation, and (c) empowering shared decision-making. Each of these actions can embrace the local and global communities represented by students, and they require no "new money."

3. Students Need Opportunities to Serve in College Leadership Roles

The creation of leadership pathways for students, particularly those from historically minoritized communities, is essential to disrupting deficit narratives and promoting equity. When students are viewed as contributors to institutional knowledge—rather than passive customers of education—they are more likely to engage meaningfully with campus life and influence the systems that shape their academic experiences (Guthrie et al., 2021).

Findings from our study highlight how structured leadership roles within peer support programs can empower students to challenge inequitable institutional practices. For example, one participant in our broader research transformed his identity from a hesitant newcomer to a visible campus leader. Initially uncertain about his academic abilities and unfamiliar with college support structures, he gradually built confidence through relational tutoring and affirming interactions. His journey culminated in substantial policy changes: he advocated for more inclusive hiring policies for tutors, challenged the exclusion of part-time students from leadership eligibility, and contributed to the redesign of study spaces to reflect more culturally validating, communal environments.

Such narratives demonstrate that leadership development should not be reserved for students with traditional markers of "readiness" (e.g., high GPAs; full-time enrollment). Rather, leadership potential often emerges when institutions recognize the legitimacy of lived experiences and support relational leadership approaches grounded in community values.

These opportunities validate students' cultural knowledge and allow them to exercise agency in shaping campus culture and policy. Colleges aiming to align leadership development with equity goals can begin by reevaluating eligibility criteria for student roles, embedding leadership training in peer support programs, and ensuring that students are included in decision-making structures. When such students are given the opportunity to lead, they not only redefine institutional norms—they also illuminate new pathways for enacting culturally sustaining, counter-deficit practices.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that building culturally validating and comfortable learning spaces conducive to developing familial-like bonds holds the potential for increased usage of academic support resources by all students. Culturally validating physical spaces, an alignment between institutional values and actions, and meaningful student leadership opportunities are critical for affirming the strengths of global and local communities.

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Advancing Inclusion: Cultivating Global Social Justice Practitioners in Predominantly White Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Universities exist as microcosms of society and therefore have a wealth of lived experiences and a myriad of communities through the professionals on their campus. Often, student affairs and services (SAS) practitioners are excluded from co-constructing within the institutional intellectual and pedagogical infrastructure. Of equal importance is the challenge that SAS practitioners face in embedding global social justice education within institutions with settler colonial histories.

Drawing on the scholarly personal narratives (SPNs) of two SAS practitioners within historically white universities, this manuscript aims to explore how global social justice practitioners consider experiential learning and activism as a method to advance inclusion in colleges and universities. Our findings suggest institutions should afford SAS practitioners the opportunity to co-construct within the intellectual space to address social injustices. Additionally, as SAS practitioners, we must employ our agency to cultivate a critical consciousness rooted in social justice.

Introduction

Historically white institutions are often characterized by the dominance of ideologies, values, and curricula rooted in the global North, which do not reflect the diversity currently present in university spaces (Dancy et al., 2018). There is a need to examine settler colonial institutions and how they can develop to become more inclusive, advancing social justice and fostering a global representation of their staff, student cohorts, and the communities in which they exist and interact, particularly with knowledge production (Majee & Ress, 2020).

This paper is founded on the acknowledgment that college and university spaces are an expression of a historical global dominance that is currently challenged by the growing demand for transformation and the need for change. According to the Higher Education Research Institute (1996), this work should be driven by an individual or collective that occupies a position of authority within the institution they seek to model a change within.

For this paper, the researchers, who are scholar-practitioners in settler colonial institutions in the United States (U.S.) and South Africa, focus on student affairs and services (SAS) practitioners, whose efforts toward student development are often not considered to fall within the scope of pedagogy. We reflect on our experiences in SAS to explore how the affirmation of experiential learning and activism can advance the pursuit of social justice

education and establish an inclusive transnational agenda for global social justice educators.

Methodology

We utilize Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), focusing on storytelling, which serves as a means of self-autonomous writing as a practice. Central to SPN is the primary theme of answering, "What," "So What," and "Now What" (Nash & Viray, 2013, p. 46). As scholar-practitioners, we discussed themes of our entries to social justice, education, and community practices that heavily influenced our time in higher education at historically white institutions.

This data is taken from two 90-minute sessions where we dialogued on a set research protocol. Our protocol included questions like "How do you understand the role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in driving inclusion and transformation?" and "Should HEIs be focusing on equity or equality?" Through a process of inductive reasoning, we explored the themes arising from our research question and identified two narratives that emerged from our inquiry.

Findings

From our narratives, we draw on specific quotes and stories that answer our research question, "How does the affirmation of experiential learning advance the pursuit of social justice education, to establish an inclusive transnational agenda for global educators?" We discuss our narratives in two themes: a) social justice education, and b) experiential learning.

Social Justice Education

During our recorded conversation, both authors discussed how community shaped our lives in social justice education, specifically in how parental influence or identity influenced our journey into education. Tumelo stated:

> … my mom was involved. It was the entry levels of having an awareness of social justice issues, where the least to do is visit elderly people or homes where you could see that these homes were more vulnerable than their communities may be.

Tumelo described how spending time with his mother in the community was his entry point to understanding social justice in action.

Like Tumelo, Di-Tu's journey with identity and justice stemmed from a fusion of cultures in her childhood, where she recognized the beauty and dissonance of growing up in a multiethnic home in the U.S. Growing up in middle America with parents of differing nationalities, she acknowledges that "culture has always been central" to her life and distinguished her from her peers.

While our stories are not overtly unique to many students, we highlight the importance of informal education as a pathway into living a socially just life. Furthermore, while students arrive at universities and acquire new knowledge, an intergenerational knowledge system is also passed down through parents, guardians, and the communities in which they grew up. These personal life experiences empower us to understand interpretations, meanings, and politics surrounding social justice.

Engaging in Experiential Learning

In the university environment, we found ourselves transitioning from our informal knowledge to experiential learning methods. Tumelo discussed how he began to grow in social justice education as he started working in the university environment. Tumelo volunteered at an organization where he developed a heightened sense of consciousness around social justice and equity, leading to over a decade of work on sexualities, gender and inclusion studies. Di-Tu discusses a similar journey of experiential learning, facilitating dialogues on social justice, built upon her previous knowledge of multiculturalism. Facilitating these dialogues challenged her internally while also challenging her students. She volunteered to teach a Residence Life course, which helped her facilitate dialogues on oppression, power, and social identity. This experience in SAS marked a significant turning point in her career. Afterwards, she pursued student affairs policy and practices from both institutional and global perspectives.

Di-Tu discusses how experiential learning was crucial to her growth, stating:

> More people are having their consciousness raised… [many]people struggle with their guilt. It is hard to sit in a space and know that [oppression] doesn't impact you personally, but …when you start looking at it from a lens of, 'No, if this person is impacted, I'm also impacted.

Di-Tu explains how her experiential learning led her to a path of social justice education. It was not the classroom that brought her to this moment; instead, it was her experience of learning and teaching in SAS.

Implications

Further research is needed to identify the theories that practitioners may be advancing or using in their social justice work to build a global community. We offer three implications for international SAS.

First, utilizing the surrounding communities as catalysts for social change is imperative in shaping social justice education for students and practitioners. Both researchers discussed the power of their home community and how communal approaches served as a springboard for enhancing their social justice education.

Second, higher education institutions must value both the formal and informal backgrounds of students to invite the whole person into the practice of global social justice work, rather than minimizing student experiences and development that may not occur in the classroom.

Third, practitioners' work needs to move from work-based reports to research outputs, and practitioners are often not encouraged to engage in academia as part of their daily work. We believe meaningful advocacy requires the agency to curate your own interventions and solutions without a dependency on a structure or authority. Engaging in research would enhance practitioners' ability to inform and advance global social justice practice in student development within the higher education sector. These implications deconstruct the power of the ivory tower and elevate collaborative work on university campuses, strengthening relationships and shared goals between practitioners, faculty, and students to advance inclusion and create a grand mosaic of global social justice education.

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Cognitive Science & Stereotypes: Informing Student Affairs in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how cognitive science can enhance the university student experience for universities located in the Arab Gulf States. Drawing on David Schneider's (2004) stereotyping framework to explore the often unfair and untrue beliefs students have about one another, we highlight strategies such as individualizing, retraining, and providing salient exemplars through intentional student experiences to lessen the harmful effects of stereotypes. Integrating principles of social cognition and global citizenship, we demonstrate how campus initiatives enable students to recognize commonalities with others, thereby fostering empathy, inclusivity, and cross-cultural understanding. Case studies from Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar exemplify the practical application of these strategies.

Introduction

The ability to positively shape the university student experience by harnessing cognitive science in higher education is particularly impactful today. There has been a substantial increase in higher education institutions in the Arabian Gulf region, commonly referred to as the "GCC" for the regional Gulf Cooperation Council economic and security cooperative group. In the United Arab Emirates alone over the last thirty years, the country has seen a small group of five institutions in 1990 grow to 71 in 2013 (UAE MOHESR, 2014). The geographically small stately principality of Qatar has transformed itself into a major educational hub with the founding of Education City. This Qatar Foundation-sponsored development on the outskirts of Doha has been home to eight branch campuses of highly ranked international universities. Five main drivers have been significant in the development of the campus: region-specific tradition to import best practice, regional and global competition, local education reform and policies, national liberalization initiatives, and globalization, internationalization of education, and transnational education (Khodr, 2011).

Cognitive Science

The study of cognitive science paves the way for students to become global citizens with empathy, rather than individuals oppressed by their stereotypes. Social cognition explores how people perceive, interpret, and mentally organize information about themselves, others, and social situations (Fiske and Taylor, 2020). Cognitive science can redefine student experience, enabling it to become one of the most powerful tools in today's world: a mechanism, unlike any other, whose effect can be permanent. Utilizing student affairs and services (SAS) and addressing perspectives of college students in Qatar could help improve the results of studies investigating the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about mental

illness and other stigmas in Qatar (Zolezzi et al., 2017). Implementing cognitive science in daily SAS practices will propel a new educational revolution that better supports students and creates an environment where all students thrive.

"It is vital to understand that stereotypes are the preexisting knowledge formed through exemplars, and while they assist in perceiving, interpreting, and responding to a subject, they can be controlled."

Formation of Stereotypes

The complexity of stereotypes lies in the intricate way in which they are formed. Stereotypes function as schemas—pre-existing knowledge structures—that individuals use to perceive and interpret social information, filling in gaps when certain characteristics are absent (Schneider, 2004). These cognitive shortcuts are formed through prototypes and exemplars that come to define categories and, in turn, sustain stereotypical views (Schneider, 2004). More recent work continues to affirm this schema-based understanding of bias, showing that stereotypes operate through processes of assimilation and accommodation that guide perception (Che, 2024), and that stereotype structures adapt dynamically in response to new experiences (Gershman and Cikara, 2023). Understanding the nature and function of stereotypes leads, not to eradication, but paves the way for SAS professionals to have another tool to use in everyday program and curricula design.

Stereotypes evolve from pre-existing schemas that consist of categories and files that are identified through prototypes and exemplars described above. Research in Kuwait has highlighted negative perceptions of the causes and traits of stuttering, as well as barriers to the vocational and societal inclusion of people who stutter (Abdalla et al., 2014) In Oman, male nursing students faced internal conflict and societal stigma, viewing nursing as a female-dominated profession with limited status (Hardan et al., 2025). Controlling stereotyping plays a vital role, because, unlike the suppressing method, it enables categories to be constructed and/or primed through the availability of salient exemplars (Schneider, 2004). However, the act of suppressing stereotypes, or asking individuals to ignore their ethnicity or gender, primes the stereotype unconsciously and the student experiences the rebound effect, where the stereotypes that were suppressed would flood back again. It is vital to understand that stereotypes are the preexisting knowledge formed through exemplars, and while they assist in perceiving, interpreting, and responding to a subject, they can be controlled.

Working with Students

For SAS teams, the student experience is real and vivid, which can be established through the sameness and overlap students achieve through campus initiatives and activities. Further complicating the situation for staff members is that high school preparation is widely acknowledged as being inadequate for modern Western (or Eastern) higher education study (Syed, 2003). Students should be presented with continuous and strong exemplars that would begin to redefine preexisting categories and prime them.

Schneider (2004) suggests several strategies to examine stereotypes, including retraining, individualizing, making certain categories irrelevant, and correcting biased assumptions. These approaches enable individuals—such as students—to actively engage with and reflect on their experiences, challenging automatic stereotypical thinking. This aligns closely with Magolda's (2008) concept of self-authorship, which emphasizes students' agency to critique and reconstruct their own beliefs and worldview. By fostering self-authorship, students can internalize Schneider's strategies, using their developing cognitive and moral capacities to reduce reliance on stereotypes and to make more deliberate, reflective judgments about others. Through intentional SAS initiatives, individualizing is an effective method because

it enables the students to find the sameness or overlap between themselves and others who are otherwise perceived stereotypically. The defining element and the key to creating global citizens through higher education is to enable them to find their sameness or overlap with the other. A localized study of students in Kuwait using translated versions of the "Global Citizenship Scale" and "Initial Development and Validation of the Global Citizenship Scale" (Alnufaishan and Alrashidi, 2023) suggested that the relationship between ethnocentrism and global citizenship was multifaceted, with facets of ethnocentrism working against features of global citizenship, while others may work together (Alnufaishan and Alrashidi, 2023). The more links between categories and exemplars provided for students, the greater the effect of these activities becomes permanent, moral, and ethical.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions in the GCC provide the ideal incubation hub for SAS teams to effectively counter student stereotypes. By linking cognitive science, stereotype management, and student development, higher education institutions can cultivate ethically aware global citizens, leveraging experiential learning to achieve lasting perceptual and attitudinal change.

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The Significance of Global Community and Diversity for Organizational Innovation

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education is currently confronted by numerous challenges that necessitate innovative types of student support, innovative teaching and research, and innovative organizational structures. Nevertheless, the factors which support organizational innovation in higher education remain either dominated by facile rhetoric concerning "disruption" or hampered by an overreliance on untested technologies, such as artificial intelligence, which not only limit the human interaction necessary for student development, but lack empirical research concerning their effectiveness in supporting diverse student populations. This article draws upon a variety of empirical and theoretical publications on innovation and student support to make a different argument, namely that diversity—and, by extension, global community—are fundamentally crucial for organizational innovation.

Introduction

Higher Education is currently confronted by numerous challenges that necessitate innovative research, innovative forms of student support, innovative teaching, and innovative organizational structures. Research is perhaps the most widely recognized innovative impact of higher education, as it provides immeasurable benefits to society in the form of medical breakthroughs, technological discoveries, inventions that improve global sustainability, and interdisciplinary ventures that raise the quality of life for millions, particularly in poverty-stricken regions (Tierney & Lanford, 2015). However, innovations in student support, teaching, and organizational structures are equally important, as they frequently mitigate the prevalence of White, Eurocentric norms and deficit perspectives in higher education institutions while stimulating the conditions for greater access and equity among all students (Tichavakunda & Kolluri, 2025).

Nevertheless, the factors which support organizational innovation in higher education remain either dominated by facile rhetoric concerning "disruption" or hampered by an overreliance on untested technologies, such as artificial intelligence, which not only limit the human interaction necessary for student development, but lack empirical research concerning their effectiveness in supporting diverse student populations (Fisher & Lanford, 2025; Mathewson & Butrymowicz, 2020). This article draws upon a variety of empirical and theoretical publications on innovation and student support to make a different argument, namely that diversity—and, by extension, global communit—are fundamentally crucial for organizational innovation.

Diversity: The Underappreciated Engine of Innovation

As argued by Feldman (2002), "innovation, at a fundamental level, is a social process that bridges individuals from different disciplines with different competencies, distinct vocabularies, and unique motives" (p. 48). Indeed, empirical studies have consistently shown that an organization's innovative potential is maximized when it embraces and effectively socializes individuals hailing from a diverse range of backgrounds, experiences, disciplinary skills. For example, Hunt et al. (2014) revealed that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more likely to have above-median financial returns, while those in the top quartile for ethnic diversity are 30% more likely to exceed the national median. Hewlett et al. (2013) similarly found that companies which emphasize the importance of inherent diversity (traits an individual is born with) and acquired diversity (traits developed through experience) are 45% more likely to grow their market share and 70% more likely to capture a new market.

When leadership holds diverse traits and appreciates their importance, organizational innovation thrives. Research consistently shows that leaders who delegate authority, encourage feedback, and consider multiple perspectives catalyze the conditions for innovation. In such environments, employees feel comfortable proposing new ideas, learning from failure, and sharing important information throughout the organization (Hewlett et al., 2013).

The problem is that the potential for scientific innovation through diversity is not always recognized at an organizational level. Hofstra et al. (2020) found in a review of approximately 1.2 million U.S. doctoral recipients from 1977 to 2015 that demographically underrepresented students innovate at higher rates than their majority peers. Tragically, however, the innovative contributions of these underrepresented students were not recognized, nor did these innovations assist them in the academic job market. Hence, our understanding of how diversity facilitates innovation in higher education is often inadequate, assuming that individuals from similar ethnic or gender identities will have like-minded viewpoints and areas of expertise.

How to Promote Diversity and Global Community in Higher Education

To cultivate a culture of organizational innovation, we must recognize the unique abilities, experiences, and strengths each individual brings—and our higher education institutions must have a global perspective. For instance, multicultural experiences enhance creative abilities, such as insight learning, remote association, and idea generation (Leung et al., 2008). Another valuable characteristic for creativity and innovation is multilingualism, as it enhances an individual's ability to translate complex concepts across different domains of knowledge (Fürst & Grin, 2017).

These findings suggest that countries with high test scores but lower innovation levels may lack an appreciation for the importance of diversity and global community in education. The U.S. educational system has traditionally valued broad-based education that embraces open inquiry. Yet, current political rhetoric increasingly dismisses this approach as outdated (Kraus, 2024). Even worse, international students and scholars have been subject to surveillance, lost their academic freedom to critique society, stripped of their legal status, and detained by federal agents (Weninger, 2025).

To drive American economic progress through innovative thinking, we must first promote the acquisition of diverse talents through a renewed commitment to the liberal and fine arts. Educational environments which hope to encourage creativity and innovation among their students must consider how to develop cross-cultural fluency, interdisciplinary thinking, and critical-thinking skills among their students. Second, educators must consider how innovative pedagogical practices, such as Collaborative Online International Learning, might be leveraged to encourage global perspectives among their students. Third, student affairs practitioners must cultivate welcoming spaces for diverse individuals so that students can be exposed to new ideas and practices in a safe, global community conducive to learning and experimental, rather than fear-mongering and epistemic closure. Fourth, all educators and student affairs professionals must push back forcefully against xenophobic discourse which threatens transnational student movement and stifle cross-cultural exchange.

Conclusion

Globally diverse and culturally competent leadership, student affairs and services staff, and faculty are necessary for the development of innovative initiatives which understand the needs, concerns, and experiences of contemporary student populations. Through their hard work, we can build coalitions to disrupt the current climate of suppression (Garces et al., 2025). We can also ensure that global community and diversity continues to support creative and innovative development in U.S. colleges and universities.

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From the Pitch to the World: Using Sport to Teach Intercultural Competence in Undergraduate Education

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ABSTRACT

This article explores an undergraduate course that uses sport as a dynamic and accessible entry point for developing intercultural competence and fostering global community. Inspired by an article claiming U.S. soccer fans have greater global awareness than the average American, the course uses the World Cup and other global sporting events to examine how race, gender, politics, and national identity intersect with sport. Through comparative case studies—from Title IX in the U.S., to the India-Pakistan cricket rivalry, to anti-racism efforts in UK football—students explore the impact of sport within and beyond their own cultures. Assignments emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and cross-cultural analysis.

The course scaffolds intercultural learning by prompting reflection on personal identities, engagement with unfamiliar cultural perspectives, and analysis of sport as a global cultural phenomenon. This article shares course structure, sample assignments, and student outcomes, offering adaptable strategies for creating culturally responsive, globally engaged learning environments.

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected yet polarized world, higher education plays a crucial role in preparing students to engage across cultural differences. However, fostering intercultural competence remains a challenge in formal education. Often dismissed as mere entertainment, sport can serve as a surprisingly powerful tool for critically examining cultural values, global power structures, and shared human experiences. As journalist Andrés Martínez (2014) notes, sport fandom reflects a breakdown of cultural isolationism and an openness to global narratives. It can be used as a common ground for difficult conversations; for example, a 2015 UNESCO initiative in Lebanon used sport to unite youth from diverse, conflict-affected communities to foster cross-cultural dialogue (UNESCO, 2015).

This paper presents an undergraduate course that uses global sport to develop intercultural competence, through allowing students to explore intersectional issues such as race, gender, nationalism, and class, sport provides an accessible bridge into critical analysis, empathy-building, and global awareness.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Foundations

The course draws on multiple pedagogical frameworks. Central to this course is the aim of cultivating intercultural competence, defined

as the ability to communicate effectively across cultures and adapt to diverse cultural contexts (Deardorff, 2006), essential in our globalized world marked by both connection and conflict.

Culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) informs the emphasis on connecting course content to students' lived experiences while validating diverse cultural perspectives. While the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993) supports the course's intentional scaffolding, helping students move from ethnocentric perspectives toward greater openness, curiosity, and ethnorelative understanding.

These frameworks emphasize that meaningful intercultural learning requires students to challenge their cultural assumptions and worldviews. The course fosters this process by encouraging students to reflect on their identities, engage with unfamiliar perspectives, and critically analyze sport as a global phenomenon.

Course Design

Course Overview

This undergraduate course, Sports and Global Culture, is offered through the Multidisciplinary Studies program at an R1 university, that is a university with the highest level of research activity, in the United States and is designed to engage students with the multifaceted relationship between sport and society through a global lens. The course opens with an introduction to foundational concepts of culture and identity, building a common foundation across all students. Subsequent units include Citizenship, Education, Athlete Activism, and Media, among others. Topics are explored through case studies–that primarily do not include US professional sports–including the India-Pakistan cricket rivalry, kneeling protests in the Premier League in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, and calling attention to racial injustice, and sportswashing, which is the strategic use of sport by governments or corporations to improve reputations and deflect criticism of human rights abuses, such as in the 2022 World Cup.

Materials are diverse and include videos, popular media articles, and podcasts, to provide accessible content that builds a knowledge base and then stimulates reflection and critical thinking. Students are encouraged to connect course themes to their own cultural contexts–the reasoning for not including US-based examples–as well as those beyond their immediate experience.

Assignments

The course uses various assignments to deepen students' engagement. These include weekly video/audio discussion posts that coincide with course units. The core assignment sequence is a series of "Sport's influence on…" papers, asking students to analyze the impact of sport, first on their own culture, then our university culture, and finally a culture other than their own. These papers scaffold from the most familiar (self) to the least (other) and mimic the path on the DMIS framework in moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism.

The course culminates in a "Sport and Culture Exploration" project, where students select a culture (national, religious, or identity-based) and research an impact of sport within it. Guidelines for this are kept general in order to not restrict the students' interests in developing their research foci, requiring substantial individual feedback in scaffolded submissions, including a target culture statement, a proposal, and an annotated bibliography, to ensure the projects remain aligned with the assessment criteria for the final submission.

Final projects take the form of a podcast, Padlet, presentation, or paper, and have covered topics such as the effects of U.S. enlisted personnel engaging with local communities through pick-up soccer games, sport as a means of integration for immigrants, and the exploration of stereotypically gendered sports, such as cheerleading.

Assessment

Assessment strategies are designed to evaluate students' understanding of core themes, intercultural awareness, and critical thinking. Participation in weekly video/audio boards is weighted to emphasize ongoing engagement and collaborative learning. Written assignments and the final project assess students' ability to synthesize course content, apply disciplinary lenses, and express ideas effectively. Grading is done with detailed rubrics provided to guide students' work.

Reflections and Impact

This course has been offered over several years now and, due to popularity, has recently been revised to be offered in accelerated winter and summer terms. The sport-centered framework seems to engage students who might otherwise be hesitant to take a course focused explicitly on culture or intercultural skills. The ubiquity, emotional resonance, and social complexity of sport make it an accessible entry point into deeper global inquiry. Students often reflect that they had not previously considered how sport shapes culture; afterward, they recognize its influence in their university experience, the media they consume, and political actions.

A number of past students are in fact student athletes themselves–from the US and around the world. Their participation in the course adds another level of experience that elevates their own experience and those of their classmates. They make connections to the issues they encounter personally, such as deliberations on whether to participate in anti-racism protests at the risk of alienating part of their fanbase and share how they feel pressure from various outside actors–university administrators, other students, politicians, and so on.

The distance provided by analyzing sport-related issues instead of "real life" seems to encourage more open discussions on difficult topics like racism. Beyond this, the choice of case studies itself broadens students' awareness–past students have stated that they had never even heard of sports like cricket or rugby before taking this course. This initial access to new things removes a barrier that makes them more able to continue their explorations themselves beyond the bounds of this course.

Conclusion

Sport offers an effective and engaging framework for building intercultural competence in higher education. The course described here can be adapted to various cultural contexts by swapping case studies to reflect different global sports and issues. Moreover, other everyday interests—such as music, film, or fashion—can similarly provide accessible pathways to global learning.

Meaningful intercultural learning requires confronting and challenging cultural assumptions and worldviews. The course supports this by using the familiarity of sport to create a safe yet stimulating environment where students reflect on their own identities and cultural lenses and engage with unfamiliar perspectives. Ultimately, the goal is to use familiar cultural touchstones to facilitate deeper understanding and engagement with the diverse world in which we live.

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Building an Inclusive Campus for International Students in Higher Education Institutions in India

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ABSTRACT

The Study in India initiative by the Government of India has a target of 500,000 international students by 2047, opening up many opportunities for the Indian education system. In this chapter, the authors will examine the factors affecting student mobility and how Indian institutions can build infrastructure and support services to enable inbound student mobility. By reconceptualizing international student mobilities, this paper reinvigorates the field by offering a more nuanced understanding of how international mobility contributes to forming global identities, reshaping higher education landscapes, and the interconnection between cultural exchange and global learning. The chapter will be primarily desk-based, drawing on a wide range of prior research and existing literature in international education. It critically synthesizes data from previous studies, reports, and policy documents while incorporating student voices through case study examples, testimonials, and survey findings where relevant.

Introduction

India, traditionally viewed as a major source country for international students, is increasingly positioning itself as a destination in the global higher education landscape. As of 2022, over 1.3 million Indian students were studying abroad (IC3 Institute, 2022). This outbound mobility is influenced by various factors such as academic aspirations, perceived quality gaps, socio-economic status, and global education trends (Choudaha, 2017). However, with the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and initiatives like the Study in India program, India has made clear strides toward attracting international students, particularly from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (British Council, 2021).

This paper is grounded in first-hand insights gathered through interviewing six international students studying in India from different geographies across the globe. These interviews captured qualitative feedback on various aspects of the student journey from pre-arrival processes and academic integration to social inclusion and campus support services. Responses were recorded through Google form survey from students across multiple nationalities and institutions, offering a rich and diverse account of what international education in India looks like from the students' perspectives. The narratives, reflections, and suggestions presented throughout this paper are drawn directly from this primary data and serve as a critical foundation for the analysis and recommendations that follow.

Findings

Onboarding Experiences and Administrative Processes

The onboarding process significantly shapes the experiences of international students. Services like airport pickup, orientation weeks, and hostel support were frequently cited as positive initiatives. Liya, a student from Ethiopia at a mid-size Liberal Arts university in North India appreciated the assistance: "Orientation week, SIM card support, and airport pickup made me feel prepared." However, concerns remain regarding bureaucratic inefficiencies in visa and residence permit processes, which can be emotionally taxing (ICEF Monitor, 2021). A student from Europe who preferred anonymity described the system as "unnecessarily complicated and emotionally exhausting." These administrative hurdles often impact students' initial perceptions of institutional hospitality.

"Campus buddy programs where international students are paired with local student volunteers play a crucial role in easing cultural transitions, offering guidance on campus life, and fostering peer-level trust."

Support Systems and Social Inclusion

Robust support systems are critical for academic and personal integration. Services such as counseling, campus buddy programs, and academic mentorship were rated as "Excellent" or "Very Good" by most participants. Campus buddy programs where international students are paired with local student volunteers play a crucial role in easing cultural transitions, offering guidance on campus life, and fostering peer-level trust. Anna from a European university, who was spending a semester at a private university in the Delhi region, specifically noted the emotional and practical help she received from her buddy, which helped her navigate both academic and social settings. However, gaps remain in areas such as healthcare access. Ismail, an international postgraduate student from Central Africa enrolled at a university in the Indian Himalayan region, emphasized the critical importance of understanding and accessing medical services efficiently, particularly during emergencies.

Additionally, another international student proposed cultural adjustment workshops and language support as valuable additions for academic work, social life, and adjustability (Ennin & Manariyo, 2023). These initiatives contribute to developing intercultural competencies, skills, and awareness that help both local and international students engage respectfully and effectively across cultural differences, thereby strengthening the overall inclusivity of the campus environment. Social inclusion is a complex dimension that extends beyond academic support. While some students reported feeling welcome, others highlighted occasional discomfort stemming from cultural ignorance. A few students suggested the need for intercultural awareness training for local students and faculty: "More awareness programs could prevent unconscious biases," these insights echo the findings of Rizvi (2011), who emphasized that mobility must also be about meaningful integration into the host society.

Infrastructure and Institutional Visibility
Quality infrastructure contributes to the academic and social well-being of international students. Safe hostels, well-maintained laboratories, and digital accessibility all influence campus experiences. Liya praised the outreach and responsiveness of her host institution: "They made it easy to navigate everything before arriving." The visibility of institutions through digital platforms, virtual campus experiences, and participation in international education fairs significantly influence prospective students' choices prior to their arrival in the host country (QS, 2022).

Policy Landscape and Institutional Action
The Government of India has introduced several initiatives to improve inbound student mobility. The Study in India program offers tuition fee waivers and centralized admissions, while Indian Council for Cultural Relations scholarships target students from the Global South. NEP 2020 lays the groundwork for internationalization by encouraging global partnerships, foreign university campuses in India, and credit transfer systems (British Council, 2021). However, the translation of these policies into campus-level actions remains inconsistent. Alexandra pointed out, "Government programs are great, but they need institutional backing to translate into lived experiences."

Recommendations for Inclusive Campuses

To strengthen India's position as a leading destination for international students, institutions must adopt a holistic and student-centered approach to inclusion. First, streamlining visa and residence processes through dedicated institutional liaisons and pre-arrival support can reduce procedural delays and ease anxieties for incoming students. Equally important is the implementation of intercultural training modules for faculty, administrative staff, and domestic students to foster empathy, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive engagement. Health and well-being services must be enhanced through multilingual counseling, culturally competent healthcare access, and 24/7 emergency support. Academic mentoring and structured integration initiatives such as campus buddy programs should be expanded to facilitate smoother social and academic transitions. Furthermore, international students should be included in institutional feedback mechanisms and governance bodies to ensure their lived experiences inform policy and practice. Finally, promoting diversity through inclusive cultural events, language exchanges, and student-led international councils can help build vibrant, interculturally aware campus communities. Together, these measures can significantly enhance the overall experience of international students and reinforce India's reputation as a welcoming and globally competitive education hub.

Conclusion

India offers a rich tapestry of academic, cultural, and economic advantages. Students are attracted to its affordable education, English-medium instruction, and the availability of niche courses in fields such as yoga, Ayurveda, and Indian philosophy (Rizvi, 2011). India's transition from a sender to a destination country in global higher education is gaining momentum. However, success will depend not only on policy but also on how HEIs engage with the lived experiences of international students. A welcoming and inclusive environment is critical to sustaining India's appeal. Inclusion must be embedded in policy, practice, and everyday interactions; only then can India fully realize its aspiration of becoming a global education hub.

**Students' names have been anonymized using pseudonyms.*

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Global Aims, Local Constraints: Reimagining Global Citizenship Education in India Through International Insights

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ABSTRACT

The diverse set of social and cultural values in India has a profound effect on the evolution and implementation of the education system. The higher education system deeply rooted in societal values corresponds with UNESCO's four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (Delors Commission, 1998), which also serves as the foundation for Global Citizenship Education (GCED). India's richness of diversity, values, and mix of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies make it an attractive hub for higher education. However, the lack of necessary support systems to ensure inclusiveness vis-a-vis learning, wellness, and creating a safe space for international students hinders the growth of global footfall in India. In this paper, the authors unpack these issues and recommend ways to mitigate India's GCED paradoxes through case studies, anecdotes, and existing literature on best practices worldwide.

Introduction

Global Citizenship Education (GCED) cultivates collective commitment to peace, empathy, inclusivity, and intercultural understanding. It is of critical importance in this age of hyper-globalization. India aspires to become a global education hub by 2030 and has aligned its National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020) with Goal 4 (Quality Education) of the Sustainable Development Goals (UN DESA, 2020). As a cradle for the ancient philosophy of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam,* the world is one family, India, inherently embodies the ethos of GCED. However, lack of institutional support remains a major hindrance to its aspiration of becoming a global leader. This paper explores the gaps and barriers to India's GCED ambitions. While our policies and philosophies emphasize inclusiveness, the systemic and structural barriers within institutions remain a significant barrier in its implementation. This chasm continues to hinder the attraction of international students to India.

India, a crossroads for many civilizations, embodies "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" in its rich, diverse heritage. Building on this heritage, NEP pursues true education by emphasizing on developing a "higher-order" cognitive capacity to attain "knowledge (*Jnan),* wisdom (*Pragyaa*), and truth (*Satya*)." The policy further aims for the cultivation of skills, and character necessary to nurture global citizenship, one that upholds human rights, and builds a deep sense of responsibility toward global well-being (NEP, 2020).

Similarly, UNESCO (n.d.) defines GCED as a tool for strengthening lifelong learning to build harmonious, inclusive, and just societies, glocally.

“Nations such as Japan and South Korea have had success in implementing Global Citizenship Education oriented systematic and structured policies at grassroots level.”

Built on three learning domains; cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral, GCED prioritizes lifelong learning. NEP’s vision echoes UNESCO’s four pillars of education (Delors, 1998), learning to know, do, be, and live together. These pillars nurture critical thinking to foster values and skills necessary in global citizens for a shared peaceful co-existence.

While “learning to know” urges balancing holistic education and disciplinary academic expertise, “learning to do” underscores the effect of experiential learning in enhancing functional skills (Delors, 1998). Whereas “learning to be” stresses the role of critical thinking, autonomy, and civic responsibility as the key to realizing shared global goals (Faure, 1972), “learning to live together” cultivates mutual respect, cooperation, empathy, and harmony.

Barriers to Achievement

The advent of modernity and globalization demands that our institutions define, profess, and live education as an individual’s transcendental exercise of becoming their highest self. This requires institutions to create an environment that enables individuals to realize their best selves and incentivize respect for others’ humanity. However, ground realities hinder the realization of these aims. Insights from international students currently pursuing higher education in India reveal significant institutional barriers that range from culture to logistics, causing trouble at a foundational level.

1. **Linguistic/Communication:** The students faced trouble comprehending diverse English accents and regional languages. Further, the culturally specific non-verbal cues like head shaking etc., impeded effective comprehension and interaction. These barriers exacerbated the feelings of exclusion and dampened class participation.

2. **Cultural:** Students who hailed from countries with more forthright communication styles struggled with miscommunication and misinterpretation. They also highlighted a lack of cultural sensitivity among peers and faculty alike. In the absence of structured support systems, international students struggled to navigate different social and communication expectations.

3. **Pedagogical and Academic:** A persistent lack of timely access to course materials was highlighted by the students, which severely impacted their academic preparedness. Additionally, overreliance on Indian-specific contexts in the content unintentionally sidelined the global perspectives. This exclusionary approach enhances the uneven playing field for international students while limiting their overall engagement with the course curriculum.

4. **Non-Academic:** The students identified significant non-academic barriers during their stay in India. The lack of orientation and institutional support in navigating unfamiliar cities led them to solely rely on their peers’ kindness for information on transport, safety, and daily logistics. Additionally, the absence of support with important procedures and services, such as immigration and healthcare, further created functional hurdles, increasing their feelings of exclusion and isolation, and impacting their overall well-being.

5. **Other:** One student pointed out the overdependence on handwritten notes instead of digital alternatives, creating a logistical issue for those who needed to carry their notes back to their home countries. This hampered their long-term learning and retention and created an avoidable obstacle.

Despite the deep philosophical alignment of NEP 2020 and India's GCED framework with the values and ethos of pillars of education and global citizenship education, the insights from the international students reveal a disconnect between India's policies and their lived realities. While the GCED framework (Commission, 2021) provides a broad guideline of holistic learning and transformative education fostering inclusion, empathy, and global awareness, it falls short in demarcating actionable strategies such as structural and institutional support to alleviate the existing academic and non-academic barriers.

Identifying Gaps and Promising Practices

To address these implementation gaps, India must learn from countries that have successfully embedded GCED in their institutional practice. Nations such as Japan and South Korea have had success in implementing GCED oriented systematic and structured policies at grassroots level. Japan's initiatives such as Global 30, and later Top Global University Project provided incentives to private and public universities to enhance the internationalization of academic pursuit (JSPS, n.d.). They introduced focused pre-arrival orientation modules, which not only guided students in understanding the academic landscape, but also assisted in practical and cultural support such as visa and immigration processes, transportation, emergency protocols, and language and intercultural communication. Additionally, an annual intercultural event, Japan Tent Program, offers students an opportunity to directly learn the culture and language from the people of Ishikawa Perfecture (University of Tokyo, 2025). Similarly, South Korea's Yonsei University (n.d.) offers student assistance in visa processing, academic pursuit, housing, healthcare, and on and off-campus resources under Global One-Stop Centers. Other institutes such as Korea University offer free language courses, and language exchange programs, facilitating students in navigating life both on and off campus.

Conclusion

Learning from these programs, India can actualize its aim of being inclusive, holistic, and globally responsive. The goal is to nurture global footfall with dignity, and purpose. To become a *Vishwaguru,* India must address the academic, logistical, linguistic, and cultural barriers through systematic cultural onboarding programs, globally aligned curricula, conversational language classes, and other non-academic support systems.

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Passport, Purpose, and Power: The Global Journeys of Black Student Affairs Practitioners

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the lived experiences of Black student affairs and services professionals who have worked or are currently working abroad, using interviews and personal essays to illuminate their journeys. Grounded in the NASPA/ACPA competencies of Values, History, and Philosophy; Social Justice and Inclusion; and Organizational and Human Resources, it examines how cultural context, identity, and organizational culture shape professional practice. Practitioners share what it means to be Black and abroad, offering stories and tips on building community both at work and beyond. These narratives not only provide insight into the intersection of race, culture, and global mobility, but also other actionable guidance for institutions and professional associations seeking to recruit, retain, and support Black professionals in international settings. By centering these voices, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of culturally responsive leadership, inclusive organizational development, and the global student affairs and services landscape through an equity-focused lens.

Introduction

In the evolving terrain of higher education, the experiences of student affairs professionals who work internationally are often underexplored, especially those who hold marginalized identities. This article centers the voices of Black student affairs practitioners who have worked abroad, illuminating how identity, institutional culture, and personal values intersect in their professional journeys. Grounded in the NASPA/ACPA competencies (2015) of Values, History, and Philosophy; Social Justice and Inclusion; and Organizational and Human Resources, this piece draws from rich interviews with professionals across functional levels and regions. Their stories provide insight into both the challenges and affirmations encountered while navigating roles far from home. In doing so, this work invites institutions and the broader field to reimagine support systems that empower professionals of color in global settings.

The Data

According to the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR, 2023), only 12% of student affairs professionals in the U.S. identify as Black or African American. Globally, data on racial diversity among higher education staff is even more limited, with most international student affairs roles disproportionately filled by White Western expatriates (Lee, 2020; NAFSA, 2022). As institutions worldwide expand internationalization efforts, the lack of racial and cultural diversity in professional staff creates a blind spot in both student support and equity practices.

Participants interviewed for this article ranged from early-career professionals to senior executives who served in residence life, comprehensive student services portfolios, and academic-adjacent roles. They were asked to reflect on their motivations for working abroad, their identity development, challenges faced, and advice for others. Their stories offer powerful testaments of resilience, clarity of purpose, and professional insight.

Discussion

Journey and Values

The journey to working abroad is a result of intention, evolution, and curiosity. Some practitioners described their path as a strategic next step to broaden impact beyond U.S. borders. For others, it was deeply personal, an alignment of curiosity with professional growth. After years of experience across Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Predominately White Institutions, and liberal arts institutions, one practitioner embraced international roles in China to lead globally diverse communities.

Core professional values such as leadership, community building, and cultural competence were consistently mentioned as motivators that deepened through international work. Participants shared how their frameworks of student development shifted as they adapted to new cultural, political, and social environments. Moments of affirmation came in the form of student growth, while challenges arose when institutional values or local norms conflicted with their U.S.-based training. Yet these complexities encouraged reflection and strategy, sharpening their ability to lead across cultural divides.

Identity and Inclusion

Racial identity emerged as both an anchor and a bridge. While many professionals experienced heightened visibility due to their physical appearance, the interpretation of Blackness varied significantly by country. In some cases, being a Black professional elicited curiosity rather than prejudice. However, in other contexts, participants encountered subtle bias or exclusion.

Professionals noted that their presence challenged assumptions and often became a point of cultural exchange and learning. Being visible created opportunities to educate others and build relationships based on authenticity. Still, complexities arose, especially in homogenous or rural communities, where exposure to the African diaspora was minimal. Representation, therefore, became a tool of empowerment and disruption, creating dialogue where it previously did not exist.

Credentialism and professional status also came under scrutiny. Despite holding advanced degrees, some participants noted that their qualifications were overlooked or unacknowledged, a sentiment not equally experienced by white colleagues. This discrepancy deepened reflections on intersectionality, visibility, and validation.

Workplace Culture

Institutional culture significantly shaped the participants' experiences. Success was more attainable in environments that embraced global education, innovation, and equity. Professionals described leading programs that bridged cultures, expanded mental health services, and challenged students to think critically about global issues.

However, barriers remained. In some institutions, change was slow, with leadership clinging to "how things have always been done." Professionals who introduced inclusive practices or challenged norms were often met with resistance or dismissal. Peer dynamics, particularly with other Black professionals, also affected experiences. Some participants found themselves lumped together or penalized for conflicts unrelated to their individual actions. Yet in more inclusive institutions, staff were able to build trust, advance initiatives, and expand student learning.

Community Building

Community building was described as essential and multifaceted. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining strong connections to family, mentors, and peers in the United States while also integrating into local cultures. Some built bridges through language learning and engagement with customs, while others leaned into expatriate and African American communities for grounding.

Food, storytelling, and shared traditions became vehicles for connection. One professional shared

that cooking traditional meals invited students and colleagues to understand and appreciate cultural nuance. For many, community building was an act of resistance against isolation and a path to creating a sense of home away from home.

Guidance for the Field

Participants offered clear advice for Black student affairs professionals considering international roles:

1. Know your non-negotiables and assess your capacity. Understand what support systems you need and whether you can thrive alone or need community in proximity.

2. Ask intentional questions during interviews. Topics like institutional diversity, support for marginalized staff, and inclusion strategies should be part of every conversation.

3. Expect to unlearn and relearn. Cultural norms, professional expectations, and communication styles may differ from U.S. contexts.

4. Embrace your presence as powerful. Visibility can be isolating, but it can also be transformational, for both you and your students.

5. Have fun and be open to the adventure. International work is an incredible opportunity to learn, grow, and lead differently.

For institutions, the charge is clear: be proactive, not reactive. Listen to Black professionals, provide mentorship and support systems, and commit to changing cultures that diminish or dismiss their contributions. Accountability must follow insight.

Desire and Declaration

The decision to pursue international work is one of courage, vision, and vulnerability, especially for Black student affairs professionals. Their journeys are marked by hope and hardship, cultural exchange and exclusion, purpose and power. This article stands as a declaration: Black practitioners are not just participants in the global student affairs ecosystem; they desire and are equipped to be architects of its future.

As student affairs embraces global interconnectedness, our field must recognize that diversity, equity, and inclusion are not U.S.-centric issues. Supporting and retaining Black professionals abroad requires the same intentionality, structure, and humanity that we advocate for in student support. To build a truly global community, we must begin with those whose passports carry both purpose and power.

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Burning Both Ends: A Conceptual Model for International Student Employee Burnout Prevention and Supervisory Practice in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

As growing numbers of international students engage in on-campus student employment, the burnout they experience remains underexamined. This conceptual article introduces a practitioner-informed, theory-driven Burnout-Responsive Supervision Model to explore how International Student Employees (ISEs) in global higher education navigate the dual identity of student and employee. The model identifies five core stressor domains—conflicting cultural norms, labor expectations, limited supervision, marginalization, and compliance pressures—that can lead to imposter syndrome, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement. It positions supervision as a pivotal factor in either exacerbating or relieving these challenges. Drawing on peer leadership, trauma-informed care, and Restorative Practices, this article urges institutions to adopt inclusive, culturally responsive supervisory strategies. By addressing both structural and cultural drivers of burnout, the model offers a holistic framework to enhance student staff development and support ISEs more effectively within global campus communities.

Introduction

International students play a vital role in global higher education, not only as degree-seeking scholars but as contributors to campus operations and culture through meaningful on-campus employment (Glass & Gesing, 2018). These roles offer income, work exposure, and a pathway to connection, belonging, and professional growth. However, international student employees (ISEs) must navigate dual identities as students and workers, balancing academic responsibilities with workplace obligations. This is compounded by microaggressions, tokenization, and inadequate culturally responsive support (Elliot & Smith, 2022). Burnout among ISEs often emerges as a trauma-informed response to sustained cultural dissonance and inadequate supervisory support, leading to disengagement and diminished career confidence (Mori et al., 2009). Reframing burnout as a systemic issue calls for responsive supervision that affirms identity and builds capacity (Su, 2018). This article introduces a burnout-responsive supervision model that examines how identity conflict, cultural mismatch, and inconsistent support contribute to burnout, and how intentional, equity-centered supervision can promote inclusive and affirming work environments for ISEs.

Problem and Significance

On-campus employment is widely recognized as a high-impact practice that supports international students' integration, purpose, and professional

development (Taylor & Sandoval, 2024). However, once hired, ISEs often face challenges shaped by language barriers, cultural adjustment, visa restrictions, and sociopolitical stress (Mori et al., 2009), factors rarely acknowledged by supervisors or shared by domestic peers. While existing research independently addresses international student engagement, burnout, and supervision (Lee, 2017; Glass & Gesing, 2018; Yin et al., 2024), the intersection of these domains, particularly through the lens of ISEs, remains underexamined. On-campus employment is often undertheorized as a mechanism for engagement and inclusion among international students, and supervisory practices tend to follow one-size-fits-all models that overlook identity-informed needs (Elliot & Smith, 2022). Subsequently, ISEs receive limited guidance and instead rely on peer support networks when navigating workplace challenges (Lee, 2017).

"International student employees must navigate dual identities as students and workers, balancing academic responsibilities with workplace obligations."

Leask (2009) argues that Internationalization at Home must extend beyond the formal curriculum to include the hidden curriculum, where student affairs and services (SAS) and the supervision of student employees play a pivotal role. This article addresses a persistent gap by framing supervision as a site for cultural affirmation and relational care. It proposes a burnout-responsive model as a practice-based approach to internationalization.

Theoretical Frameworks

This article introduces a practitioner-informed, exploratory conceptual model grounded in four intersecting theoretical frameworks. Kim's International Student Identity Model (2012) highlights how international students navigate bicultural identity and power asymmetries, which shape their workplace experiences. The Job Demands–Resources Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) explains burnout as arising when job demands outpace available resources, a dynamic applicable to student workers managing academic, cultural, and emotional stressors. Restorative Practices emphasize relational trust, empathy, and accountability in supervision, particularly across cultural lines. Trauma-Informed Supervision (Creamer, 2023) emphasizes the importance of safety, identity-based stress, and emotional proximity. These frameworks' relevance to intercultural supervision and identity development was applied iteratively to organize emergent stressor domains and guided the development of a model outlining supervisory strategies to enhance the inclusion of ISEs within global campus communities.

The Conceptual Model

This model frames burnout among ISEs due to overlapping stressors often ignored in campus employment. **Figure 1** offers four interconnected supervisory practices that address identity, culture, and systemic support to create more affirming and sustainable work environments.

Stressors Leading to Burnout

First, Cultural Dissonance and Role Conflict. ISEs often come from hierarchical cultures with different norms around authority and boundaries, making it challenging to balance academic and work responsibilities while adapting to unfamiliar supervision and peer dynamics, intensifying their stress. Second, Internalized Expectations. Many ISEs internalize expectations of perfection and gratitude, leading them to avoid seeking help or disclosing challenges for fear of appearing weak. This perfectionism often masks deeper stress and feelings of isolation. Third, Supervision

Figure 1. Burnout-Responsive Supervision Model for ISE

Dual Identity: International Student & Student Worker

Key Stressors

Cultural Dissonance	Internalized Expectations	Supervisory Distance	Marginalization & Underrepresentation	Structural & Political Stress
• Conflicting values around hierarchy & work ethic • Balancing competing priorities for student employees	• Reluctance to seek help for fear of showing vulnerability • Pressure of over performance and perfect perfection	• Inconsistency and accountability and communication • Lack of culturally responsive, student-centered support	• Navigating micro aggression and workplace tokenism • Isolation is one a few international students staff	• Visa compliance, impacting job availability/ flexibility • Socio political climate, causing heightened vigilance

Cause

Burnout Response

Emotional Exhaustion | Imposter Syndrome | Withdrawal and Disengagement

Mitigation

Relational Supervision	Feedback & Role Clarity	Accountability & Peer Support	Culturally Responsive & Affirming
• Consistent intentional in proactive check-ins • Normalize naming challenges • Foster open communication	• Transparent job expectations • Timely, constructive feedback • Responsibility with capacity in context	• Peer mentorship/ leadership • Collaborative and shared decision-making • Encourage mutual reflection	• Acknowledgment of identity-based stressors • Empower student success • Career advising/ guidance

Inconsistency. Supervisory structures in SAS are usually transactional, leaving ISEs with minimal guidance and assumed self-reliance.

Furthermore, ISEs often undertake additional labor that is rarely acknowledged, rendering their contributions to campus life essential yet invisible (Lee, 2017). Fourth, Marginalization and Underrepresentation. ISEs are often the only non-domestic staff members, leading to feelings of tokenization and doubts about being hired for merit. Microaggressions, such as assumptions about their competence or language skills, intensify anxiety and drive overperformance, further isolating them from team culture. Finally, Structural and Political Pressures. ISEs face restricted work hours and limited job access due to visa, citizenship, and work-study constraints. Those who secure roles often feel underpaid, replaceable, and fearful that mistakes could threaten their status; these are structural, not personal, stressors. These stressors contribute to ISE burnout, appearing as emotional exhaustion, impostor syndrome, withdrawal, and disengagement (Parkman, 2016).

Supervisory Practices

First, Relational Supervision. Proactive and consistent engagement fosters trust, helping supervisors identify concerns early. Normalizing challenges and encouraging open dialogue allows ISEs to feel supported, viewing supervision as guidance rather than management. Second, Feedback and Role Clarity. Clear expectations and timely, strengths-based feedback reduce ambiguity and stress. Responsibilities should align with each student's capacity and background to support growth within U.S. workplace norms. Third, Accountability and Peer Support. ISEs benefit from peer mentorship and co-leadership (Mitchel & Kay, 2013). This supports intercultural learning and promotes equitable labor. Inclusive, team-based practices elevate ISE voices and contributions, reducing isolation. Finally, Culturally Responsive and Affirming Practice. Supervisors should tailor support to address identity-based stressors, affirm ISE experiences, and guide career development concerning visa, language, and cultural realities.

Future Directions

ISEs contribute more than labor; they enrich campus culture, foster intercultural learning, and model global citizenship. Supporting them is not just operational, but a matter of equity and inclusion. Supervisors must be trained in restorative practices, cultural fluency, and compliance-informed approaches to provide affirming, responsive support. Institutions should invest in onboarding, evaluation, and leadership development tailored to ISEs. Supervision must be recognized as a high-impact practice that promotes student retention, well-being, and a positive campus climate. Supporting international students already contributing to our campuses is critical to building truly global institutions and advancing Internationalization at Home (Leask, 2009). Burnout-responsive supervision is not an add-on but foundational to fostering equity, belonging, and sustainability.

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The Critical Role of Academic Advising Practitioners in a High-Tech Era in the Middle East

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on navigating student relationships and highlights the role of student affairs in fostering student success in a tech-driven era, amidst evolving higher education landscapes and diverse student populations. The article presents the insights of two professional academic advisors from the Middle East, focusing on academic and career advising while honoring the unique cultures of students and institutions. The authors emphasize the importance of developing trust and building value-driven relationships to support students, particularly those with hidden struggles. They will share examples of transformational relationships with students facing academic and personal challenges, demonstrating their significant impact on student success. Additionally, they will explain the difference between transactional advising, which depends on technology, and value exchange with students, which stems from experience and institutional memory. They will also highlight the often overlooked, undocumented practices that advisors use to help students navigate their challenges, practices that cannot be replicated by technology.

Introduction

While the definition of academic advising varies across institutions, its core purpose remains universal: provide meaningful guidance to students throughout their educational journey. Academic advising goes beyond course selection. It helps students align their academic paths with personal goals while supporting them to navigate institutional policies (Troxel, Bridgen, & Sullivan-Vance, 2021). Optimally, advisors are educators who foster informed decision-making, self-reflection, and personal growth.

In this article, the authors, Omneya Badr and Miriam Khalil each bring over 15 years of advising experience in Middle Eastern and American higher education institutions offer insights into advising practices in the Middle East, where broader global challenges intersect with region-specific cultural and institutional dynamics.

Discussion

Across higher education, some institutions are shifting from the title “Academic Advisor” to “Student Success Advisor” to emphasize a holistic approach to student support. Technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), can play a key role in enabling this shift. Rather than replacing human interaction, AI is designed to complement it by automating routine tasks and processes. This allows advisors to focus on deeper, more meaningful engagement with students. Tools that assist with schedule planning, major or minor changes, degree audits, and graduation timelines can be significantly enhanced by AI, streamlining

conversations around course selection for students with complex commitments such as caregiving or full-time jobs. Additionally, AI can flag scheduling conflicts, missing prerequisites, high-failure-rate courses, and high-demand classes. Advising chatbots can also direct students to resources and academic policies.

As AI becomes integrated into academic advising, critical questions arise, including: can it replicate empathy, trust, and contextual awareness that define human connection? While AI tools can streamline administrative tasks and flag academic risks, at this point, they cannot detect nuanced issues like a student's lack of motivation or unspoken struggles, especially among English language learners (ELL), where cultural and linguistic differences may distort recommendations. These limitations underscore the irreplaceable role of human advisors in fostering trust, interpreting context, and offering culturally responsive support.

"To build effective AI-powered advising tools, institutions must prioritize the retention and development of skilled advisors, not only through technological investment, but also by fostering diversity and intercultural communication."

These questions highlight the limitations of relying on technology in advising, especially in regions where cultural context plays a significant role in student engagement and success. Students in the Middle East share many similarities with their global peers, yet distinct social and cultural norms shape their academic experiences. "Higher education institutions face key challenges in academic advising, including insufficient advisor training, unclear policies, poor communication, and time management issues" (Thottoli & Soosaimanickam, 2024, p.2, citing Chan et al., 2019).

Effective Practices

Badr recalls the first face-to-face meeting with a sophomore struggling to improve their grades. Badr brought up the national soccer team's latest win and asked about the student's favorite sports and preferred high school subjects. This conversation, which seemed not related to the student's academic performance, led to revealing that they always had academic difficulties and were often given extra time during exams. Since the student has not been diagnosed with any type of disability, the student did not realize that extra time is part of standard disability accommodations. Badr understands that it is common for families in the Middle East not to seek professional diagnosis in the case of suspected hidden disabilities, as it is culturally unacceptable. To holistically engage with students, she insists on

at least one in-person meeting with her advisees during their first semester to familiarize students with key resources that support their academic success and to refer them to the focal points on campus while respecting their privacy. (Badr, personal communication, May 2025).

Similarly, Khalil shared a powerful example of the human connection that AI cannot replicate. One student, shaped by a history of academic and personal disappointments, initially responded to advising with mistrust. Through intentional outreach, including pausing in the hallway to ask about the student's training, Khalil exhibited care and by using empathetic listening and meeting the student where they were, trust was gradually built. This relationship ultimately empowered the student to take initiative and re-engage with their academic journey. Such breakthroughs often arise from recognizing unspoken struggles, something only human presence can truly uncover (Khalil, personal communication, May 2025).

Family and Societal Considerations

In higher education institutions in the U.S., first-generation students are identified during the admission process, and there are resources specifically geared toward them. In the Middle East, first-generation students are generally not identified, and no specific resources are allocated for them (Mahani, 2022). Badr indicates that, based on her experience in institutions in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, there is a high number of first-generation students who, like their counterparts in the U.S., need special attention. Badr, through one-to-one conversations, finds out if the student is the first in their family to attend college and, if so, thoroughly goes through policies and their interpretations as well as academic decisions that would impact transcripts, tuition, and graduation timeline. Almost all first-generation students Badr interacted with had no understanding of the value of campus engagement. Demonstrating the positive impact of co-curricular activities on career readiness, and skill-building, is not as effective if only AI is used as there is a need to relate the activities to the student's interests and career goals (Badr, personal communication, May 2025).

Throughout her career, Khalil has worked with students who were pursuing majors not out of personal interest, but because they were selected or promoted by family or societal expectations, programs they qualified for but didn't truly enjoy. Despite strong academic performance, many of these students were quietly struggling. As their advisor, Khalil could sense a lack of enthusiasm in the conversations and often recommended alternative majors that still aligned with their families' aspirations but offered greater personal motivation and fulfillment. Khalil recalls numerous success stories of students who were grateful to explore other majors and still meet their graduation dates (Khalil, personal communication, May 2025).

Ultimately, a one-on-one advising session allows the advisor to observe non-verbal communication, and explore personal goals, insights that help tailor guidance to the individual. Drawing on institutional knowledge and experience, the advisor offers culturally relevant, personalized support that goes beyond listing resources, creating a sense of genuine care and connection. Complicated advising scenarios are best addressed by seasoned academic advisors who possess institutional knowledge, are aware of the hidden curriculum, and can provide advice that safeguards a student's academic plan.

To build effective AI-powered advising tools, institutions must prioritize the retention and development of skilled advisors, not only through technological investment, but also by fostering diversity and intercultural communication. Advisors, as educators, offer irreplaceable human insight and cultural awareness that are critical to the advising process. While these elements cannot be replicated by AI, a thoughtfully designed platform can augment the advising experience by integrating advisor-driven data and practices into culturally responsive systems that enhance student success, retention, and graduation outcomes.

Note: Portions of this document were edited with the assistance of AI-based language tools to enhance clarity and style.

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Virtual Voyages: Digital Tools for Global Experiential Education

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly interconnected world, digital transformation offers unprecedented opportunities to expand experiential learning beyond traditional boundaries. This article explores how technologies like Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, and online simulations are revolutionizing global experiential education and fostering impactful social engagement. We analyze how digital platforms facilitate virtual international internships, service-learning, and collaborative research, connecting students with diverse communities to address pressing global challenges. Examining the role of digital tools in cultivating intercultural competence and global citizenship, we also address the critical issue of the digital divide. Practical strategies for designing equitable and effective digital experiential learning programs and focusing on global impact, are provided. This article advocates for leveraging technology to create inclusive and transformative global learning experiences, empowering students to become agents of positive social change.

Introduction: Redefining Global Experiential Learning

In an era defined by profound global interconnectedness, higher education bears a critical responsibility to cultivate graduates who are not merely proficient in their disciplines but are also globally competent citizens capable of navigating complex cross-cultural landscapes and contributing to shared human flourishing (AAC&U, 2021). Experiential learning, long heralded as a cornerstone of deep student engagement and skill development, traditionally faced inherent limitations, including substantial costs, geographical barriers, and limited accessibility for diverse student populations (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). However, the pervasive acceleration of digital transformation is now radically reshaping this pedagogical paradigm. This article posits that the strategic integration of digital tools, encompassing virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and sophisticated online collaborative platforms, is not merely augmenting but fundamentally revolutionizing global experiential education. This profound shift expands unprecedented access to transformative learning opportunities, fosters authentic intercultural engagement, and crucially, serves as a powerful catalyst for creating global community among students and institutions worldwide. We explore the evolving digital landscape of experiential learning, delineate its capacity to cultivate global social impact, address the imperative of digital equity, and provide actionable strategies for effective implementation within student affairs and services (SAS).

The Digital Toolkit for Global Experiences

Digital experiential learning, in its essence, re-imagines traditional hands-on engagement by leveraging technology to simulate, facilitate, and extend real-world experiences beyond physical constraints (Jisc, 2023). This digital toolkit is remarkably diverse and increasingly sophisticated. VR environments, for instance, immerse students in culturally distinct settings or simulate critical global scenarios, from navigating a bustling international market to participating in a virtual United Nations climate summit (PwC, 2022). This allows for repeated practice and exposure to complex environments previously inaccessible to many. AR layers digital information onto real-world views, offering interactive guides during virtual site visits or providing real-time cultural context during remote interactions. Furthermore, advanced online collaborative platforms, including secure video conferencing, shared digital workspaces, and specialized project management tools, enable seamless asynchronous and synchronous teamwork across continents (Microsoft, 2024). This technological synergy dissolves geographical distances, enabling learning opportunities that were once considered the exclusive domain of affluent institutions or individuals, thereby laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and expansive global community.

Virtual Voyages: Cultivating Global Social Impact

The true transformative power of digital experiential learning lies in its unparalleled capacity to cultivate tangible global social impact, moving beyond theoretical understanding to direct action and shared purpose, thereby profoundly strengthening global community.

Virtual International Internships represent a groundbreaking avenue, allowing students to remotely intern with international organizations, NGOs, or businesses. This modality dramatically reduces the prohibitive costs associated with physical travel and visas, democratizing access to high-quality global professional experiences for a significantly broader cohort of students (Handley et al., 2022). Interns contribute directly to global projects, developing cross-cultural communication, problem-solving skills, and a global professional network from their home institutions. This shared professional endeavor, transcending borders, fundamentally fosters a professional facet of global community.

Online Service-Learning Projects enable students to collaborate virtually with international community groups or non-profit organizations to address pressing social, environmental, or economic challenges. For example, students might collectively design sustainable solutions for a remote village, analyze global health data for a healthcare initiative, or develop educational resources for underserved populations abroad (Dolgon, 2023). This direct engagement with real-world issues cultivates profound empathy and solidarity, as students witness the global impact of their work and recognize their shared responsibility for planetary well-being. Such collective problem-solving and contribution inherently deepen the bonds within the global community.

Collaborative Global Research Initiatives demonstrate the intellectual power of digital connectivity. Students from disparate universities across the globe can co-conduct research on shared topics, leveraging diverse cultural perspectives and methodological approaches. This not only enriches academic outcomes but also cultivates a dynamic global intellectual community (Singh & Gupta, 2023). The process of jointly formulating hypotheses, collecting data, and disseminating findings fosters a profound sense of shared intellectual pursuit that transcends national boundaries, actively building a knowledge-driven global community. These virtual voyages, therefore, are not merely simulated experiences but are catalysts for genuine, impactful contributions to the global common good.

Navigating the Digital Divide: Ensuring Equitable Access

While digital tools offer immense promise for creating global community, their potential can only be fully realized if the pervasive challenge of the digital divide is rigorously addressed. Unequal access to reliable broadband internet, appropriate devices, and fundamental digital literacy across various socioeconomic strata and geographic regions presents a significant

barrier to equitable participation (UNICEF, 2023). Institutions must proactively develop strategies to mitigate these disparities rather than inadvertently amplifying them.

Prioritizing low-bandwidth friendly designs for digital content and platforms ensures accessibility even in areas with limited connectivity. Universities can also implement policies to provide institutional support, such as loaner devices, subsidized internet access, or designated on-campus hubs with robust connectivity for students lacking home resources (EDUCAUSE, 2022). Furthermore, forging strategic partnerships with international universities or community centers already possessing established technological infrastructure can extend reach to underserved populations. Crucially, comprehensive training and support in digital literacy, coupled with multilingual interfaces and content, are vital to empower all students to confidently navigate these virtual environments. True global community through digital means requires a conscious ethical commitment to ensuring these transformative opportunities are genuinely accessible and inclusive for every aspiring global citizen, rather than perpetuating existing inequalities.

Implementing Effective Digital Experiential Programs

For SAS professionals and educators, the successful implementation of digital experiential learning programs requires meticulous planning and a proactive approach. Effective program design principles must be paramount, ensuring clear learning outcomes are established and explicitly aligned with desired global competencies, such as intercultural communication, adaptability, and ethical global citizenship (NASPA, 2021). Programs should incorporate robust scaffolding, structured reflection activities, and opportunities for authentic, real-world problem-solving.

Equally vital is comprehensive faculty and staff development. Training should extend beyond mere technical proficiency to encompass effective facilitation of virtual intercultural interactions, remote supervision best practices, and the unique pedagogical approaches required for digital learning environments (OECD, 2023). Establishing strong, reciprocal partnership building with international organizations or institutions is crucial, demanding thorough vetting processes and transparent communication protocols to ensure mutual benefit and shared understanding. Finally, assessment and evaluation methods must be sophisticated enough to measure both the development of student global competencies and the tangible social impact achieved by the programs. By focusing on these strategic areas, institutions can ensure that their virtual voyages genuinely contribute to creating global community and fostering globally engaged student populations.

"While digital tools offer immense promise for creating global community, their potential can only be fully realized if the pervasive challenge of the digital divide is rigorously addressed."

Conclusion: The Future of Global Student Engagement

The digital transformation of experiential learning represents a profound paradigm shift, unlocking unprecedented opportunities for higher education to cultivate global citizens. This Paper underscores the immense potential of technologies like VR, AR, and online collaborative platforms to democratize access to global experiences, fostering authentic connections, and facilitating impactful contributions to global challenges. These innovations are not merely technological conveniences; they are indispensable tools for actively creating global community by expanding accessibility, fostering cross-cultural collaboration, and instilling a deep sense of shared purpose among students worldwide. As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, the imperative for globally competent and civically engaged

graduates intensifies. SAS professionals are uniquely positioned to champion this evolution, ensuring that these digital pathways are inclusive, equitable, and continue to inspire the next generation of global leaders dedicated to shaping a more interconnected and empathetic world.

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Revolutionizing Academic Advising: From Traditional to AI-Driven Academic Advising

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ABSTRACT

The plethora of AI-driven technologies has disrupted many industries, including higher education. The integration of AI in academic advising will vehemently revolutionize the traditional model. This article explores the key applications of AI in academic advising, focusing on the use of machine learning algorithms to forecast student chances of success, use of predictive models to anticipate student performance and identify student-at-risk, and the use of chatbots to provide personalized self-service technology. Advantages of utilizing AI in academic advising include providing automated day-to-day tasks, increasing student success and retention, improving accuracy and student confidence in decision making, and decreasing the risk of student failure. Nonetheless, challenges include data availability, ethical consideration, user acceptance, and the lack of clear strategy for AI integration and role transformation within student affairs and services. This article analyzes AI's potential in academic advising to guide future strategic planning.

Introduction

The knowledge and competency of academic advisors are pivotal in delivering effective academic guidance. It not only encompasses knowledge of study plan requirements and course selection, but also extends to being familiar with institutional policies, and on-campus student support services (Bilquise & Shaalan, 2022). As such, academic advising is becoming increasingly complex and demands more time and effort (Cha et al., 2024). To enhance advising quality and scalability, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies has become increasingly important. AI holds an immense promise for transforming academic advising within three key areas. First, using AI-based solutions for course selection. Second, utilizing predictive analytics that enable early alert systems to identify students at risk of academic failure, allowing for timely interventions. Third, providing continuous support through AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistance. This article provides a review on the potential use of AI in academic advising, while informing strategic planning and guiding future developments.

AI-based Models for Course Selection

Effective academic advising sessions rely on accessing a wide range of student information. However, such information can be dispersed across different institutional systems and platforms. The lack of data integration and sometimes limited accessibility to relevant information can hinder an advisor's ability to make informed decisions. Students, on the other hand,

are often faced with various course options, which may lead to confusion and poor course planning (O'Banion, 2016). In response to these issues, a growing body of research addressed the perceived usefulness and positive effect of AI-based models as course recommenders. For instance, Learning Analytics Dashboard for Advisors (LADA) supports academic advising by leveraging predictive analytics and adaptive multilevel clustering techniques to estimate students' success rates (Gutiérrez et al., 2020). It enabled the exploration of different course options and facilitated the development of study plans with a lower risk of failure. By collecting, integrating, processing, and presenting data from various platforms, LADA assisted advisors to make informed, data-driven decisions. Other models utilized cognitive knowledge-based approaches to provide personalized course recommendations based on students' traits (Al-Hunaiyyan et al., 2020). Additionally, other AI-based course-recommender systems offered scalable tools that assist students navigating various course selections while supporting more informed decision-making (Cha et al., 2024).

Predictive Models Identifying At-Risk Students

In many academic advising settings, interventions occur only after the final exam, while early recognition of academic warning signs enables more proactive approaches and allows for remedial actions to take place. In online learning environments, for instance, Machine Learning (ML) and Deep Learning (DL) algorithms were used to identify student at-risk (Adnan et al., 2021). Relying on student data attained at different stages in the course, random forest algorithm provided early and accurate identification of at-risk students. Other initiatives went beyond performance and attendance rates as indicators of at-risks, to further include students' personality traits, historical academic performance, current progress in academic concepts, and soft skills (Embarak & Hawarna, 2024). Utilizing ML and explainable AI, the model provided interpretable explanations for its predictions allowing for more data transparency. Other studies used ML and DL to provide an accurate prediction of students' grades (Korchi et al., 2023).

Chatbots and Virtual Assistance

Chatbots and virtual assistance have demonstrated the capacity to deliver personalized support that goes beyond human capabilities. Unlike FAQ systems, AI-driven chatbots employ Natural Language Processing (NLP) to address student questions in conversational style. Recent literature reflects the growing interest in identifying the components of a robust academic advising chatbot architecture (Assayed et al., 2024), ranging from basic rule-based systems to ML models. Moreover, some researchers have successfully developed bilingual chatbots to improve accessibility and enhance student satisfaction (Bilquise et al., 2022). AI-powered chatbots can also facilitate personalized course recommendations (Kuhail et al., 2022) and act as proactive personalized reminders, enhancing service quality and supporting student success.

Opportunities and Challenges

The integration of AI into academic advising can fundamentally revolutionize the process in which students receive guidance by automating tasks, enhancing accessibility, personalizing communication, and streamlining administrative processes. Nonetheless, this transformation is accompanied with various challenges identified in the literature, including data availability and quality, ethical implications such as privacy and algorithmic bias in at-risk student prediction, over-reliance on automation, user acceptance among students and advisors, and the lack of standard defined evaluation methods of AI applications (Albinali et al., 2024). Additionally, most institutions lack a clearly articulated strategic framework for AI integration. Yet among the serious challenges is preparing and equipping student affairs professionals with the competencies they need to lead in an accelerating AI era (Ren & Wu, 2025).

Strategic Implications and Conclusion

The utilization of AI in academic advising offers several notable advantages, including the automation of routine administrative tasks, enhanced student success and retention, improved accuracy in academic decision-making, and increased student confidence (Albinali et al., 2024). The effective integration of AI can support the development of academic advising practices by enhancing flexibility and resilience. AI can

strengthen advising practices while preparing institutions to meet evolving future demands. However, AI in academic advising should be seen as a supportive tool, not a replacement of the human academic advisor. Further, advisors will need to develop key related competencies to amplify their impact and to better support their students, including data literacy and governance, ethics and best practices in AI deployment, digital communication skills, and data privacy.

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Facilitating Belonging: Autoethnographic Reflections from a Residence-Based Learning Environment

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to the evolving literature on student housing professionals by examining how intentional co-curricular practices foster student learning, development, and belonging within residence-based environments. Using autoethnographic methods, I reflect on my role as a Residence Head and Education Coordinator, drawing on personal passions such as music and public speaking to create spaces for connection, confidence-building, and community engagement. Informed by Reed-Danahay's (1997) notion of situating the self within a social and cultural context, I explore the reciprocal relationship between my growth and the student community's development. The reflection critiques initial assumptions about leadership and highlights residence as a dynamic, holistic learning space aligned with Groenewald and Fourie-Malherbe's (2019) view of student success. While many interventions proved empowering, others exposed challenges, underscoring the need for student housing professionals to embrace vulnerability, risk-taking, and co-creation as essential practices in promoting authentic student success and identity formation.

Introduction

As a student housing professional, I have come to appreciate residence life as a powerful sphere for fostering student belonging and development. This reflective essay draws on my lived experience of cultivating student community, fostering belonging, and out-of-class learning through co-curricular activities, specifically public speaking and music. By using an autoethnographic approach, I reflect on how personal interests, when intentionally shared, can transform both student engagement and professional growth. In residence spaces, where learning often happens outside traditional classrooms, moments of connection and vulnerability are essential to building a sense of belonging. This essay situates my personal story within the broader context of a student community, offering reflections on how residence-based learning can support and sustain student success and identity formation in meaningful ways.

Theoretical Anchors

This reflection is grounded in two concepts: holistic student success and co-curricular learning within student housing. Groenewald and Fourie-Malherbe (2019) emphasize that when Residence Heads (RHs) actively engage in students' journeys, they contribute not only to students' academic success, but also to their personal and social development. Their work highlights the importance of residence as a learning environment, where student success is understood as a holistic and integrated process, rather than a purely academic outcome.

This understanding repositions the RH's role beyond administration, advocating instead for intentional involvement in students' lived experiences. Acting as facilitators, mentors, and co-learners, RHs help shape inclusive and responsive learning spaces. Such involvement requires an active presence while co-creating learning opportunities with students. It requires vulnerability, risk-taking, and a willingness to participate in experiences that may fall outside formal institutional structures but have lasting educational value.

Autoethnography supports this lens by offering a method for embedding the personal within the social context. It recognizes that the meaning of an experience is not isolated from its context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Through this lens, my own journey becomes a way to explore how student housing professionals, globally, can foster community and co-create environments where students feel seen, heard, and empowered.

Becoming an Education Coordinator

I started my journey with certain assumptions regarding student needs, what leadership should look like, and about my own role as RH within a residence community. My focus was on structure, compliance, and academic support. I soon realized that students longed for more than information. They yearn for connection, space for self-expression, and opportunities to grow beyond their coursework.

With this understanding, autoethnographic reflection helped me map this transformation. As I paid closer attention to my own learning within the community, I recognized that leading in residence is not about knowing more; it's about journeying alongside the students. The shift toward co-curricular engagement came naturally from my personal passions: music and public speaking. These became my tools for relationship-building and for creating a stronger sense of community.

Learning Through Community

Music as a Learning Practice

Music unites people; it forms bonds that might not exist otherwise. It connects different cultures, promotes diversity and growth. Music encourages creative thinking, discipline, leadership, and problem solving (Percussion Play, n.d.).

In our community, music became a catalyst for connection and creativity. It was initially introduced as a recreational activity, but it quickly revealed its deeper potential: to unite people across languages, cultures, and personal histories. It started with a deliberate intention to invite and encourage students to play and showcase their musical talents, whether through instruments or voice. It developed into student-led performances that brought residents together in new and meaningful ways.

Music allowed students to express themselves, build confidence, and develop deeper interpersonal skills. More importantly, it created a shared emotional landscape that fostered trust and openness. As one student noted, "I felt like I belonged for the first time: not because I said anything, but because I was part of the sound." Music-making offered a non-verbal yet powerful form of learning, one rooted in collaboration, creativity, and presence.

Public Speaking and Confidence Building

In tandem, public speaking workshops emerged as a response to the visible anxiety many students had about expressing themselves in front of a group. Whether in class, leadership positions, or social settings. Drawing from my own professional training and passion for effective communication, I created spaces where students could practice public speaking in a supportive environment.

These workshops focused on storytelling, critical thinking, and personal voice. Students learned to structure their thoughts, receive feedback, and present themselves with authenticity. Over time, the sessions became spaces for dialogue, identity exploration, and leadership development. One student reflected: "Public speaking gave me more than a voice; it gave me the courage to take up space."

Both interventions illustrated that co-curricular activities cultivate key competencies that are essential for student success (Kuh, 1995). It underscored the importance of emotional safety and belonging as preconditions for learning. From this, students began initiating their own activities, further strengthening peer learning and ownership within the residence.

Implications for Student Affairs Practice

My lived experience highlights the value of positioning residence not just as accommodation, but as a dynamic and fluid learning environment. Belonging, I have come to understand, is not built through policies alone. It is built through consistent, caring, and creative practices that invite students to show up fully.

For student housing professionals, this means embracing a multi-dimensional role: facilitator, mentor, coach, and learner (Groenewald & Fourie-Malherbe, 2019). It means being present and participatory in the daily life of residence, not just in disciplinary or academic matters. Co-curricular learning should be treated as central, and not peripheral, to student development and success.

Critically, this also requires personal vulnerability. Whether singing with students or giving feedback in a workshop, I had to let go of traditional notions of leadership and instead engage as a co-creator. Such moments are not always comfortable, but they are always constructive. They act as signals to students that their presence and perspectives matter.

Institutions, too, have a role to play in supporting this work. Student affairs professionals must be empowered with time, training, and flexibility to design and implement co-curricular initiatives. When staff are encouraged to draw on their own strengths and passions, as I did with music and public speaking, the impact is deeper and more authentic.

Conclusion

This reflection has shown how music and public speaking, introduced as co-curricular activities, supported the development of a sense of belonging in a residence-based learning environment. These out-of-class experiences challenged my own assumptions, expanded my understanding of student learning, and deepened my appreciation for the community I serve.

Through reflection, I realized that belonging is both a feeling and a practice: one we co-create with students through shared experiences, vulnerability, and mutual growth. Residence life holds powerful potential for this kind of development, provided we are willing to meet students where they are and invite them into spaces of meaningful engagement. By centering co-curricular learning in residence, we not only support student success, we transform the very nature of student affairs practice.

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Lisinda de Jager is a law graduate and communication specialist with a scholarly interest in social justice, leadership development, and student housing practice. Lisinda's work focuses on policy-informed practice, facilitative leadership, and the design of learning environments that support academic success, wellness, and diversity. Lisinda facilitates professional development for staff and students, fostering ethical leadership, resilience, reflective communication, and purposeful community engagement. Lisinda's work creates safe, vibrant communities where everyone is empowered to thrive and lead with purpose.

Creating Global Communities by Mentoring International Graduate Students and Professionals: Five Key Practices from Research

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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, higher education administrators and student affairs and services (SAS) professionals come from international backgrounds, making it imperative to imagine the field as a global community. Mentorship is instrumental in transforming SAS as it allows individuals to build trust, safety, community, and advocacy (Santa-Ramirez & Vargas, 2024). In this short research-to-practice paper, we draw from collaborative autoethnographic research (Tay et al., *in press*) to offer five key lessons for mentoring international graduate students and professionals: Understanding that immigration is a constant companion in their lives; Recognizing that they are still affected by power structures and systems in the U.S.; Providing mentorship on "technical" things and on one's professional identity as a whole person; Honoring the in-between spaces they occupy that makes them a unique contributor to professional and organizational efforts; and Offering different avenues for mentorship.

Introduction

Increasingly, higher education administrators and student affairs and services (SAS) professionals come from international backgrounds[1], making it imperative to imagine the field of SAS as a global community. Mentorship is instrumental in transforming the field as it allows individuals to build trust, safety, community, and advocacy (Santa-Ramirez & Vargas, 2024).

In this research-to-practice paper, we draw from our collaborative autoethnographic research (Tay et al., *in press*) to offer key lessons for mentoring international students and professionals. Eva is an international graduate student, Yi Xuen and Karren are two SAS professionals with international backgrounds, and Milad is a faculty member with an international background and a mentor to international graduate students. Our shared

1. We use the term 'international' here specifically as all of us have studied in the U.S. and used this term in reference to ourselves as students. That said, we do not intend to reproduce the binary of international/domestic as often being international is nuanced and can have multiple meanings and international student experiences are varied (see Jones, 2017). We use International students and professionals throughout the text.

"Creating a global community in higher education requires actively dismantling structural barriers that exclude international students from equity strategies."

international background and diverse professional roles allowed us to capture a broad range of experiences in our study and offer personal narratives as contexts to each practice below.

Understand Immigration is a Constant Companion

International students and professionals navigate their lives across shifting immigration statuses, from temporary visas such as F-1 or H-1B to permanent residency. On one hand, we are privileged to hold a legal status, to be enrolled and/or employed by United States (U.S.) higher education institutions, living, studying and/or working in the U.S. On the other hand, immigration status renders our lives precarious as exemplified by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)'s unexplained termination of thousands of F-1 visas (Inside Higher Ed, 2025). Immigration status can be used to discriminate against our employability when losing jobs/offers due to visa sponsorship needs (FE Online, 2025), and exploit international students and professionals by sponsoring institutions/employers as a point of vulnerability due to dependency on the visa.

While job searching, even a *verbal* offer of H-1B sponsorship for immigration can override factors like an institution's location or values. As a professional, an employee with no immigration restriction could easily leave a toxic work environment, but an international employee's life is systematically tied to their employer who sponsors their visa, limiting their mobility. As such, one has to understand that immigration is a constant companion to international students and professionals' lives that can be acknowledged to support and mentor them.

Recognize Power Structures and Systems in the U.S.

Various forms of "-isms" and systems of oppression affect marginalized folks from the U.S. but also internationally. International students may find themselves learning to navigate power and identity differently than what they were accustomed to in their home country. As women of color professionals, Karren and Yi Xuen both navigated racism, discrimination, and microaggressions in their predominantly white workspaces. Eva felt the pressure to fit into dominant norms of the U.S. academy (i.e., being taught lessons on U.S. culture), rather than being valued as a co-creator of knowledge. Milad experienced resistance in his journey when advocating for practices in higher education institutions that challenged existing power structures. Mentorship becomes a crucial tool to encourage radical rest and healing from the harm and emotional exhaustion caused by these systems.

Teach Hidden Curriculum and Embrace Cultural Differences

International students and professionals need mentorship that guides them in the technical know-how of navigating U.S. higher education as students, scholars, and practitioners. The technical know-how includes sharing with students and professionals the hidden curriculum and supporting them in navigating the often unwritten norms and rules of navigating graduate school, job markets, and professional environments that may seem clear to those living in the U.S. but culturally foreign to those coming from international backgrounds. Milad, for example, as an international student had to learn what leadership meant in CVs as he shared a different cultural

understanding of the term than what it is in the U.S. Other technical aspects may include writing norms, networking practices, and negotiation know-how. Mentorship requires this technical know-how while embracing our multifaceted experiences and backgrounds

Honor the In-Between Spaces and Unique Contributions

International students and professionals' existence in higher education is often marked by liminality, never fully here nor there, belonging yet always questioned. We live in the "in-between;" between countries, legal statuses, cultural norms, identities and temporary immigration statuses–a shared experience between Eva, Yi Xuen, Karren, and Milad. This liminality is far from being a deficit, it is a source of adaptability and resilience. Mentors who honor these in-between spaces recognize that international students/professionals navigate multiple worlds simultaneously. By acknowledging this complexity, mentorship empowers mentees by embracing the unique knowledge and transnational perspectives they bring into spaces that can hold potential for transformation.

Provide Holistic Mentorship

Holistic mentorship means recognizing internationally that students and professionals are navigating academics, immigration, cultural displacement, and institutional expectations. One-size-fits-all approaches simply fall short. For Karren, narrow career advice ignored the emotional weight of being a woman of color on a work visa. Beyond that, however, we benefited heavily from mentors that saw us as whole people with knowledge that could in fact help transform U.S. higher education, and not just as others needing to assimilate into existing structures. Mentorship that asks "How are you really doing?" as Eva's faculty mentor did, care for the whole person. Yi Xuen's and Milad's most meaningful relationships were grounded in care, community, and accountability. Holistic mentorship moves beyond the technical know-how to a transformative relationship rooted in care, community, and justice.

Conclusion

Mentorship across borders is about affirming humanity. By being able to understand that immigration is a constant companion, naming power and oppression, teaching hidden curricula, honoring liminality, and also offering holistic care, mentorship can become a tool to transform higher education into a global community.

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Academic Advising in the Global South: Practice, Reflection, and Possibility

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ABSTRACT

The concept of academic advising originated in the West, particularly in the United States, and is an integral part of the student experience, contributing significantly to their academic success. Advising can be implemented by staff members, faculty, or both. While the principles of academic advising seem universal and applicable to universities worldwide, certain regions in the Global South require a different approach to adapt to societal and cultural variations. Unfortunately, limited research has been conducted in the Global South to acknowledge these differences. This article aims to highlight the changes needed in academic advising services in the Global South, considering the rise of artificial intelligence.

Introduction

The concept of academic advising originated in the West as an integral part of the student experience, contributing significantly to students' academic success and personal growth. The literature on academic advising began emerging in the 1970s, evolving alongside the practice itself (Miller & Miller, 2022). Staff and faculty actively serve as academic advisors for undergraduate students, and today, this process can be streamlined by integrating artificial intelligence (AI). While academic advising principles may seem universal, regions in the Global South often require adapted approaches that reflect local cultural and societal norms. This article is grounded in Reflective Practice Theory (Schön, 1983), which emphasizes the role of critical reflection in professional learning and knowledge construction.

Discussion

During my journey as an academic advisor and adjunct faculty, supporting undergraduate students for over fifteen years at American higher education institutions in the Middle East, I learned about the importance of reflective and experience-based learning. These experiences and my understanding of academic advising were shaped by mentors from Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates who shared the importance of knowing their students and building meaningful connections with them as a foundation for successful advising.

Although my experiences vary, higher education institutions in the Global South continue to face persistent challenges in academic advising, including limited advisor training, ineffective communication, and difficulties with time management (Thottoli et al., 2024). Professional

development opportunities for academic advisors remain scarce and often inaccessible. Most programs are based in the United States, usually requiring financial resources that many institutions in the Global South lack. Even when offered remotely at no cost, time zone differences and content that does not fully align with local advising contexts can limit the professional development's usefulness. In this context, mentorship becomes not just valuable but essential, often serving as the only form of training available.

Mentorship

While mentorship fills a critical gap in advisor development, advisors also face challenges stemming from students' lack of preparedness for university life including not taking responsibility for their decisions and careers (Liu & Renn, 2024). As illustrated by de Klerk (2021) writings, the South African higher education sector is widely recognized as being in crisis, with many incoming students underprepared for tertiary study. Many students continue to face challenges with academic literacy and social adjustment, hindering their success, and ultimately, the impact of academic advising. The lack of adequate resources and support systems further exacerbates these issues, making it difficult for advisors to implement proactive strategies and for students to access the help they need.

These student challenges are amplified by structural issues within advising systems, such as disproportionately high student-to-advisor ratios, which limit advisors' ability to provide individualized support. This burden not only compromises the quality of advising but also increases the risk of advisor burnout.

In addition to workload pressures, advisors must also navigate institutional decisions that often involve adopting advising models developed in vastly different contexts. Institutions either import advising frameworks without the necessary infrastructure or cultural adaptation or, when financial resources allow, invest in student success software designed for different settings. In both cases, these approaches frequently fail to meet the needs of students, resulting in disengagement and limited impact. Western advising models often overlook critical factors such as family dynamics, financial constraints, and diverse educational pathways that shape student experiences in the Global South. To truly support both advisors and students, machine learning models in advising software must reflect the societal and cultural realities of the regions in which they are used. English language learners, in particular, require systems that are not only linguistically inclusive but also attuned to local norms and student needs. Without this contextual awareness, even the most advanced tools may fall short of their intended impact.

Shaping Advising Models

Academic advisors in the Global South have great opportunities to shape innovative, context-sensitive advising models that reflect the unique needs of their students. While these opportunities may not yet represent a widespread movement, they signal a promising space for growth, collaboration, and localized leadership in the field. They also open the door for meaningful contributions to research and data-driven initiatives. For example, I contributed to the data extraction and preprocessing phases of a significant faculty-led research project titled "Enhancing Prediction of Student Success: An Automated Machine Learning Approach." The project aimed to develop an AI-driven model capable of predicting students at risk upon admission, thereby enabling early intervention and support strategies (Zeineddine et al., 2021). The study considered various context-specific variables tailored to the regional student population. This example illustrates how innovative approaches can emerge when advisors are empowered to act on the insights they gather. Advisors are often privy to rich, student-centered data, but for this information to truly contribute to student success, it must be interpreted and applied in meaningful, demographically relevant ways.

To help ease advisors' workload, there is a growing possibility to integrate the growing availability of AI into student success tools. However, this potential also introduces a significant challenge: the risk of applying technology without cultural or contextual adaptation. AI-powered tools such as advising chatbots may seem promising, but their effectiveness depends heavily on being designed with cultural sensitivity and ethical considerations in mind. Without this,these tools risk reinforcing existing biases and producing inaccurate or misleading predictions.

Another way to address these challenges is by fostering a culture of volunteering and experiential learning, which can serve as a powerful avenue for professional growth and the exchange of best practices. While many professionals in the region may not immediately recognize the benefits of volunteering, it equips individuals with valuable skills that can accelerate career growth and help them stand out among their peers.

Conclusion

This reflective exploration of academic advising in the Global South highlights both the challenges and the innovative practices shaping the field. By grounding this work in lived experience and theoretical insight, it lays the groundwork for deeper inquiry. Personally, I plan to build on these reflections through a forthcoming empirical study that will examine advising practices across diverse institutional contexts. This next phase aims to generate data-driven insights that can inform more equitable, effective, and contextually relevant advising models.

Note: Portions of this document were edited with the assistance of AI-based language tools to enhance clarity and style.

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Over-Managed or Overlooked: The Dual Failure in Supporting International Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

International graduate students constitute a significant portion of the U.S. graduate student population, yet institutional structures often fail to meet their unique needs. The authors argue that these students are either being over-managed through hand-holding service designed for younger undergraduate students, or being overlooked and left without adequate support. Both approaches point to limitations in cultural awareness and training within graduate education. Drawing from professional experiences, institutional examples, and relevant studies, this article examines how these dual failures can affect international graduate students' autonomy, sense of belonging, academic success, and career preparation. To address these challenges, we propose policy and practice recommendations, including cross-departmental training, asset-based approaches, and recognition of culturally responsive staff.

Introduction

International students occupy a substantial portion of the graduate student population in the United States (U.S.). Student affairs and services (SAS) systems typically emphasize undergraduate services (Perry and Hall-Hertel, 2022) and often lack a global mindset or cultural competency to understand and support international students (Wong et al., 2024). As a result, these students may be over-managed or overlooked. Based on our professional observations, institutional examples, and relevant research, this manuscript explores limitations in current practices and offers recommendations for more intentional and inclusive practices in graduate education.

Over-Managed or Overlooked

From our personal observation and experience, international graduate students are often over-managed or overlooked. One of the authors, formerly working in an international office at a public university in the U.S. Midwest, observed that F-1 visa students must obtain international advisors' approval before dropping courses, even when remaining above full-time status. While it is intended to ensure compliance with federal regulations, this requirement limits students' autonomy in managing their academic and immigration responsibilities. In a subsequent role supporting graduate students at a different institution, she found that advisors, including academic advisors, are also encouraged to track down unresponsive students for immigration check-ins. Although necessary for regulatory compliance, such practices foster a culture of surveillance that potentially undermines students' accountability and independence.

International students may also be overlooked in areas where they expect guidance or resources.

At the same public university where one author previously worked, international students were frequently redirected to the international office regardless of the issues. For example, an international graduate student from Malaysia shared that when she sought advice about navigating job searches with Optional Practical Training or H-1B visa sponsorship, the career center referred her to the international office without providing any actual career consultation. Similarly, another author experienced comparable limitations at an Ivy League university during her graduate studies. As they are sent from office to office, inclusion and a sense of belonging are undermined (Bernhardt, 2021). While sending international students to international offices is a safe solution, it often overlooks the actual needs, interferes with addressing the core issue, and contributes to a diminished sense of belonging. Overall, these examples illustrate that institutional practices either underestimate international graduate students' capabilities through excessive intervention or fail to address their actual needs by simply deferring them to international offices.

The dual failure reflects that faculty and staff are rarely trained to support graduate or international students, as most SAS training focuses on undergraduates and some professionals were trained through traditional student affairs programs with no formal curriculum on supporting graduate students (Perry and Hall-Hertel, 2022). In our professional experiences, we also noticed that some SAS managers leading graduate support teams were hired or promoted with previous experience focusing on undergraduates (e.g., student engagement, undergraduate advising, orientation and first-year experience) and lacked graduate student exposure. Their leadership directly shapes how teams support students, which can perpetuate undergraduate- and domestic-centric approaches and further limit attention to graduate and international student needs.

Some colleagues also lack cross-cultural competency or experience with international students. These gaps often manifest in deficit-based assumptions, which focus on perceived weaknesses of individuals or communities and frame them as "the problem" or "needy," (Wong et al., 2024). Such assumptions contribute to mistrust of international students' autonomy, skills, and capabilities. Without proper comprehensive training, these factors will continue to reinforce the approaches that fail to support international adult learners.

Implications

To offer better and more balanced support for international graduate students, we propose two main recommendations for institutions and graduate departments. First, they can evaluate campus resources and provide staff with ongoing, tailored, professional training to support international graduate students. To ensure relevance, effective assessment tools should be designed to gather authentic feedback from students. Given the diversity of graduate populations across programs, locations, and institution types, no single training model fits all and thus involving international graduate students in training will help bridge this gap. To confront deficit-based thinking, it is critical to adopt an asset-based mindset (Wong et al., 2024). International students bring unique assets and cultural capital into their institutions and schools. Institutions should provide guidance as needed, but trust students to take ownership of their success without over-intervention.

International graduate students have multiple identities and needs; relying on the central international office or any single department is not ideal to support them. Yeh et al. (2021) specified that a culturally responsive approach helps faculty and staff reduce barriers when working with international students. Cross-departmental SAS training and collaboration are essential to equip supporting staff with knowledge, campus resources, and empathy needed to support international graduate students effectively. In practice, strong partnerships between career services and international offices can further foster students' sense of connection and belonging (Bernhardt, 2021).

Higher education institutions and individual departments could also strengthen policies to formally recognize professionals who demonstrate culturally responsive practices, through awards, professional development opportunities, or leadership pathways. Many international educators face burnout due to high workloads, limited institutional support, or lack of recognition (Bowman, 2021; Miller, 2023), which can impact

their capacity to support international students. While acknowledging staff contributions, especially those whose roles are not exclusively focused on international students, may not transform the current practice overnight, it can signal the value of cross-cultural competency and cultivate sustainable support for international graduate students. Many institutions already have leadership programs that promote global-mindedness and honor employees contributing to international education; extending these initiatives more broadly may gradually foster a culture that supports international graduate students.

Conclusion

International graduate students are essential to campus diversity, academic vitality, and institutional development, yet being over-managed or overlooked reflects a systemic failure of understanding and care. Cross-cultural competency with a global perspective is more than a slogan. Institutions and departments need to revise their policies and systems to foster a globally engaged and inclusive campus community. More research is needed to identify effective strategies for supporting international graduate students and holding institutions accountable.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Pre-University Career Guidance Intervention to Foster Access, Retention, and Success in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of pre-university career guidance interventions on student access, retention, and success in higher education in South Africa. With increasing financial support enhancing access to universities, many students still face challenges related to uninformed program choices, leading to high first-year dropout rates. The pre-university career hub program provided a suite of interventions, including psychometric assessments, mentorship, and career fairs, aimed at fostering self-awareness and informed decision-making among prospective students. Quantitative data from 2024 Grade 12 students revealed high satisfaction with the program, particularly in career clarity and university preparation. Key benefits identified included improved confidence, academic discipline, and alignment of career choices with personal strengths. The study concludes that early career guidance is critical for enhancing student readiness and academic persistence, suggesting the need for broader implementation of such interventions to support successful transitions into higher education.

Introduction

The massification of global higher education has been facilitated by the growth in financial aid support for youth from low-income households (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014). The increase in financial support has broadened access, motivating young people to improve academically and meet the university-set program admission criteria, calculated based on high school exit grades/scores (Chiramba & Ndofirepi, 2023). Meeting the university admission scores means the students can choose from an array of programs in diverse study fields. In applying to university, learners are required to indicate a first and second choice of study. These lifechanging decisions are, however, often made abruptly and without the necessary guidance, pre-exposure, or full understanding of the degree programs (Agherdien, et al., 2018). The high drop-out rate at first year tells a different story, raising the questions: To what extent are incoming students ready and academically prepared for higher education? What interventions can be put in place prior to university entry, to promote informed career choice and access with sustained success?

Rationale

A full 70% of the pre-university program students who received career guidance pre-university were accepted into their first choice of study at one of the largest universities in South Africa. There was a need to investigate and understand the extent to which this exposure played a role in aiding informed student career choice and persistence in their first year. The study explored

the extent to which the students' persistence could be attributed to a better fit in terms of degree program choice.

Student Readiness and Academic Preparedness for Higher Education

According to Agherdien, et al. (2018), student readiness in the South African context, is the students' ability to access higher education and succeed with minimal remedial initiatives. On the other hand, academic preparedness is multifaceted, and it encompasses both cognitive and non-cognitive domains (Agherdien, et al., 2018). The quantitative study by Agherdien, et al., (2018) uncovered that the cognitive aspects include students' dedication to class attendance, writing and computer skills, time management skills, and class preparation. While the non-cognitive domain involves support (family, friends, etc.), motivation, and the students' integration into the institution (Agherdien, et al., 2018). Although studies highlight the importance of student readiness and academic preparedness, there remains a shortage in career guidance interventions that prepare students prior to higher education entry; more so in the South African context.

For first-year students, it is important to explore and address preparedness during the transition from high school to university (Agherdien, et al., 2018; Florence and Rosser, 2018). The studies by

Table 1. Suite of Career Guidance Interventions Offered

Year	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
2022		Career Interest Survey UP-PUA Grade 11	
2023	Mini Career Fair Study According to Personality Session Examination Preparation Session	Career Interest Survey Psychometric Assessments Career Interest Survey UP-PUA Psychometric Assessment Consultation Mini Career Fair Study According to Personality Session	
2024	Study According to Personality Session Mini Career Fair Examination Preparation Session Mentorship Program	Career Interest Survey Psychometric Assessment Examination Preparation Workshop Psychometric Assessment Consultation Mini Career Fair Study According to Personality Workshop Mentorship Program	Applications to Higher Education Mentorship Program

Florence and Rosser (2018) and Mthethwa (2022) highlighted the importance of academic self-efficacy, confidence, optimism, and autonomy in aiding a smoother transition into university and the importance of continued student support in guiding students to maintain a healthy mental and emotional state. Academic preparedness may mean more than a students' ability to integrate and excel academically but the student's ability to take up the resources at their disposal and persist while maintaining good academic performance (Mthethwa, 2022).

Sampaio et al. (2025) highlighted the effectiveness of psychological career interventions in reducing uncertainty and improving first-year academic adjustment. These programs focused on building students' career self-efficacy, goal clarity, and decision-making capabilities. Similarly, Magagula et al. (2020) found that career self-efficacy, exploration, and perceived employability are strong predictors of students' work readiness, indicating that career guidance fosters the confidence needed to pursue and persist in higher education.

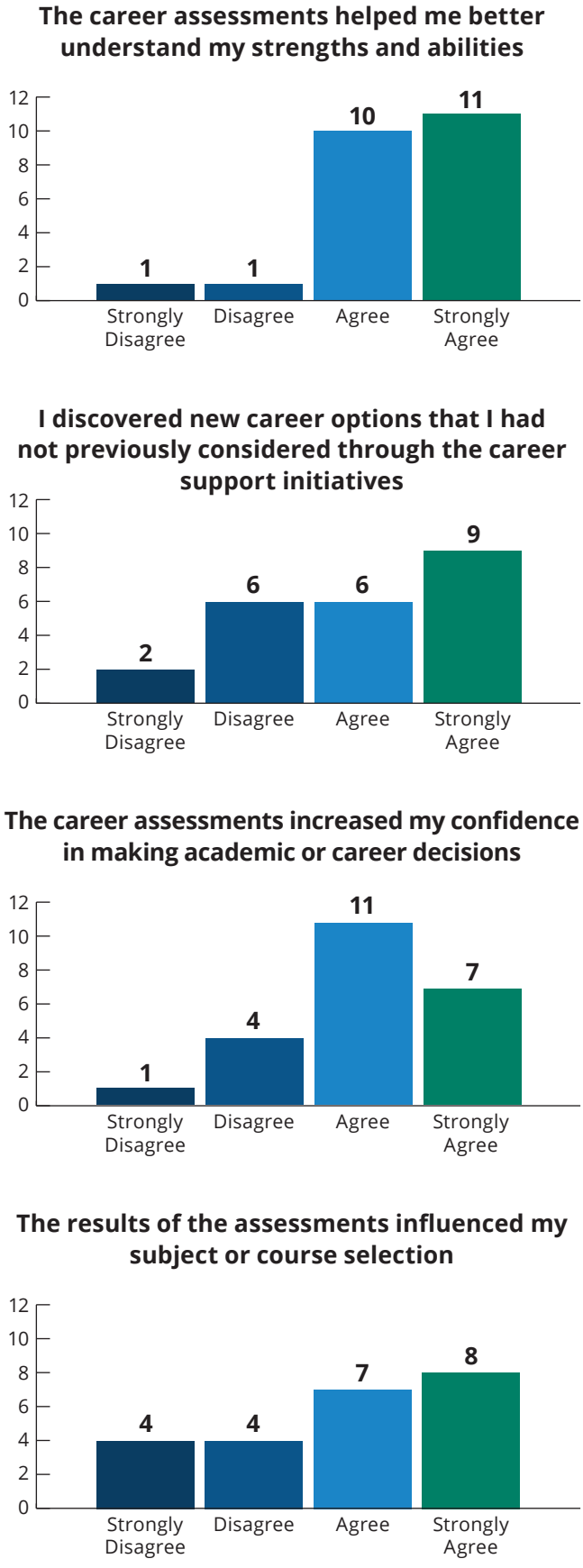
The Intervention

The pre-university program provides a suite of career guidance interventions through a career hub. The career hub offers students various co-curricular support interventions. **Table 1** highlights the suite of interventions the learners received from 2022 to 2024.

Interventions such as psychometric assessments and consultations were aimed at heightening self-awareness, helping the learners to understand themselves, and draw links to careers best suited to their personalities and strengths. The intervention aimed to ensure that learners make informed decisions when applying to university. Learners were assisted with their university applications once in grade 12.

Learners were also paired with mentors from a university run Non-Government Organization (NGO). Second year Engineering students earn course credits in exchange. This mentorship is centered around career interest support, employment, and higher education prospects.

Figure 1. Learner Responses to Career Intervention Impact Survey



Various faculty in the university engaged with learners during the mini career fair, exposing them to various careers. This is an important aspect of the career hub as it exposes learners to careers that they otherwise would not have been exposed to given their backgrounds. Parents were invited to attend the career fair to ensure parental guidance and support for learners' career decisions.

The career interest survey was administered at the beginning of the grade 11 year. The grade 11 year is important as learners use their grade 11 final school results to apply for provisional admission into university.

Results

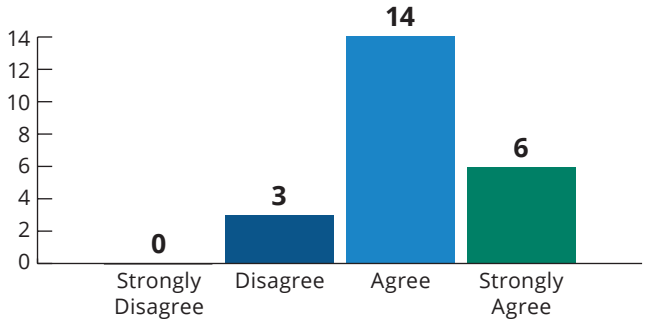
The 2024 grade 12s (N = 23), first year students in 2025, responded to a 4-point Likert scale questionnaire. The students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the career hub program, particularly in its ability to clarify career choices, build self-awareness, and assist in university preparation (**Figures 1 and 2**).

Most students reported benefiting most from Study Methods and Examination Preparation Workshops (43.5%), followed by Career Assessments (26.1%), and the Mentorship Program (21.7%).

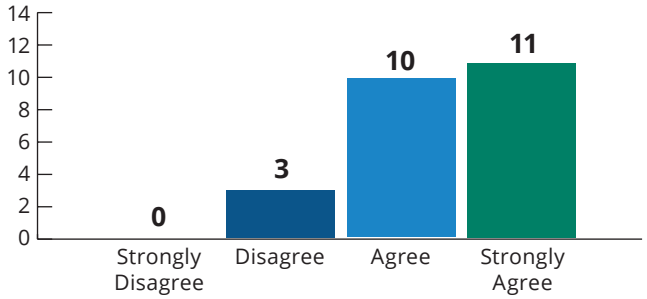
"A full 70% of the pre-university program students who received career guidance pre-university were accepted into their first choice of study."

Figure 2. Learner Responses to Career Intervention Impact Survey

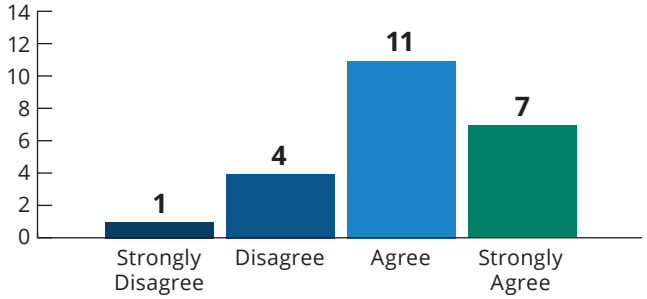
I now have a clearer understanding of the steps I need to take to reach my career goals



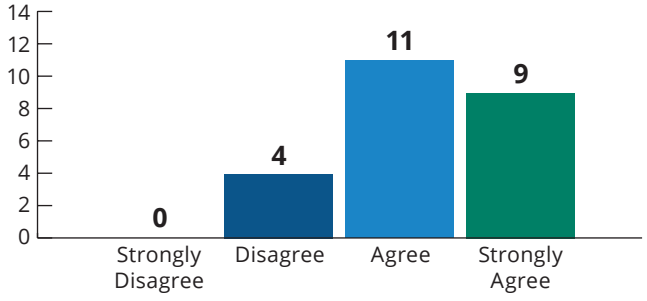
The guidance received helped me set more realistic and achievable academic goals



I feel more motivated in my studies since receiving the career guidance

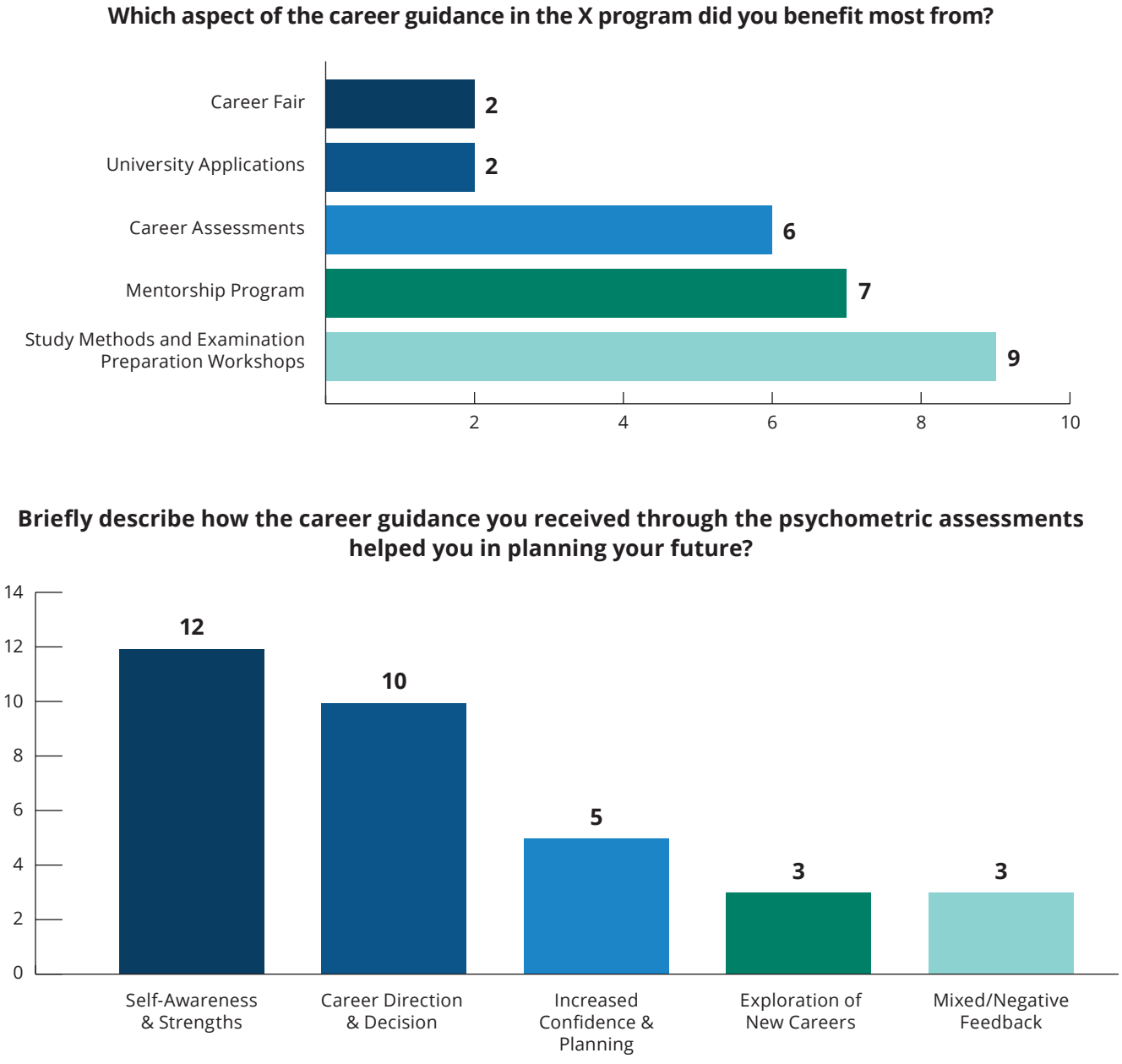


The program helped me plan better for university, bursaries, or job opportunities



When asked "Briefly describe how the career guidance you received through the psychometric assessments helped you in planning your future?" students described how the program helped them gain confidence, develop academic discipline, align careers with their personality traits, and reduce anxiety about university life (**Figure 3**). Some suggestions included expanding access to more

Figure 3. Learner Responses to Career Intervention Impact Survey



schools and aligning sessions more closely with university demands (**Table 2**).

Conclusion

Early career guidance interventions play a pivotal role in helping students make informed academic and career choices. The current study highlights the importance of academic and student readiness initiatives in the pre-university space to increase student readiness for and academic success in higher education.

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Table 2. Recommendations by Learners

Theme	Representative Quotes	Frequency/Emphasis
Academic Preparedness & Transition	"I genuinely feel like a senior... X program was proper training for uni life." "Self-study sessions helped me develop discipline."	High
Program Expansion	"Such a good program should be accessible to more people." "Make the X program expand to as many learners as possible."	Moderate to High
Curriculum Alignment	"Align the timetable of work with school so revision tests replace heavy studying."	Moderate
Program Value & Continuation	"Only comment is for this program to never shut down." "I highly recommend X Programme." "Career assessments should be continued."	High
Mixed/Negative Opinions	"I honestly felt like it was a waste of time."	Low

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Bridging Cultures, Building Futures: Supporting International Student Success

Aray Saniyazova, Head of International Students and Scholars Services, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan

ABSTRACT

As colleges and universities become increasingly global, the success of international students depends not only on academic preparedness but also on culturally responsive advising, inclusive mentoring, and intentional community support. This piece explores a holistic framework for fostering international student success through comprehensive support systems. This case study of Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan, draws on practical experience and student feedback and discusses challenges and opportunities in building a welcoming and empowering environment—from pre-arrival support to post-graduation transitions. Emphasis is placed on empowering students to shape their experience and on the staff role as a bridge between institutional resources and the unique challenges international students face, aiming to turn cultural diversity into a shared strength for the entire campus community.

Bridging Cultures, Building Futures: Supporting International Student Success

In an increasingly interconnected world, international education serves as a bridge between cultures and a catalyst for global development (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Each year, millions of students travel across borders in pursuit of knowledge, personal growth, and future opportunities (OECD, 2023). While international students enrich host institutions with diverse perspectives and cultural experiences, they also face distinct challenges that can impact their academic performance and overall well-being (Oduwaye et al., 2023).

When choosing a university, students are usually more focused on academic aspects (rankings and reputation, graduate employability, etc.) and financial implications (funding and scholarship opportunities, etc.). They often overlook other important aspects that can impact their educational journey. For example, in the case of Nazarbayev University (NU), finding yourself in a non-English-speaking country in the second-coldest capital in the world may add to the challenges that international students across the globe encounter: culture shock or difficulties adjusting to a new environment, isolation and homesickness, and language difficulties (Saniyazova, 2025).

Kazakhstan is not yet a well-established destination for international students. However, the evolving dynamics of international education are beginning to influence Kazakhstan's position in the global academic landscape. Nash (2025) reports that the number of international students in Kazakhstan reached a record level of 31,500 in 2024 reflecting the increasing recognition by the

government that internationalization is crucial both for the development of education and national economy and also for Kazakhstan's reputation around the world. With the growing number of international students, institutions must enhance their support services not only to provide a high-quality education but also to foster meaningful integration into the campus community—enabling these students to become ambassadors for the institution and the country upon their return home. Thus, supporting international student success is not only a moral and educational imperative but also a strategic investment in the future of global cooperation and innovation.

The practice shows that institutions can and must play a vital role in supporting international students both inside and outside the classroom by implementing culturally responsive teaching practices, providing targeted academic and mental health support, and fostering inclusive campus environments.

Home Away From Home: Case Study of Nazarbayev University

NU is an English-medium institution established in Astana, Kazakhstan, in 2010. Built from the ground up with the goal of becoming a globally recognized research university and rooted in the values of academic freedom, meritocracy, and global engagement (Katsu & Saniyazova, 2018), NU admitted its first international student in 2013. Currently, NU hosts approximately 300 international students from 35 countries of the world, accounting for about 2.5% of its total student population. While still a relatively small proportion, this growing demographic reflects the university's broader strategy of internationalization and cultural diversity.

To address the needs of its international students, NU has implemented a range of support mechanisms that reflect a holistic and culturally responsive model. "Home Away from Home" is a new initiative launched to enhance the international student experience and empower students to take ownership of their journey both academically and socially. The program includes a range of purposeful activities and events designed to support students' transition, adaptation, integration, and inclusion within the university community and beyond.

Inform and Prepare

As the first principle of the program implies, it is important for the institution to recognize that institutional support should begin even before students arrive on campus, through visa application support, pre-arrival guidance, orientation materials, and engagement activities that help them prepare academically, emotionally, and culturally for their new environment.

Cultivate A Sense of Community

A sense of community can be cultivated from the very first day of arrival, starting with a warm welcome at the airport, and continuing throughout the year through engaging events—both large and small. Personalized touches, such as birthday greetings and organized off-campus trips, further strengthen the sense of belonging and connection among students.

Turn Challenges Into Opportunities

Challenges that international students often face can present meaningful opportunities for growth and institutional development. At NU, feedback from international students has played a vital role in shaping more inclusive policies and practices.

It is important that these challenges, rather than being viewed solely as obstacles, are treated as entry points for dialogue, innovation, and community-building. By actively engaging students in identifying and addressing gaps in support, NU turns their lived experiences into opportunities to foster empathy, resilience, and intercultural understanding across the university.

Keep Informing Without Overwhelming

Effective communication is essential for supporting students, but finding a balance between being informative and not overwhelming can be challenging. This can be managed through a multi-channel approach that includes official email correspondence and informal communication via social media and messengers. Official channels provide structured, accurate information, while informal groups allow for real-time updates, peer support, and quick answers to everyday questions. This system is complemented by an open-door policy, where staff remain accessible for in-person consultations.

Streamline Support Services and Resources Across The University

For international students to thrive, higher education institutions must ensure that support services are not only available but also well-coordinated and easy to navigate. At NU, efforts have been made to streamline services by fostering collaboration between student support units. Importantly, the intention has been to avoid isolating international students as a separate group to be handled solely by the international office. Instead, promoting an inclusive, integrated approach in which all departments share responsibility for student success is key.

Conclusion

All of these efforts are approached through the lens of student empowerment, encouraging international students to actively engage, take initiative, and shape their own experiences throughout their time at the university. Supporting international students as they navigate the challenging transition to a new academic and social environment is no small task, but it is both achievable and deeply rewarding—especially when it contributes to the creation of a truly inclusive and global campus community.

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Transforming Global Student Affairs: A Conceptual Paper Reimagining Student Support and Advising through an Ubuntu Lens

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ABSTRACT

Ubuntu philosophy is a South African value system that prescribes to being self through others. Ubuntu emphasizes interconnectedness, mutual respect and understanding principles that hold transformative potential for global student affairs. By adopting Ubuntu as a foundational approach in higher education, we can reimagine how students are globally supported and advised. This conceptual analysis explores the relevance of Ubuntu in shaping inclusive, just, and holistic support systems for students across cultural and institutional contexts. While universities serve as progressive and developmental spaces, there remains a persisting need to rethink how student services extend beyond formal learning and academic instruction. As transnational educators grounded in the Ubuntu values systems, we advocate for its integration into student advising and student support through teaching and learning to globally enhance higher education environments, making them more responsive to student needs and experiences.

Overview of Ubuntu within the Global South

Ubuntu is a philosophical concept rooted in the traditions of Bantu-speaking communities across Africa (Dladla, 2020). It is more than a belief system; it embodies a worldview that emphasizes relational, communal, and spiritual values as central to African ways of knowing (Mugumbate et al., 2023). Dladla (2020) distinguishes "Ubuntu" as humanness, a dynamic state of being, rather than "humanism," which suggests a static ideology. This view frames Ubuntu as an evolving ethical orientation that guides how individuals relate to one another and the world around them (Ramose, 2015). Language plays a vital role in shaping and transmitting this philosophy, as it encodes the values of interdependence and collective growth central to Ubuntu's ethical vision (Murove, 2009; Ngcoya, 2009).

Although unique and varied in name or acknowledgment, Ubuntu deeply echoes throughout and within various African languages and cultures. Values such as *ukama* (Shona) and *isiko* (isiZulu) emphasize relationships, culture, and a deep commitment to indigenous identity and ways of knowing (Praeg & Magadla, 2014; Twikirize et al., 2023). Concepts like *uburu* (Swahili), meaning freedom, and *giramamawa* (Hausa), meaning mutual respect and humility, highlight ethical principles of liberation, dignity, and coexistence that are foundational to Ubuntu. Similarly, *ujamaa*

(Swahili) promotes collectivism and cooperation, while *ubunyarwanda* (Rwandan) underscores nationhood and peace as central ethical and communal values.

Ubuntu in Practice: Student Support & Advising

At its core, Ubuntu provides an equitable approach to supporting learners across diverse cultural and social backgrounds, fostering educational environments where all students can thrive (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). Globally, college students seek not only academic success but a deeper sense of belonging, connection, and support as they navigate campus life and the complexities of institutional culture (Hughes, 2024). With this understanding, Ubuntu in action has the power to build capacity for mutual understanding, strengthen social intimacy, and lessen the burden of adjustment within higher education for students (Ngubane & Makua, 2021; Ngubane & Gumede, 2018).

Ubuntu approach to student support and advising offers a relational and inclusive framework that centers the voices, intersectional identities, and experiences of minoritized and underrepresented students (Luescher & Holtzhausen, 2023; Ngubane & Makua, 2021; Ngubane & Gumede, 2018). It affirms students' personhood and lived realities through genuine care and intentional mentorship from both university personnel and peers, creating trust and relational depth often absent or inconsistent in contemporary advising and support practices (Luescher & Holtzhausen, 2023). Through this approach and practice, Ubuntu has the potential to rectify the alienation, isolation, and exclusion many students experience (Hughes, 2024; Mathebula & Martinez- Vargas, 2024). It prioritizes the deliberate curation of community through intentional and equitable university programming, policies, and practices (Luescher & Holtzhausen, 2023). As a result, an Ubuntu approach within global student affairs empowers institutions to transform student support into a collective and humanizing experience (Hughes, 2024; Luescher & Holtzhausen, 2023).

Ubuntu in Practice: Student Support Through Teaching & Learning

An Ubuntu approach to teaching and learning in higher education is central to understanding the growing challenges for transformation, social justice and decolonization in our midst (Hlatshwayo, 2024; Giroux, 2024; Shahjahan, Estera & Surla, 2022). This Ubuntu based approach in teaching and learning demands that we rethink, reimagine, and reconsider four significant aspects of curriculum design and its pedagogic relations in our classrooms.

An Ubuntu approach to teaching and learning in higher education is vital for addressing ongoing challenges around transformation,

"Ubuntu provides an equitable approach to supporting learners across diverse cultural and social backgrounds, fostering educational environments where all students can thrive (Ngubane & Makua, 2021)."

social justice, and decolonization (Hlatshwayo, 2024; Giroux, 2024; Shahjahan et al., 2022). This perspective urges us to rethink key aspects of curriculum design and pedagogy, beginning with the deliberate inclusion of diverse voices, especially those from the global South, who are often marginalized in academic spaces (Pett, 2015). Such inclusion fosters epistemic justice by challenging dominant Western paradigms and recognizing the knowledge of those historically "othered." It also calls attention to the often opaque process of curriculum development, which is governed by academic autonomy but remains resistant to transformation. Because curriculum design is frequently seen as a reflection of academic identity, questioning its content can be perceived as a personal challenge. Moreover, adopting an Ubuntu informed pedagogy requires rejecting the commodification of students as mere consumers of educational products (Morrow, 2009). This market-driven view undermines the humanity of students and erodes meaningful educational relationships. Instead, we must humanize our classrooms by fostering mutual recognition and care. This also involves dismantling hierarchical teacher-student dynamics, which often position the curriculum as a fixed entity delivered from above. An Ubuntu approach promotes collaborative engagement, where students actively contribute to the design, delivery, and assessment of the curriculum, enriching it with their diverse cultural and epistemic backgrounds.

When applied in higher education, Ubuntu reimagines student advising and student support through teaching and learning in a holistic way, addressing the cultural, social, intellectual, and academic dimensions of student development. This philosophy offers a deep appreciation for humanity and human-centered approaches that value students' unique experiences, prioritizes their needs, and actively supports their learning, growth and development. By embracing an Ubuntu approach, educators foster equitable and inclusive higher education environments where students feel seen, heard and empowered. Ubuntu serves as a powerful framework for nurturing a global student community that transcends cultural and geographic borders.

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PERSONAL AND ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS (PPF)

VALUES, PHILOSOPHY, AND HISTORY (VPH)

ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH (AER)

LAW, POLICY, AND GOVERNANCE (LPG)

ORGANIZATIONAL AND HUMAN RESOURCE (OHR), LEADERSHIP (LEAD)

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Building a Global Consortium: How IASAS is working to Promote Space for Culturally Responsive Practitioner Research in Student Affairs and Services Globally

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ABSTRACT

Practitioners working in student affairs and services globally are facing a plethora of unique challenges. Much of the research and theoretical perspectives available to support their needs come from the Global North with a Western lens of investigation. This means that regions of the world that are still developing may face large gaps between theory and practice, and that culturally responsive practices may be lacking. One way to address this issue is to connect practitioners and researchers globally in a space built for culturally responsive exchanges of ideas and the promotion of global practitioner research partnerships. Specifically, a practitioner-based virtual Global Consortium is needed to meet the needs of a diverse and ever-changing world. This work looks at the efforts of the International Association of Student Affairs and Services in creating a virtual Global Consortium to promote practitioner research by connecting researchers and practitioners from across the globe.

Introduction

Student affairs and services (SAS) have existed since the early 1800s within the United States (Schuh et al., 2017), but were not fully recognized as a professional field until June of 1937 with the publication of the *Student Personnel Point of View* that evolved from the April 16-17, 1937 American Council on Education's (ACE) conference (ACE, 1937; Doyle, 2004; NASPA, 2025; Roberts, 2012). The document was initially drafted at the ACE conference by three educators (i.e., Esther Lloyd-Jones, H. El Hawkes, and L. B. Hopkins) and then presented to the ACE committee for approval formally establishing SAS as a profession largely rooted within a U.S. context (Roberts, 2012); however, the concept of providing support services to students within academic environments has existed informally across the globe far longer. Patton (2016) notes that U.S. "historians begin their accounts of the profession with the colonization of U.S. America" (p. 44) as early as 1636 when efforts were made to duplicate the Oxford-Cambridge model of student support. More broadly, we see that the historical desire to support students within higher education has existed globally even longer. We can see examples of this across a variety of historical cultures and contexts within higher education through charitable acts of scholarship, student guilds, religious support systems, tutoring, and much more (e.g., Cox, 2001; Kamalakar & Kamala, 2023; Peters, 2019).

Professionalization

The formal evolution of SAS continues today as both a field of study and practice within higher education globally. However, there are challenges to address as SAS moves toward a more global

form of professionalization. As Bardill Moscaritolo and Schreiber (2023) noted,

> Central to any process that seeks to professionalize SAS, is acknowledging that western philosophies and models located in the Global North dominate the literature of the field. Authors steeped in a particular view, premised on Global North values and contexts, assert ideas that, from their perspective, will enhance student learning and development throughout the world. [However], [t]he dominance of Global North scholarship, with its inherent imbalance of power and hegemonic presence, discourages the emergence of knowledge from diverse cultural contexts and regions. (pp. 7-8)

Because much of the research centered on student development and student development theory originated from a Global North perspective, it is not always culturally relevant across borders. Nonetheless, student development theory originating in the Global North heavily influences global student affairs and services both in research and practice. As Heleta (2016) noted "One of the most destructive effects of colonialism was the subjugation of local knowledge and promotion of the Western Knowledge as universal knowledge" (p. 2). Therefore, intentionality is critical in global efforts to internationalize SAS as a profession.

While some work has taken place globally to establish local student development research from a non-Global North perspective, there are areas of the world where university systems are still being established. In these same spaces, those working in higher education may not hold the knowledge and/or skills needed to promote research for the establishment of indigenous student development theory that is culturally responsive to their student population needs. Seifert and colleagues (2014) noted that practitioners working in SAS globally hold varying levels and types of educational credentials and receive professional development in a variety of ways. Thus, skill levels may, too, vary across cultural contexts. This is the struggle that must be addressed if cultural identity and context is to be properly represented within student affairs and services research and practice.

The International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) has created a virtual Global Consortium (IASAS, 2023). While still in its initial stages, the goal of the consortium is to provide a platform for practitioners and researchers with varying levels of research knowledge to connect and engage in research. This goal seems simple, but there are challenges. Consortium members are hesitant to connect with their global peers due to varying levels of research knowledge and fear of the unknown in creating cross-cultural collaborations. Therefore, IASAS must be intentional in creating opportunities for engagement. Thus far this has been accomplished through research webinars. The webinars provide a non-threatening space for global practitioners and researchers to gain or refresh basic research skills while also engaging with potential research partners. Through the webinars, future consortium members can be recruited, and while everyone enters with various skill levels, educational backgrounds, and research goals, they are gaining so much more by mentoring each other, breaking down communications issues,

"As intentional research and engagement opportunities grow, so do the consortium and the possibility for the advancement of culturally responsive student development theory that addresses students' needs who are not in the Global North."

and making global connections. As intentional research and engagement opportunities grow, so do the consortium and the possibility for the advancement of culturally responsive student development theory that addresses students' needs who are not in the Global North.

Conclusion

IASAS's Global Consortium also creates space for academic diplomacy which can strengthen connections between nations and foster mutual understanding within higher education (von Feigenblatt, 2023). Universities stand at the forefront of knowledge creation and have an integral role in globalization as spaces "of interaction between transnational actors" (Feigenblatt, 2023, p. 317). The Global Consortium creates a virtual space for researchers and practitioners to engage across borders and cultural contexts for the purpose of advancing culturally responsive research and meeting students' needs.

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Advice for Americans who Become Immigrants – and Literal Expatriates in Student Affairs and Services

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ABSTRACT

Across nearly 15 years of leading student affairs and services work around the globe, including 4 years of living as an expat in China and as an immigrant in the United Kingdom, I've learned iterative lessons through a perspective of cultural humility about approaching the work of student affairs and services from my U.S. American and person-of-color cultural identity, professional practice base, and academic knowledge. U.S. Americans are rarely taught the process of perspective taking across global cultures, nor are we taught much about higher education systems across the world. As such, the realities of knitting the mosaic of a global, professional community can be challenging, especially when confronting the realities of migration and cultural adjustment. This article will focus on the joys and the challenges of global migration, of finding that balance in the work through global experience while providing practical advice for U.S. American student affairs and services professionals who aspire to a global life.

Introduction

The thought experiment of leaving the U.S. for what feels like greener, or at least more adventurous pastures, has crossed many of our minds. You visit a new country, you wonder what it would be like to live there, or if life might be better elsewhere. The process of knitting together the mosaic of a global life can be incredibly rewarding. The actual doing of it comes with some realities that must be considered before packing up.

While exploring, supporting, teaching, learning, and leading student affairs and services (SAS) work across the globe, I've learned iterative lessons about approaching the work of SAS from my U.S. American and person-of-color cultural identity, professional practice base, and academic knowledge. U.S. Americans are rarely taught the process of perspective taking across global cultures, nor are we taught much about higher education systems around the world. How does one begin this journey? What questions should we ask ourselves before making a big move?

Immigrant or Expat?

Many migrants originating from Western cultures like the U.S., Canada, and the UK tend to identify as expatriates (expats for short) when moving into a new country. The term "expat" has roots in privilege, and specifically in English-speaking privilege, economic privilege, Western privilege, and racial identity-based privilege (Kunz, 2020). In contrast, the term immigrant has been often applied to people of color and people coming from nations with less economic privilege (Kirkley and Nimijean, 2022). Expatriation can be reframed as privileged migration with a sense of unearned

goodness whereby both racial and social economic privilege are conflated with migration being good or earned (Cranston, 2017). An expat, because of this unearned goodness, may not be expected by the local community to live by certain social rules or speak in the local language, whereas immigrants may be held to assimilative expectations.

Expats are at risk of engaging in neo-colonialization practices as a result. This may be in the form of assuming work knowledge and experiences apply in full to the new context, that communication patterns work well in the new environment, or that SAS work rooted in U.S. practice will apply cleanly to the new cultural

Practical (Non-Exhaustive) Questions to Ask Yourself

Before you make your move, you might consider some of the following (non-exhaustive) questions to help guide you in your decisions.

1. **Am I prepared to spend holidays and other milestone events apart from loved ones?** Going home for every event, even major annual holidays, likely will no longer be a financial viability. Your chosen and found family in your new community will need to fill a larger role than perhaps you had considered.

2. **What will medical care look like in the new country, and can I access it as such?** English speakers may not consider what it may be like to communicate illness symptoms in a second language or with limited translation tools. Certain medications may not be available in the new country due to differing regulations or social attitudes towards specific medical conditions. While public healthcare is available in many parts of the world, you may or may not be eligible based on your citizenship and/or immigration status.

3. **Will I be able to commit to real language acquisition?** If you want to move to a country in which you do not speak the local language—even if that country has a high proficiency in a language you already speak—the ability to culturally immerse, make friends, and communicate in daily life will undoubtedly increase your quality of life. Learning through an app alone will not likely lead you toward true fluency. Language can also help contextualize cultural values by how concepts are framed in that language. In my experience, multilingual people think differently in each of their known languages.

4. **How will I obtain the appropriate permission to live and work?** Most nations require specific types of visas, some of which may be employer-sponsored. It will be important to know the duration of the visa, your rights and restrictions, and the renewal rules.

5. **What do I know about the educational system in the new country? Y**ou will be working with local staff and students, engaging with the local community, and generally expected to understand the educational system. Build in time to create this understanding inclusive of early education and standardized testing, the admissions process, the university system, school year calendar, and beyond.

6. **What cultural norms exist around work in the new country and where will my U.S. assumptions create tension?** You are used to navigating leadership styles, power structures, paid time off, punctuality, after-hours expectations, and collegial relationships in your current cultural context. In a new culture, there may be hidden expectations you might not understand unless you have a cultural ally.

context. Particularly within the context of inclusion-based work, ironically, expats run the risk of inadvertently employing exclusionary practices by applying inclusion curricula, principles, and theories from home while abroad (Bowling, 2023). Expats carry the responsibility of knowing one's own historical context while learning their new, chosen cultural context.

As you consider international migration, a conversation with yourself on privilege, identity, and the realities of immersing oneself into a new culture must emerge. What are you bringing to the table in a new cultural environment, and how will you practice and engage with cultural humility while honoring your own experiences?

Realities of Cultural Adjustment

Foundationally, you must iteratively reformulate your understanding of how things work. Seeking to understand, asking questions to fill in knowledge gaps, and perspective taking will be important skills to rely upon while building your knowledge base in your new cultural home. The Cultural Humility framework (Tervalon & Garcia, 1998) encourages personal disarming of bias through self-critique and working through a humility focused mindset.

The process of cultural transition involves learning how to be a whole person in a new cultural system. Processes that you take for granted may become surprisingly difficult such as opening a bank account, building credit, accessing health care, signing up for a mobile phone plan, finding foods in a grocery store, or simply knowing what something familiar is called in a new cultural environment. These things may seem simple and obvious on the surface but can contribute to exhaustion as meeting daily needs becomes a constant challenge during the cultural adjustment process.

A large part of choosing to immigrate will be creating a new support network. You will need to find cultural allies. A cultural ally, someone who has deep understanding of your new environment and who is willing to tell you the truth when you make cultural mistakes – and you will make cultural mistakes – must derive from authentic, respectful, and mutual space. Cultural allies will be critical to your success in the new environment, and you must reciprocate meaningfully.

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Staff Wellness Powers Student Success: A 4-Day Work Week for University Counseling Centers

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation and outcomes of a four-day workweek (4DW) pilot at Stellenbosch University's Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD), designed to address rising staff burnout and growing student mental health demands. Rooted in the university's Vision 2040 commitment to being an "Employer of Choice," the initiative sought to enhance staff wellness without compromising service delivery. Using mixed-method assessments, including SHAPE surveys, Boston College metrics, HR data, and qualitative reflections, the pilot demonstrated significant benefits. Findings included reduced burnout scores (3.01 to 2.30), increased life satisfaction (5.93 to 6.93), improved work-life balance, and a 47.9% decline in sick leave, alongside cost savings of nearly R2.7 million ($154K USD). Staff reported higher morale, collaboration, and productivity within four working days. The results highlight how investing in staff well-being through structural innovation strengthens student support, reduces attrition risks, and fosters a sustainable, compassionate academic culture adaptable to global higher education contexts

Introduction

University counseling centers are under unprecedented pressure as student mental health needs grow in complexity and volume. At Stellenbosch University, the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) implemented a four-day workweek (4DW) in 2024 in response to the increasing complexity and volume of student mental health needs. This initiative aligns with Stellenbosch University's Vision 2040, particularly with the core strategic theme "Employer of Choice", to reimagine workplace sustainability and care in a higher education context. As Maddock (2024) noted, increased demand for support places serious pressure on resources, contributing to staff burnout and turnover, which undermines service quality. By adopting the 4DW model, the CSCD aims to prioritize staff wellness and ensure the long-term sustainability of critical student support services. These kinds of changes also fit into the broader goals of the university, which wants to be an employer of choice, prioritizing staff well-being as a key to student success (Richemond & Needham, 2020).

Staff wellness directly influences students' outcomes by enhancing the quality, consistency, and emotional presence of educational support services. Research indicates that when staff are well-supported and mentally healthy, they create more engaging, empathetic, and stable learning environments that foster student success (Khatri et al, 2024). Improved staff well-being also reduces burnout and absenteeism, ensuring continuity in student care and academic guidance (Maddock, 2024). Moreover, institutions that prioritize

wellness signal a culture of care, which positively shapes student attitudes toward learning, mental health, and help-seeking behavior. This is supported by research that indicates that educators who receive adequate support are better equipped to address the requirements of their students, thereby reducing student anxiety and loneliness (Elmer et al., 2020). Therefore, putting money into staff wellness, like the 4DW model, can help create a strong and thriving academic community (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

This article explores the implementation and outcomes of a four-day workweek (4DW) at the Stellenbosch University CSCD. In response to staff burnout and rising student mental health demands, the CSCD piloted a 4DW model to enhance staff wellness without compromising service delivery. Using mixed-method assessments, including SHAPE surveys, Boston College metrics, and sick leave analysis, the results showed improvements in staff well-being, productivity, morale, and cost efficiency. The pilot demonstrates that prioritizing staff wellness through structural change not only supports employees but also creates institutional conditions that power student success. These findings have practical implications for global higher education institutions striving to build community and sustainable support systems.

Rationale

Exit interviews and internal assessments prior to this pilot program revealed that the CSCD staff experienced significant emotional exhaustion, citing a lack of flexibility and high caseloads. Inspired by international 4DW trials and informed by local academic consultations, the CSCD designed a productivity-focused model in partnership with the 4 Day Week SA and SHAPE Global. The aim was to reduce burnout, improve work-life balance, and enhance service continuity through equitable staff rotation and outcome-based performance tracking.

Methodology

The pilot study ran from February to July 2024. The evaluation instruments included SHAPE well-being surveys, Boston College assessments, midpoint qualitative feedback, and HR data comparisons. Staff submitted weekly reflections, while the management monitored service levels, team morale, and cost indicators. The Wellness Day—granted weekly—was conditional on maintaining output.

“Institutions that prioritize wellness signal a culture of care, which positively shapes student attitudes toward learning, mental health, and help-seeking behavior.”

Key Outcomes

These findings demonstrate compelling outcomes. Burnout scores dropped from 3.01 to 2.30, and life satisfaction rose from 5.93 to 6.93. The work-life balance improved from 2.5 to 3.57. Notably, sick leave declined by 47.9%, and consultant fees dropped by 77.87%, saving nearly R2.7 million ($154K USD). Staff reported improved morale, collaboration, and the ability to manage duties within four days.

SHAPE Survey Insights

Comparative SHAPE surveys from May to December 2024 show improved indicators of psychological health, employee commitment, and job satisfaction. Scores on optimism, intrinsic rewards, and team belonging rose, while fatigue and attrition threats declined. However, gaps remain in areas such as career prospects and recognition, highlighting the need for broader institutional support and investments.

Global and Local Relevance

Globally, 4DW trials have yielded positive results in employee wellness and productivity. The CSCD’s implementation of 4DW adds to this body

of knowledge with context-specific evidence from South Africa. In line with NASPA's theme of building a global community, this model shows how localized innovation in staff care can enhance student services and contribute to international conversations on sustainable, equitable higher education systems.

Conclusion

The 4DW pilot at Stellenbosch University illustrates the transformative impact of wellness-centered structural reform. Institutions aiming to improve student success must begin by investing in the people who serve them. A four-day work week, carefully implemented, offers a powerful strategy to reimagine community, connection, and care in the academy. It challenges outdated models of productivity and prioritizes human sustainability as essential to educational excellence. As higher education continues to adapt to complex student needs, initiatives like the 4DW signal a shift toward compassionate leadership and a healthier academic culture for both staff and students.

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DECLARATION

I declare that AI-assisted tools (ChatGPT-3.5 Free Version and Grammarly BETA Version) were used to support the writing and editing of content originally written by me in this manuscript. These tools were also used to condense the sections to meet word count limitations. No content solely generated by AI was included in this study.

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This Work Is Not Easy, But It Is Necessary: Leadership to Overcome Resistance to Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

Globally, we can agree that students and employees should be able to access their education and employment free from sexual violence and harassment (SVH). Yet, students and employees across higher education (HE) internationally continue to be impacted by SVH. Views that SVH is a societal issue often result in disavowal of responsibility within HE—"it's a societal problem, so it's not our job to fix it." However, university leaders are responsible for the learning and work environments within the organization and therefore hold some responsibility to address SVH impacting their community. SVH prevention initiatives are often met with resistance, including denial and backlash for example. Building on the work of DiSantis and Towl (2025) and VicHealth (2018), this article explores how formal and informal leadership can support overcoming resistance to SVH prevention for safer learning and work environments across HE internationally.

Introduction

Students and employees across higher education (HE) are impacted by sexual violence and harassment (SVH), with certain groups disproportionately targeted by perpetrators (DiSantis & Towl, 2025). A systematic review of 21 countries found the global prevalence of sexual assault for students was 11% for all genders, 17.5% for women, 7.8% for men, and 18.1% for gender-diverse students (Steele et al., 2024). A study of 15 European countries found 62% of student and employee respondents were subjected to at least one form of gender-based violence and 31% were subjected to sexual harassment since enrollment or employment at their institution (Lipinsky et al., 2022). The prevalence and impact of SVH create a critical problem within HE often exacerbated when work to address SVH is met with resistance.

Students and employees should be able to access their education and employment free from SVH. In some locations, this is set out in regulation (e.g., Office for Students, 2024) or even legislation (e.g., Worker Protection Act 2023). Despite the growing recognition that SVH should not be tolerated in HE and even when regulation and/or legislation is in place, there still seems to be resistance to addressing SVH (DiSantis & Towl, 2025). Views that SVH is a societal issue often result in disavowal of responsibility within HE—"it's a societal problem, so it's not our job to fix it." However, university leaders are responsible for the learning and work environments within the organization. Therefore, university leaders have significant responsibility to address SVH impacting their community.

Types of Resistance

When those working in HE to address SVH are met with resistance at institutional and individual levels, this results in stalled or blocked initiatives and burn-out for changemakers (DiSantis & Towl, 2025). Building from the model of resistance developed by VicHealth (2018), DiSantis and Towl (2025) presented how the following resistance tactics could be used to block or dismantle SVH prevention and response initiatives:

The reality of resistance is alive and well and comes in many forms. Changemakers will face resistance from individuals within their institution, from the institution itself, and from outside the institution too.

1. **Denial –** denying SVH is a problem or that it is a large enough problem to warrant change.
2. **Disavowal –** refusing to recognize responsibility, (e.g., arguing it is a criminal justice matter only).
3. **Inaction –** taking no action.
4. **Appeasement –** placating the changemaker by agreeing to the initiative but then taking no action.
5. **Appropriation –** simulating a change but then covertly undermining it, (e.g., creating a reporting procedure, but then discouraging victim-survivors from reporting).
6. **Co-option –** shifting the focus within the initiative to maintain the status quo, (e.g., changing a conversation focused on support for victim-survivors to only considering support for the "falsely accused").
7. **Repression –** reversing or dismantling an initiative that was already implemented, (e.g., removing funding for prevention work).
8. **Backlash –** using aggressive, attacking, or even violent responses to stop the change from occurring.

Role of Leadership

Formal and informal leadership can support overcoming resistance to SVH prevention and response initiatives to create safer learning and work environments across HE internationally. Governing bodies, presidents/chancellors, provosts, deans, department heads, and managers across student affairs and services and academic departments, for example, all have formal leadership responsibilities within their roles with the ability to offer top-down support for change initiatives. Leaders can demonstrate commitment to change initiatives and set the tone and expectations for the community. Informal leadership often comes through peer champions who advocate for change initiatives through peer networks and informal communication channels offering bottom-up support. Champions can work at all levels of an institution from students to tenured faculty as they are speaking to their peers.

Leaders and champions can move institutions beyond tick-box exercises to embed meaningful comprehensive institution-wide approaches to prevent and respond to SVH through practical actions (see Table 6: Checklist of Leadership Actions in DiSantis & Towl, 2025, p. 307). An example of an action leaders can take is to have their organization join the global Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, which supports the safe recruitment of employees by helping organizations to legally share conduct information from past employers during recruitment (The 1752 Group et al., 2024). A practical example of engaging champions is the Active* Champions program from Active* Consent (2024) where students in a volunteer or paid capacity are trained in promoting consent culture on campus through a range of initiatives, for example, awareness raising, creative arts activities, and facilitating evidence-based consent workshops.

Not only do we need university leaders and champions to support SVH prevention and response initiatives within institutions, but we need global leadership for the sector. In an ever-changing global environment where higher education institutions are directly affected by global politics, challenges to positive culture change in this area are increasing. HE is particularly unique in how it functions as a global community across disciplines for students and employees impacting every sector. Students and

employees regularly move between institutions internationally through study abroad, research projects, conferences, and career progression opportunities. SVH is occurring within institutions of HE worldwide. As a sector, leadership is crucial. Repression and backlash on a global level need to be challenged. It is one thing to face resistance within the organization, but externally against the sector is a whole other issue. Perhaps external pressures being placed on HE globally will act as a catalyst for the leaders and champions within the sector to work together to overcome resistance to change.

We know we have a problem with SVH in HE. Our students and employees deserve to access their education and employment free from SVH. Although this work is indeed not easy, it is necessary to keep our communities safe so that our students and employees can thrive. Through global and institutional leadership and peer champions, we as a sector and community can make a meaningful impact on addressing sexual violence and harassment in higher education.

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Top Issues Shaping Student Affairs and Services in 2025-Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) Area

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ABSTRACT

Student affairs and services (SAS) is evolving rapidly in response to workforce preparation, technological advancements, and ever-changing student needs. Drawing inspiration from the 2024 NASPA Top Issues in Student Affairs, this article explores key issues shaping SAS in the MENASA region with the aim of promoting proactive and student-centered strategies. An online survey (54 responses) was conducted to capture what SAS practitioners view as most important to their institution across four key areas: professional preparedness and development; evaluation of service and programs; health, safety and wellbeing; and technology adoption and innovation. Findings highlighted crisis and conflict management, leadership, and strategic planning as highly valued competencies among SAS leaders. Data-driven decision-making, research utilization, and mental health support for students affected by crises emerged as top priorities. Considerable attention was also placed on campus-wide collaboration and advancing technology adoption.

Introduction

The SAS field is growing rapidly in response to technological advancements and the evolving needs and expectations of students. To remain relevant, continuous assessment and evaluation of SAS initiatives, programs, and staffing is essential (NASPA, 2022). Despite this growth, the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia (MENASA) region is still lacking empirical data that explores the factors shaping and influencing the future of SAS practice. In response, this survey was developed based on the NASPA's 2024 *Top Issues in Student Affairs Survey* (NASPA, 2024), with a specific focus on four thematic areas: professional preparedness and development; evaluation of services and programs; health, safety and wellbeing; technology adoption and innovation. To ensure contextual relevance, several modifications were made to the original survey. This article aims to contribute to the advancement of SAS in the region by presenting insights into the priorities, challenges, and emerging themes.

Data Collection

A total of 54 responses were collected. The online survey was promoted and disseminated among SAS professionals in the region. Participants were asked to rate factors by the level of importance. The survey was made available in both Arabic and English. Demographic data shows that 100% of participants are currently working in SAS, ensuring regional relevance. Of the 54 participants, 31 identified as leaders or individuals in supervisory roles. As reflected in **Table 1**, the majority (65%) have 6–20 years of experience, reflecting a highly experienced group of professionals. As illustrated in **Table 2**, in terms of institution type, government universities (61%) dominated the sample.

Data Analysis

Professional Preparedness and Development

Professional development facilitates the acquisition of new competencies and develops critical skills tailored to specific functional roles and administrative level (Roberts, 2005). As such,

Table 1. Years of Experience Among Participants (n=54)

Years of Experience	Count	% of Total
1 year or less	1	2%
2–5 years	12	22%
6–10 years	15	28%
11–15 years	11	20%
16–20 years	6	11%
21 years or more	9	17%

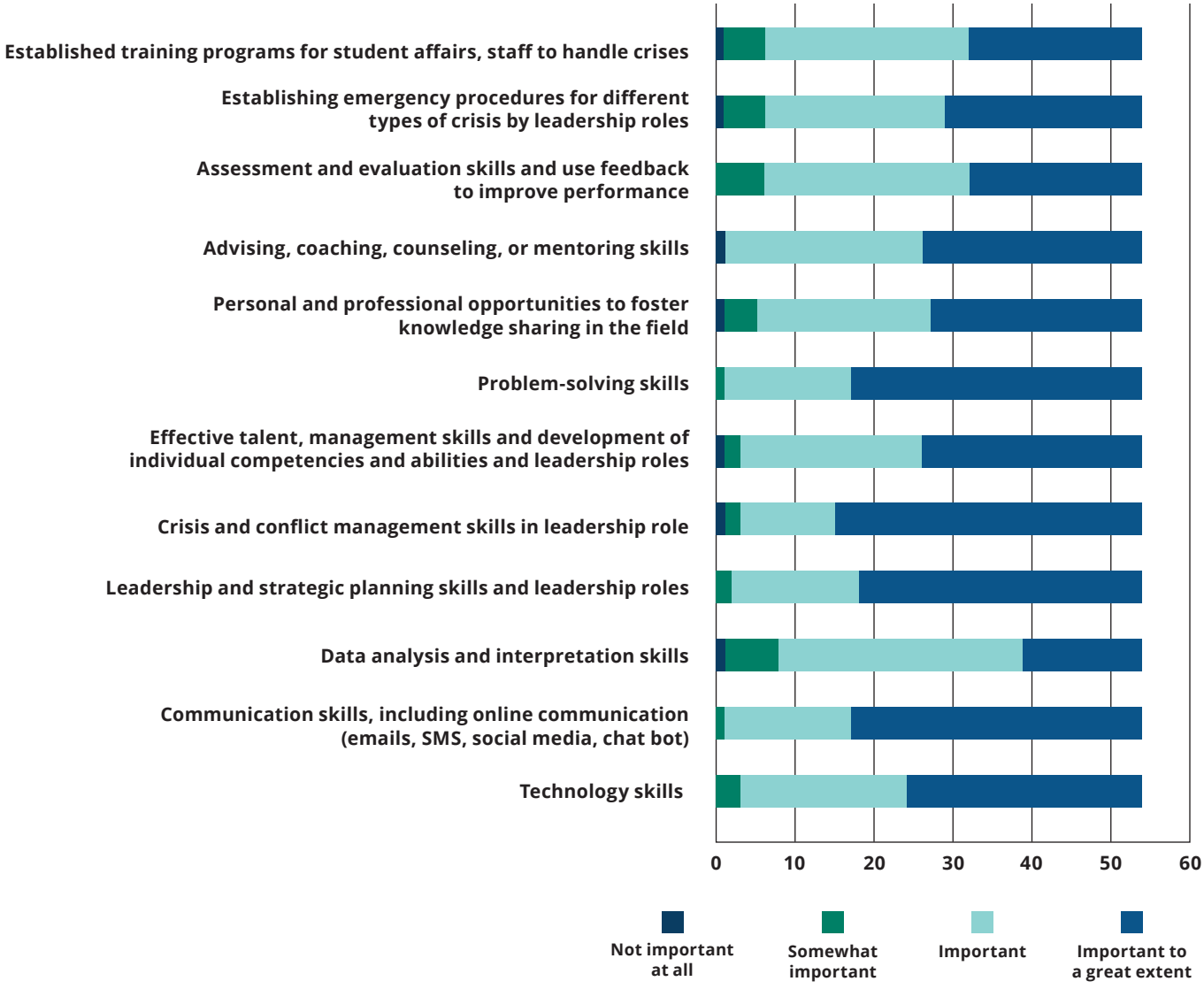
Table 2. Distribution of Institution Type (n=54)

Years of Experience	Count	% of Total
Government University	33	61%
Private Institute	15	28%
Semi-Government University	4	7%
Community College	1	2%
Private College	1	2%
Military College	0	0%

this section highlights the competencies needed to strengthen institutional effectiveness and support implementation of student-centered practices. In this study, 98% of participants (important+[1], n=53) identified communication skills as a critical competency for SAS practitioners (**Figure 1**). The same support was given to problem-solving, and advising/coaching/mentoring/counselling skills. Agreeably, 98% (important+, n=53) of SAS professionals in MENASA region believed these competencies define today's successful practitioners. A strong consensus emerged that students need more than just administrators, they need mentors. This emphasis on mentorship resonates with Law et al., (2020) who highlight that mentoring programs are increasingly seen as essential components in promoting student success. In addition, participants highlighted the need for strategic vision and leadership within the field. Over 96% (important+ n=52) said that leadership and strategic planning skills are crucial. There is also an emphasis on the importance of

1. Important+ refers to important and important to a great extent combined.

Figure 1. Professional Preparedness: To what extent do you believe a student affairs practitioner should possess the following competencies?



being crisis-ready. Given the unstable geopolitical nature of the region, nearly 89% (important+ n=48) stressed the need to establish emergency procedures and provide staff training to handle those high-pressure situations. The one area with slightly lower endorsement was data analysis and interpretation, although still supported by 85% (important+ n=46). This may suggest both recognition of its value, yet it may also indicate a possible gap in implementation readiness.

Evaluation of Services and Programs

This theme highlights the importance of incorporating student voices to inform and enhance programs and services. A total of 87% (important+ n=47) prioritized student-centered approaches in assessment practices **(Figure 2)**. Participants also highlighted the importance of strengthening campus-wide collaboration, showing a growing awareness of the need for different departments to work together and collaborate to enhance the overall delivery of programs and initiatives. In addition, the findings showed a recognition of the importance of data-driven decision making to determine the impact of programs on students (79%, important+, n=43). In contrast, the use of predictive analytics received less attention (61%, important+, n= 33), suggesting possible barriers that may still exist in the MENASA HE when it comes to Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption. Chaaban (2024) similarly found that while researchers in higher education acknowledged the importance of AI, there was no clear consensus on their readiness to implement it effectively. Barriers include technical proficiency, ethical consideration, and collective engagement.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

The need to increase campus counselling services (92%, important+, n=50) emerged as the most important factor in this thematic area. This is a clear signal that availability and access to wellbeing initiatives remain a top priority in the region. Following were calls to recruit trained mental health professionals and increase student interest in joining student clubs (85%, important+, n=46). In addition, increasing access to mental health services and providing support for students affected by crisis was deemed important (83%, important+, n=45). These results suggest a clear call to prioritize mental health infrastructure through developing preventive wellbeing programs. Provide support, increase campus-wide collaboration and develop programs to increase learning were also supported by participants (79%, important+, n=43).

Technology Adoption and Innovation

Within this thematic area, 83% (important+, n=45) of participants identified the need to provide staff and faculty with technology-related professional development and training (Figure 4). Additionally, 81% (important+, n=44), emphasized the importance of ensuring access to technology-related education and training for students and increasing strategic collaboration, reaffirming the importance of cross-collaboration to establish a robust technological integration. The findings suggest that successful technology adoption is more dependent on people's digital competencies, rather than systems and tools. Furthermore, virtual support was recognized as critical (77%, important+, n=42). Interestingly, leveraging AI received moderate support, reflecting a cautious adoption.

"At the competency level, results show that today's SAS professionals are expected to be multifaceted leaders, communicators, mentors, strategists, and crisis-ready."

Limitations and Conclusion

The findings in this survey are limited by the sample size and the uneven distribution of participants across various institution types,

impacting the overall representation of HE institutions in the region. Moreover, the survey reflects opinions of professionals at a given period of time. A solution for this limitation is to conduct an annual survey to capture evolving trends. This would allow the establishment of a consistent participant-base and longitudinal tracking of evolving trends. Despite these constraints, this survey offers valuable preliminary insights into current priorities in SAS within the MENASA region. At the competency level, results show that today's SAS professionals are expected to be multifaceted leaders, communicators, mentors, strategists, and crisis-ready. A key area for further investigation involves examining competencies through the level of job entry. Future surveys can integrate the results to support the professional development stage theory, which suggests that staff members should achieve a mastery level to successfully progress to the next level (Clark et al., 2024). In terms of evaluation of services and programs, emphasis is placed on the need to receive feedback from students directly to assess programs and initiatives. In addition, data-driven decision-making, research utilization, and mental health support for students affected by crises emerged as priorities, particularly in the context of health safety, and wellbeing. With regards to technology adoption, attention was given to advancing campus-wide collaboration. Overall, the results point to a shared understanding that advancing SAS in MENASA requires a well-integrated strategy.

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Developing a Measure for Student Well-being in Student Affairs

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ABSTRACT

Student well-being is a higher education priority, requiring culturally responsive tools that capture holistic development. This study developed and validated the Student Well-being Scale (SWS), designed to reflect Filipino students' experiences within the student affairs context. Using sequential exploratory mixed-methods, Phase 1 involved focus group discussions (n=20) to generate items from six preliminary well-being domains. In Phase 2, the initial 58-item pool was pilot-tested with undergraduate students (n=97). Exploratory factor analysis identified a five-factor structure, comprising Academic Motivation and Personal Mastery, Emotional and Mental Resilience, Spiritual and Existential Well-being, Social and Community Relations, and Physical Health and Self-Care, explaining 62.3% of the variance. The overall scale demonstrated high internal consistency (α = 0.91). The findings emphasize the multidimensional and culturally rooted nature of Filipino student well-being, highlighting the importance of spirituality and collectivist values. The SWS provides practitioners with a validated framework for developing and evaluating initiatives promoting well-being.

Introduction

Student well-being is an educational priority in the global education landscape (Hossain et al., 2023), addressing students' cognitive and socioemotional needs. Well-being is not merely the absence of distress but the presence of positive functioning and supportive relationships (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011).

Well-being aligns with the developmental mission of student affairs and services (SAS). Various offices, such as counseling, sports, and career services, are responsible for supporting student life. This integrated framework calls for evidence-based tools that can measure well-being holistically and in a culturally sensitive manner. This study aims to develop a culturally responsive and contextually validated instrument—the *Student Well-being Scale*—that captures the Filipino students' perspective on flourishing, thereby supporting the design and assessment of SAS programs that promote integral development.

Promoting Well-being through Student Affairs

SAS practitioners are uniquely positioned to foster student development. Komives and Woodard (2003) emphasize that SAS should integrate psychosocial and academic support through co-curricular programming, advising, and values formation. In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order No. 9 (2013) outlines programs that foster moral, emotional, and social well-being in universities. These institutional

commitments underscore the growing expectation for SAS professionals to engage in intentional, data-informed efforts to promote flourishing.

Need for Culturally Grounded and Contextually Relevant Instruments

Numerous standardized well-being measures exist (e.g., the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale), most of which were developed in Western contexts and may not capture the cultural nuances of student experiences in collectivist societies. This raises concerns about the instruments' ecological validity and cultural appropriateness in non-Western settings.

There is growing recognition that well-being must be assessed through culturally informed lenses. Ungar (2011) argues that resilience and well-being should be interpreted within local social ecologies, particularly in communities with collectivist traditions. In the Philippines, indigenous psychology has explored concepts such as *kapwa* (shared identity), *loob* (inner self), and *kaginhawaan* (comfort and wellness) as essential to its understanding of Filipino well-being (Enriquez, 1992; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Culturally grounded assessment frameworks are essential for ensuring that instruments capture the lived realities of local student populations (Resurreccion, 2024).

"Consistent with existing models, the results affirm that well-being encompasses not only emotional and mental health but also academic engagement, relational support, and physical care."

Opportunities in Student Affairs Measurement Development

Despite these existing models and instruments, SAS practitioners often lack access to evidence-based, developmentally appropriate, and culturally grounded tools. Current gaps include a lack of validated instruments tailored to the student affairs co-curricular context. The *Student Well-being Scale* seeks to address these gaps by offering a structured tool for capturing the multifaceted experience of well-being among Filipino university students.

Method

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design to develop and validate a culturally responsive instrument for assessing student well-being in the context of SAS. The research was conducted in two phases: qualitative exploration for item generation (Phase 1) and quantitative analysis for psychometric validation (Phase 2).

In Phase 1, four focus group discussions were conducted with 20 student volunteers using a semi-structured protocol focusing on six preliminary dimensions of well-being: physical, psychological, social, academic/mental, spiritual, and professional. Emergent themes and student language from the transcripts were used to construct the initial items. In Phase 2, pilot testing involved 97 undergraduate students (mean age = 19.6) recruited through stratified random sampling. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation. An initial pool of 58 items was constructed based on Phase 1 inputs. The items were then subjected to content validation, during which redundant and ambiguous items were revised or removed, resulting in a 48-item version.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal axis factoring with oblique rotation (Promax) was conducted to examine the factor structure.

Sampling adequacy was verified using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The reliability of the scale and its subscales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Several limitations are acknowledged. The sample was drawn from a single institution, which may affect generalizability. Future studies should conduct confirmatory factor analysis on a larger and more diverse student population. Additionally, longitudinal studies are recommended to assess the scale's sensitivity to change and its predictive validity concerning varied outcomes.

Results

The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.84, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(435) = 2{,}134.56$, $p < .001$, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. EFA revealed a five-factor structure accounting for 62.3% of the total variance. The resulting factors and sample items are:

- Academic Motivation and Personal Mastery ("I set goals and strive for excellence in my work.")
- Emotional and Mental Resilience ("I can handle setbacks without feeling overwhelmed.")
- Spiritual and Existential Well-being ("When I have problems, I turn to God for help.")
- Social and Community Relations ("I have meaningful and supportive relationships.")
- Physical Health and Self-Care ("I am conscious of my personal hygiene.")

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency values for the subscales are presented in

The overall internal consistency of the scale is acceptable ($\alpha = .91$).

Discussion

The study developed a culturally responsive instrument for assessing student well-being in the context of SAS in the Philippines. The Student Well-being Scale identified five empirically-supported dimensions: Academic Motivation and Personal Mastery, Emotional and Mental Resilience, Spiritual and Existential Well-being, Social and Community Relations, and Physical Health and Self-Care. The emergence of these factors reflects the multi-dimensional and integrated nature of Filipino students' well-being. Consistent with existing models, the results affirm that well-being encompasses not only emotional and mental health but also academic engagement, relational support, and physical care.

The inclusion of Spiritual and Existential Well-being as a distinct factor aligns with Filipino cultural values, where faith, meaning-making, and transcendence play a role in coping and

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency of the Subscales (N = 97)

Subscale	Items	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Academic Motivation and Personal Mastery	5	4.12	0.56	.87
Emotional and Mental Resilience	8	4.01	0.61	.83
Spiritual and Existential Well-being	4	4.25	0.52	.80
Social and Community Relations	6	4.18	0.60	.78
Physical Health and Self-Care	5	3.94	0.65	.76

development (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), a dimension often overlooked in Western-centric measures. Similarly, Social and Community Relations reflect collectivist tendencies prevalent in Filipino psychology, particularly the value of shared identity (Enriquez, 1992).

For SAS professionals, the validated scale provides a robust framework to inform the design and evaluation of programs and policies that support student development. The tool's multidimensional nature aligns with the co-curricular and developmental thrusts of SAS, enabling institutions to respond effectively to learners' complex needs.

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Navigating Compliance and Compassion: The Role of International Student Services in Building Global Community

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ABSTRACT

In U.S. higher education, student affairs and services (SAS) offices serve as the nexus between regulatory compliance and student support. These offices ensure adherence to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requirements while fostering inclusive, supportive environments that empower international students. This article examines how SAS professionals can integrate compliance with compassion to build global campus communities. Drawing on the author's professional experience as a Principal Designated School Official (PDSO) at Hamilton College, the article explores the principles of compassionate compliance, campus collaboration, and programmatic initiatives that enhance belonging. It argues that SAS offices can function as architects of global community, where regulatory integrity and student well-being coexist. Practical strategies, including plain-language communication, cross-campus education, and intentional programming, demonstrate how institutions can both protect legal status and nurture international students' holistic success.

Introduction

U.S. college campuses, shaped by global mobility and cross-cultural exchange, play an increasingly critical role in preparing students to become global citizens. International students contribute diverse perspectives, enrich classroom dialogue, and bridge cultural divides between their home countries and host institutions. However, their ability to thrive depends largely on the support they receive from SAS offices.

SAS professionals occupy a dual role: they safeguard institutional compliance with Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulations while ensuring international students feel valued and supported. Balancing these priorities is challenging. Excessive rigidity risks alienating students, while laxity jeopardizes legal standing. Research demonstrates that international students' sense of belonging correlates closely with institutional support and the clarity of regulatory guidance (Andrade, 2019).

This article highlights strategies for embedding compliance within a culture of care. Drawing on professional practice at Hamilton College, it emphasizes how SAS professionals can lead with empathy, partner across campus, and design inclusive programs that empower international students. In doing so, SAS offices can foster global communities where compliance and compassion work in tandem.

Understanding the Compliance Landscape

Compliance forms the bedrock of SAS responsibilities. International students on F-1 and J-1 visas must adhere to complex federal requirements, including SEVIS (U.S. Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) reporting, maintaining a full course of study, adhering to employment restrictions, and completing programs within prescribed timelines. SAS staff must also monitor travel restrictions, policy changes, and the nuances of lawful presence in a constantly shifting regulatory environment.

Legal obligations are non-negotiable, but when compliance dominates student interactions, relationships risk becoming transactional. Students may feel reduced to visa holders rather than community members. Conversely, neglecting compliance endangers both student legal status and institutional accreditation. Effective SAS practice requires striking a balance: meeting legal responsibilities through processes that are empathetic, clear, and culturally sensitive.

Compassionate Compliance: Centering the Student Experience

Compassionate compliance recognizes that every student interaction presents an opportunity to build trust. Leading with empathy acknowledges the stress students endure while navigating unfamiliar bureaucratic and cultural systems. Equally important is using transparent, plain-language communication when explaining regulatory obligations.

At Hamilton College, SAS professionals intentionally avoid jargon in communication with students. Advising sessions and orientation frame compliance not as restrictive but as enabling, helping students maintain status so they can fully engage in academic and social life. This framing transforms compliance from punitive oversight into a supportive pathway.

Cultural humility also informs advising. Terms such as "status violation" or "unauthorized employment" may hold different meanings, or none at all, in other cultural contexts. Taking time to explain these concepts fosters safety in asking questions.

An illustrative case involved a student delayed by visa processing, unable to arrive for the semester's start. Rather than terminate the SEVIS record, SAS staff collaborated with faculty and deans to arrange academic continuity while advising on the legal deferral process. Filing an updated Form I-20 ensured compliance, while compassionate advising reduced student stress. This example underscores how regulatory duties can coexist with human-centered care.

Educating and Partnering with Campus Stakeholders

SAS offices cannot achieve global community alone; collaboration with campus stakeholders is essential. At Hamilton, one priority has been educating faculty, staff, and administrators on both immigration compliance and student well-being.

Through departmental visits and training sessions, SAS professionals share practical DHS requirements while highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity. This dual approach emphasizes that campus partners' responsibilities extend beyond avoiding compliance violations—they also include fostering inclusive, supportive environments.

A successful collaboration with the Career Center illustrates this approach. Together, staff developed workshops guiding international students through job searches under visa restrictions. Students learned about Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT) regulations while gaining culturally informed networking and interview skills. This initiative not only improved compliance outcomes but also enhanced students' confidence and integration into the broader campus community.

Building Belonging through SAS Programs

SAS programming provides opportunities to reinforce both compliance and belonging. At Hamilton, orientation establishes this foundation by blending regulatory education with community-building activities. Incoming students also participate in the Multicultural Peer Mentoring Program, which pairs them with trained upper-class mentors who provide guidance on both campus resources and cultural adjustment.

Events such as *Cooking and Conversations*, cultural festivals, and *Global Dialogues* further

celebrate diversity. These programs create spaces where international and domestic students exchange ideas, share traditions, and form authentic relationships. Importantly, they are framed as central to student success, not as extracurricular entertainment.

Workshops with the Writing Center on cross-cultural communication also illustrate this integration. By addressing both linguistic and cultural challenges, SAS empowered students to thrive academically while fostering awareness among domestic peers. These initiatives demonstrate how programming can simultaneously enhance compliance and promote holistic engagement.

Theoretical Grounding: Transition and Belonging

Supporting international students during adjustment aligns with Schlossberg's Transition Theory, which emphasizes connection, support, and empowerment during change (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 2022). SAS professionals, by blending regulatory guidance with empathy and inclusive programming, embody these principles in practice.

Students navigating transitions face not only academic pressures but also cultural, social, and legal challenges. When SAS offices adopt compassionate compliance, they offer stability and support, helping students transform uncertainty into growth. This theoretical framework validates the integration of legal and emotional support as essential to student success.

Conclusion

As institutions of higher education strive to cultivate global communities, SAS offices stand at the intersection of compliance and compassion. By centering the student experience, educating campus partners, and developing inclusive programming, SAS professionals demonstrate how regulatory integrity and human connection can coexist.

The future will demand even greater attentiveness to these principles. Shifting political landscapes, evolving immigration policies, and global tensions directly affect international students' experiences. Compassionate compliance must remain a guiding philosophy, ensuring campuses remain welcoming spaces for all students, regardless of nationality.

Every advising session, SEVIS update, and program offers SAS professionals the chance to bridge cultures and build community. In this way, SAS offices do more than monitor regulations; they shape environments where international students are empowered to thrive.

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Making the Effort to Meet Halfway: How Holistic Orientation Strategies Can Be Used to Support the Success of International Teaching Assistants

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have found that the challenges faced by International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) in acclimating to teaching in foreign countries can be ameliorated by including cultural and linguistic bias training in ITA orientations. However, even if ITAs are made aware of cultural classroom differences and how they as TAs may be perceived by speaking with a foreign accent, the onus often remains on them to solely adapt and address the bias they experience from students. This article focuses on preparing the broader campus community to support ITAs. Clemson University addresses this gap by disseminating cultural context training to chemistry teaching assistants, domestic and international through a departmental session, purposefully intermingling experiences from both groups to reinforce allyship. This article includes an examination of the effectiveness of this strategy for ITA coordinators, international student support specialists, faculty advisors, academic success mentors, and teaching development offices supporting departments or students with ITAs.

Introduction

American society has a history of adhering to language structures, creating barriers that English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers must overcome to be viewed as successful and respected as experts (Lippi-Green, 2012). This discrimination regularly occurs in higher education, an entry point for many international students pursuing advanced degrees. Many international teaching assistants (ITAs) teach undergraduate students who may potentially perceive ITAs as difficult to understand, sometimes due to factors unrelated to the way their teaching assistants (TAs) speak (Rubin, 1992). Feeling unable to communicate with their assigned TA, undergraduate students might appeal to domestic TAs, complaining about not understanding what is being taught, especially if the subject matter is challenging or students are grade-focused. How this culturally complex situation is handled depends on TA expectations, relationships, and understanding.

Annually, both the ITAs and domestic teaching assistants (DTAs) in Clemson's chemistry department attend a training session presented by English Language Programs. The two-hour presentation addresses three main themes: (a) differing global educational systems and their resulting academic contexts, (b) linguistic bias and language usage, and (c) classroom culture and management strategies. Presenting to both DTAs and ITAs encourages participants to build relationships and share experiences throughout the instructional process. This practice emphasizes solidarity and allyship, encouraging TAs to act as

a unified department, supporting one another in their roles as facilitators while building topical knowledge.

Cultural Norms

Participants begin by examining culturally rooted truths and values that influence classroom behaviors and expectations. In the U.S., these cornerstones include individual rights, personal responsibility, freedom of choice, interactive learning, and independent thinking. Participants are then asked to share their experiences with values in small groups, ideally with a comparable number of domestic and international students.

At the most recent training, a notable split occurred when the TAs were asked to share what punishment for acting out in class in their home countries looked like. When one domestic student shared that they grew up fearing school suspension as a punishment, several international students laughed in surprise. When asked to explain their laughter, they shared that misbehavior in their school often resulted in corporal punishment. The idea that the worst punishment might be being sent home was surprising and benign to them. This conversation led to groups discussing additional academic experiences, such as homework norms and what constitutes a good teacher in their culture.

Language

The second phase of the training addresses linguistic bias and reverse linguistic stereotyping. Linguistic bias is a phenomenon where the brain assigns values or stereotypical traits to those who speak in certain ways. For example, we make assumptions based on specific sounds or pronunciations, which leads us to assume a speaker's ethnicity, intelligence, enthusiasm, trustworthiness, attractiveness, or education level (Zanuttini, et al., 2018). There is no inherent value associated with certain sounds; however, our judgments of linguistic features reflect our social biases. Usually, these manifest as positive bias towards sounds that are familiar to our own speech and negative bias for those sounds that are unfamiliar (Fuertes et al., 2012).

Reverse linguistic stereotyping causes listeners to assign speech styles based on the speaker's perceived identity (Ruben, 2012). Because someone looks different from the listener, the listener anticipates that they will not be able to understand the speaker, exaggerating perceived accents and lowering comprehension as a result. In a chemistry classroom setting (where some might consider chemistry a language of its own) with an ITA, these two processes combine, resulting in students' predisposition to having difficulty understanding what is said.

With this framework, participants are encouraged to make use of this understanding in their responses to students with communication-related concerns. For example, an undergraduate student who is having difficulty understanding their ITA in class approaches a DTA to vent their frustrations and ask for a new TA. The DTA can be an ally in this moment by educating the student on linguistic bias or encouraging them to bring the issue directly to their ITA to develop a joint solution (especially if they have not discussed the issue with the ITA). At the very least, the DTA can avoid reinforcing the student's assumption that the ITA is solely responsible for adjusting their communication. The DTA can instead remind the student that they also have responsibilities in the teacher-student relationship.

Teaching Strategies

The final phase of the training delivers strategies that reinforce effective teaching, simplify complex subject matter, and provide guidance on how to communicate when one has a strong accent that might be unfamiliar to their students. This serves the participants who sound different than the students they are teaching, and it also provides a refresher on best teaching practices for both ITAs and DTAs who may have limited pedagogical training. The TAs are then invited to reflect on the training and how they might adjust as TAs going forward.

While this training is designed to directly support ITAs, it also provides content and development for DTAs. One participant, a domestic student who moved to the Southeast from the Pacific

Northwest for grad school, shared that they went through an adjustment similar to that of the ITAs in acclimating to linguistic patterns and classroom expectations. While they acknowledged that their transition was not as extreme as their international peers, their reflection on their own struggles adjusting to regional dialects within the U.S. helped them empathize with the challenges ITAs navigate at American institutions.

Conclusion

This training works well because Clemson's chemistry department features a high number of both DTAs and ITAs supported by a graduate student coordinator. The right elements (TA populations, departmental need, and resources/support are in place for this program to be impactful. Departmental support is essential for the initiative's success. Without prioritizing TA onboarding and development opportunities focusing on these themes, TAs are less likely to develop an understanding of the cultural contexts, global academic styles, and linguistic nuance.

While training of this kind is most useful for TAs, anyone can benefit from the culturally contextual lessons. Application of these strategies is not limited to American institutions, chemistry programs, or staff who work with ITAs. Faculty advisors of international students can use these strategies to enhance how they mentor advisees. Also, academic success staff with this knowledge can aid undergraduates struggling to understand a TA or faculty member. Graduate schools and faculty development programs can create and implement workshops like the one described here that reach broad audiences on campus. In an increasingly globalized world, understanding, empathy, and solidarity are more important than ever to support the international members of our institutions, and holistic, community-centered development opportunities are an excellent way to pursue this goal.

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Onboarding Staff with an Intercultural Lens

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ABSTRACT

In today's globalized higher education landscape, increasing cultural diversity among students and professional staff necessitates intentional approaches to onboarding within student affairs and services (SAS). This article examines the role of intercultural onboarding as a strategic tool for fostering inclusion, belonging, and organizational excellence. It argues that effective onboarding must extend beyond assimilation into dominant institutional norms to embrace intercultural competence, mutual adaptation, and inclusive practices. Key strategies include cultural competence training, customized onboarding plans, and mechanisms for social and professional integration. Challenges such as miscommunication, unconscious bias, and institutional inertia are explored, alongside a case example of integrating international staff into residence life. Ultimately, intercultural onboarding supports staff retention, team cohesion, and the capacity to serve diverse student populations. By embedding intercultural values into onboarding, institutions move beyond performative diversity toward transformative inclusion.

Introduction

In today's increasingly globalized landscape, higher education institutions are witnessing a significant increase in the cultural diversity of both students and professional staff. This diversification brings a variety of perspectives, experiences, and practices to campus life—but it also presents new challenges, especially for staff onboarding. Within SAS , effective intercultural onboarding becomes not only a matter of organizational integration but also a vital strategy for fostering inclusion, belonging, and excellence in supporting our students (Kuffuor et al., 2024).

This article explores the complexities inherent in onboarding SAS staff from diverse cultural backgrounds. Intercultural competence, inclusive institutional practices, and continuous dialogue are essential to intercultural onboarding and leads to building high-functioning teams that can meet the evolving needs of a global student body (Deardorff & Jones, 2012).

Understanding Intercultural Onboarding

Global campuses often see teams with a variety of cultural backgrounds and interculturally focused onboarding works to intentionally address communication styles, value systems, and social norms that shape the experiences of incoming staff. Onboarding is not simply about teaching new employees to adapt to the dominant institutional culture, but rather utilizing an intercultural lens to the onboarding process. This is a cultural encounter—an opportunity for mutual adaptation between the new hire and the existing team.

The Role of Cultural Competence in Training

Foundational to effective intercultural onboarding is the development of cultural competence and should start at orientation (Liyanage et al., 2025). Cultural competence refers to the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. Onboarding programs should include formal training modules that address:

- **Cultural awareness and sensitivity:** Understanding implicit biases, ethnocentrism, and cultural assumptions (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).
- **Cross-cultural communication:** Navigating verbal and non-verbal cues, language proficiency barriers, and differing communication styles (Purnell, 2018).
- **Contextual diversity:** Recognizing how cultural backgrounds influence perceptions of authority, time, hierarchy, and collaboration (Żemojtel-Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023).

Such training benefits not only the new hire but also the existing team, fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation. These intentional trainings can help new staff members feel comfortable engaging with their colleagues in an authentic way that can increase meaningful engagement with not only their peers, but also the students.

Inclusive Onboarding Practices

Inclusive practices should be embedded throughout the onboarding process. These practices demonstrate institutional commitment to equity and signal that diverse identities are welcomed and valued. Strategies may include:

- **Customized onboarding plans:** Consider language needs, religious observances, and cultural traditions.
- **Social integration efforts:** Culturally inclusive welcome events, affinity groups, or cross-cultural dialogue forums.
- **Inclusive documentation and orientation materials:** Avoid jargon, acronyms, or country-specific references that may be unfamiliar, but can also provide a glossary of terms.

Importantly, these practices must align with broader institutional values around diversity, equity, and inclusion (Hashemi Toroghi, Denney, & Simpson, 2024), reinforcing the message that intercultural onboarding is part of a systemic commitment, not a standalone initiative.

“By embedding intercultural values into onboarding, institutions move beyond performative diversity toward transformative inclusion.”

Challenges in Intercultural Onboarding

Despite best intentions, several challenges may arise when onboarding culturally diverse staff. Common difficulties include:

- **Miscommunications or misunderstandings:** These can arise from cultural or linguistic differences (Yousef, 2024).
- **Unconscious bias:** These can come from colleagues or supervisors, which can hinder the new hire's sense of belonging (Ugoh, 2023).
- **Institutional inertia:** Longstanding norms or practices make it difficult to implement change and inclusivity (Samadi, 2024).

SAS leaders must approach these challenges with empathy, flexibility, and a problem-solving mindset. Openness to feedback and a willingness to adjust practices is essential for creating a dynamic and supportive onboarding environment.

Case Example: Integrating International Staff in Residential Life

Consider a SAS department hiring a residence life coordinator from the U.S. to a role based in Southeast Asia. While the coordinator brings a wealth of experience in student development, their approach to authority, conflict resolution, and work-life balance may differ significantly from their new department's norms.

Through intercultural onboarding, the department can:

- **Create structured dialogues:** Topics related to both working with students and peers from an intercultural lens.
- **Provide peer mentorship:** Provided for both domestic and international colleagues with an intercultural lens so that in-group norms do not make the work environment less inclusive.
- **Create intentionally inclusive spaces:** Allow the coordinator to share their perspective and introduce new approaches to student engagement.

Rather than assimilating into the dominant culture, the new hire becomes a contributor to an evolving, interculturally informed department ethos. This can help even long-standing staff learn important skills in intercultural engagement.

The Long-Term Impact of Intercultural Onboarding

Intercultural onboarding has implications far beyond the first few weeks of employment. When done well, it contributes to:

- **Higher retention and job satisfaction:** This benefits all members of the team and will lead to a more diverse staff (Mor Barak, 2015).
- **Improved team cohesion:** By celebrating intercultural diversity intentionally, there will be more opportunities for conflict resolution and greater integration of all parties.
- **Enhanced service delivery:** Staff, new and established, will be better able to cater to a diverse student body.

It also helps institutions move from performative diversity to transformative inclusion—where every staff member, regardless of background, feels empowered to lead, innovate, and belong.

Conclusion

As SAS professionals seek to create inclusive, high-impact environments for students, they must also invest in inclusive practices for their teams and that starts with onboarding. Intercultural onboarding is not a checklist—it is a strategic, relational, and ethical commitment to equity and excellence. By centering cultural awareness, mutual respect, and intentional mentorship, departments can build dynamic teams equipped to serve today's diverse student populations.

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ABSTRACT

Creating an inclusive and disability-conscious campus is the business of staff and students at Stellenbosch University (SU). In 2018, the Disability Unit (DU) initiated a six-session biannual Lead with Disability transcript-recognised program for students. It is underpinned by Kolb's (Kolb & Kolb, 2018) experiential learning cycle theory and the social model of disability. Themes such as universal access and assistive technologies are introduced. Students form allyships by developing transformative thinking. The program raises awareness on the silenced topics around disability. In addition, a Lead with Disability@work six-session series was initiated in 2024 for staff, in collaboration with the SU Human Resources Department (HR). The program equips staff with awareness, knowledge, and tools that benefit the SU community. Themes include staff and student experiences, disclosure, and universal access. Staff gain insights into best practices for understanding and supporting their colleagues and students, ensuring a more accessible and accommodating campus environment.

Introduction

Stellenbosch University (SU) is committed to agreed-on values in its SU 2040 vision (Stellenbosch University, n.d.B). Vision 2040 advances five core values: excellence, compassion, equity, respect, and accountability. Values guide and drive attitudes and behavior and were thus integral to the development of the training program. Additional to these core values are strategic themes. These themes drive our programs and planning: A thriving Stellenbosch University; A transformative student experience; Purposeful partnerships and inclusive networks; Networked and collaborative teaching and learning; Research for impact and being an employer of choice (Stellenbosch University, n.d.B). With these values and strategic themes in mind, we embarked on structured training programs, driven by student affairs and services (SAS) with Lead with Disability for students. In collaboration with HR, we extended this to staff of SU, called Lead with Disability@work. Networking and purposeful partnerships drive global community engagement.

Lead with Disability for Students

Lead with Disability for students is a six-week biannual, transcript-recognized program that started in 2018 at the DU. This program grew from 12 students in 2018 to 98 in 2024, as a response to SU becoming a disability-conscious, inclusive, and transformative campus. Through underpinnings from Kolb's experiential learning cycle theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2018), DU focused on raising campus-wide disability-consciousness.

Kolb's experiential learning cycle theory espouses that learning can be transformative as knowledge is gained (Kolb & Kolb, 2018). Learning is a continuous and reflective process that happens through experiential engaging in, for example, field trips and role-playing. Additionally, by incorporating graduate attributes of SU (Stellenbosch University, n.d.A) into Kolb's theory, students acquire skills such as being an engaged citizen, being a dynamic professional, an enquiring learner, and a caring individual. This is conducive to being a global citizen and creates an engaged and caring disability inclusive graduate. Students reflect on our common humanity and diversity. Student activities include interviewing a person with a disability to understand their daily experiences, reviewing the accessibility of a local space using universal access and design principles, and exploring ableist language and culture to identify ways to promote inclusivity.

Lead with Disability is run within a social model of disability framework (Oliver, 2009), which contributes to social justice. Program participants reflect on their broader environment, their behaviors, and thinking about disability in the greater world. In this way, allyships are formed that elicit transformative attitudes and behavior. The program raises awareness on the silenced topics around disability and espouses universal access to include human diversity. The social model shifts the focus from individual impairments to societal and environmental barriers that restrict the full participation of people. The program continues to make a meaningful impact, with a notable increase in participation from students and leaders in education, medicine and engineering. They find value in connecting the theoretical components of their academic curriculum with the social realities of disability, while acquiring practical tools and knowledge that will foster inclusive environments within their own spaces and the larger world. This has not only broadened awareness but also inspired students to incorporate disability as a theme in their academic work, including assignments and course projects.

The program is facilitated by staff with extensive experience in the disability sector. Lived experiences are shared by guest speakers and students offering reflective, engaging, and critical encounters, highlighting the diversity of human experiences. The value of the program is eloquently echoed by a participant as follows:

> As somebody who always wants to be as helpful to others as possible, the information I [learned] in this program was useful in expanding my ability to do so. Remembering that people with disabilities are all individuals and have unique needs and wants is very important…and will always be the way that I engage with any person, regardless of whether they have a disability or not. In the future… in the workplace as either an employee or employer, I would want to ensure that persons with disabilities are considered equally to others, and that their needs in terms of accessibility are provided to my best extent.

Lead with Disability@work

To advance the University's core values and aspirations, SU has committed a robust training and development framework for all staff. SU's HR offers various training and development programs for which staff members can enroll (SU, 2025).

In 2022, led by the Employment Equity office in HR, SU established a Disability Inclusion Advisory Committee (DIAC). Its aim was to advance the rights and interests of staff with disabilities and create a disability competent organization. It did this by nurturing and promoting disability competence and literacy in all members of the university community including leadership and line managers. Through the DIAC, the Lead with Disability@work program was initiated. The program was piloted at the DU (part of SAS) in 2023, and officially started with staff campus-wide in 2024, as a collaboration between HR and the DU.

The primary objective of Lead with Disability@work is to provide opportunities for staff to learn more about disability-related matters, create awareness in the workplace and of classroom context and offer staff the tools and knowledge to engage and learn how to create accessible environments. The six sessions cover topics such as staff and student experiences, disclosing disability, and the legal imperatives for inclusion. Further topics are universal access,

medical conditions, the need for compassion and accommodation, assistive devices, and service dogs on campus.

Through the program, staff have a space to voice critical concerns about disability inclusion on campus. The need for activism around disability particularly for staff, emerges often. There is a need to raise awareness on various matters such as medical conditions affecting staff and neurodiversity. Staff have raised concerns around the fragmented support available for staff with disability, and the need for a more coordinated approach. Without this coordinated approach that makes visible the support available to staff, many are left to the decisions of their line managers who may not always have the knowledge and experience of engaging disability competently. For many participants, Lead with Disability@work is a welcome, positive injection into development of a culture of inclusion. A participant reflected:

[This] has been an incredibly enriching experience, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to learn from such a diverse group of speakers. The insights shared throughout the sessions have broadened my understanding and sparked meaningful reflection, both personally and professionally. I leave this series with a greater appreciation for the issues explored, a deeper sense of connection to the broader community of practice, and renewed motivation to apply what I've learned.

Conclusion

It is encouraging to see the daily steps SU takes in creating an inclusive campus. There are still numerous barriers to break and boulders to move. Lead with Disability helps us see these boulders and inspires each of us to take action in removing them. In this way, we promote inclusive, full, and productive employment and decent work for all (UN 2030, 2015). SU values such as equity, respect, compassion, creating a transformative experience through partnerships and collaboration, can ensure a thriving university, making a local and global impact.

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International Student Engagement in U.S. Higher Education: Challenges and Supports to Involvement

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ABSTRACT

Student leadership within U.S. higher education is a focus within student affairs and services (SAS); however, when it comes to international student engagement, leadership programming is not always the most welcoming. This article shares findings from a narrative inquiry qualitative study that showcase the experiences of international graduate students in leadership positions. These experiences encompass both the challenges and supports within U.S. higher education institutions when it comes to international student engagement with leadership programming.

Introduction

U.S. higher education institutions are failing to creating systems to make student engagement and leadership more welcoming and equitable to international students. Student engagement within U.S. higher education has many benefits to both international students and higher education institutions themselves. While the benefits are clear, there are many barriers to engagement facing international students. Through past research and findings from a narrative inquiry qualitative research study focused on the experiences of eight international graduate students holding student leadership roles while studying in the United States and using pseudonyms (Vaughn, 2025), this article will share both institutional challenges and the support systems international students navigate when taking part in campus activities.

Past Research on Benefits and Challenges of Student Engagement

When it comes to the benefits of student engagement, past research on the topic has found that engaged international students have more connections with their campus and have more positive views of campus climate (Glass, 2012). International students who participate more in extracurricular activities were found to have higher rates of satisfaction with their overall university experience (Glass, 2012; Glass & Westmont, 2014). Aspects such as social groups, positive peer interactions, and supportive academic advising all lead to greater international student retention (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Engaged international students also in general have more connections with their campus and more positive views of the campus climate (Glass, 2012). When it comes to benefits to institutions, international graduate

students in particular bring new perspectives, skills, and a more global understanding of knowledge to graduate programs which can help these programs increase their academic research and development (Le & Gardner, 2010).

Benefits to international students and institutions are not always able to occur due to common challenges international students face within U.S. higher education. These include living concerns, academic concerns, socio-cultural worries, and psychological issues (Tseng & Newton, 2002). When it comes to graduate students, they have additional concerns such as building relationships with supervisors, research challenges, and financial constraints. While many of these challenges are related to adjustment challenges, there are also barriers to engagement facing international students that include international students' focus on academics, a discouraging campus culture/environment, and language barriers (Cecil & Hu, 2021). Barriers such as those related to a discouraging campus culture/environment can impact international student engagement and sense of belonging (Glass, 2012; Glass & Westmont, 2014).

Findings

The findings of a qualitative narrative inquiry study concerning leadership and engagement within the U.S. higher education environment found that aspects of experiences related to support systems, motivation, and environmental factors all played a part in being involved on campus (Vaughn, 2025).

Support Systems

One participant, Atusa, shared that they found university employees helpful when it came to learning about how to get funding for student organization events. They had a lot of support from staff working with student organization officers. When it came to peer support networks, Kancha shared that joining the student association for Nepalese students allowed them to be exposed to the institutions in ways that they might not have otherwise. However, not all students had strong support systems in place and struggled to make connections. While Ven had a very supportive department, they did not have any peers from their home culture and that made it harder for them to adapt to life in the United States. Kat struggled to build support networks within their academic program, and it took changing majors before they became aware of different support systems on campus (Vaughn, 2025).

Motivation

Motivations for the participants to become more engaged on the campus of the research site often were tied into building communities and making connections. Olivia for example has a lot of internal motivation to make a difference and help other students. However, not all participants were motivated at first to engage in leadership, Mauve for example was scared to take a leadership position, but she did feel a passion for organizing events which gave her motivation to take the position. As for participants like Kat, they wanted to get involved because they were happy and wanted to give back to the community and student organizations.

Environmental Factors

While there were worries from the participants about fitting in, generally they all have had good experiences at the research site with supportive departments and peers. Many of the participants shared experiences of microaggressions within the classroom, as well as on and around campus where they did not feel the safest or most welcome. Peer networks also played a part in participation. Some participants were the only student from their country that they knew of and others had a community of people from their home country that helped them navigate the adjustment to the U.S. Those with communities did seem to find it easier to adjust than those who had to start from the beginning. When looking at organizational/structural factors, most participants felt like the systems in place might have a learning curve, but were accessible to students who knew the processes and resources were out there. John worked hard to adapt to US culture and was able to navigate through spaces that other international students may not be welcome in due to their lack of accent. Olivia also shared that they sometimes needed to "team up" with a US student in order to be fully heard at times.

Discussion and Suggestions

This study focused on students who were successful in becoming engaged on-campus, but these experiences are not the same for all students. The participants in the study all had communities that gave them awareness of support systems on campus, but many international students are unaware of these networks if they lack a supportive academic department or peer network. Kat's experience in not connecting with the campus environment until they changed majors is an example of how students without departmental support can end up isolated. Practitioners and faculty should support international students when they want to become more engaged on campus and have more transparency on joining organizations, funding for events, etc. In closing, educators and facilitators of leadership should be more culturally relevant in encouraging campus engagement no matter the backgrounds of the students they work with. Barriers to engagement should be minimized as much as possible for international students.

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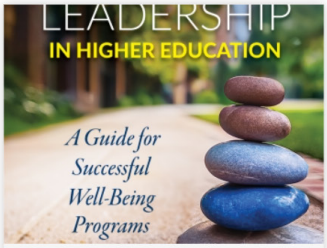
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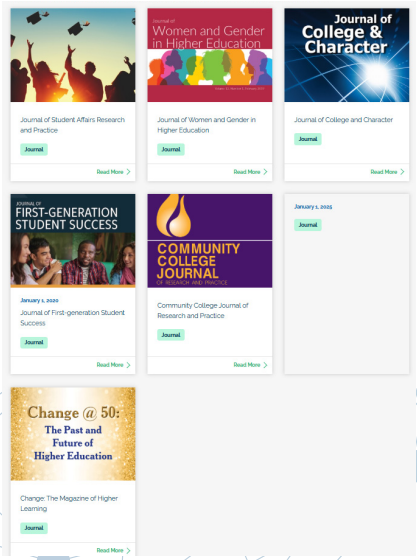
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