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Conceptualizing the Variables That Shape the International Student Experience in Higher Education

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CONCEPTUALIZING THE VARIABLES THAT SHAPE THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis Presented

By

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ABSTRACT

The period since 1990 has been marked by an accelerated pace of globalization. As a consequence, the challenge of acculturation has been more noticeable than earlier periods, where migration occurred among more similar populations. The recent migration includes the highest levels of international student exchange, with the US being the top destination. Literature on globalization, multiculturalism and diversity in higher education does not address why institutions of higher education offer different resources and programming to their international students.

Interviews conducted with educational administrators at three small liberal arts colleges in the United States, with review of documents made available to the researcher by the colleges, form the core data that is analyzed and compared to interpret the approach each institution takes toward mediating international student challenges.

The thesis examines the data collected at each college to identify and explain how: 1.) student agency, 2.) awareness and understanding, and 3.) organizational structure and alignment, affect 4.) the institutional resources and programing made available to international students at college. Finally, a conceptual model, based on an analysis of the data is developed to explain how the interaction among these four variables, in turn, determines the outcomes and experiences of international students in college. The model is presented as a tool for the analysis of institutional variation in addressing international student challenges, as well as for improving resource development and programming at institutions of higher education.

CHAPTER 1:   GLOBALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CHALLENGES

Overview

The period since 1990 has been marked by an accelerated pace of globalization, where globalization is broadly defined as the interconnectedness of nations and individuals, through exchange of goods, information and flows of people around the world. Unlike earlier periods of mass migration in the 19th and 20th centuries, migration since the 1990s (globally 250 million people) has been marked by flows of people moving from less developed countries to more advanced nations, and from more diverse cultural and religious backgrounds than earlier waves of migration (Freeman 2006, Li 2011, Pakulski et al. 2014). As a consequence, the challenge of acculturation has been more noticeable than before, where migration occurred among more similar populations (e.g. among Europeans).

This migration includes the highest levels of international student exchange, with the US being the top destination (Freeman 2006). The 2018 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange reported that the number of international students studying abroad in the United States has surpassed one million and is increasing. The top two countries of origin for international students studying in the US are China and India, respectively. Given these trends, it is clear that the benefits and challenges of international student migration and acculturation are especially relevant topics of research for US colleges today.

Various literatures suggest institutions of higher education in the United States do an inadequate job of addressing diversity in education and the needs of their international students. Colleges and universities appear to value international students for financial and reputational

purposes, but, once on campus, they expect students to navigate a range of challenges on their own. International perspectives and diversity often remain on the outskirts of the educational landscape in the form of isolated activities or study abroad programs, that are not integrated into the larger educational model.

Weaving together the literature on globalization, international student needs, multiculturalism and diversity in higher education, this paper explores how small liberal arts colleges in the United States frame their approach to mediating international student needs. This first chapter seeks to contextualize the problem by outlining how globalization is changing student demographics on college campuses, as well as identifying the new challenges this trend poses for institutions of higher education. The second chapter will discuss multiculturalism, research on minorities in higher education and the gap in literature on understanding differences in resources and programming offered to international students. The third through eighth chapters describe the methods and results of three case studies on US liberal arts colleges, present a conceptual model to outline the interaction of identified variables, and discuss the implications and limitations of this study, together with recommendations for further research.

Patterns of Globalization in Relation to Higher Education

What is New?

The period since 1990 has been marked by an accelerated pace of globalization, where globalization is broadly defined as the interconnectedness of nations and individuals, through exchange of goods, information and flows of people around the world. The 1800s saw mass migration of European citizens that continued through the early 1900s before declining during

the later 1900s (Li 2011). Today's world migration patterns present a number of significant differences (Li 2011, Pakulski et al. 2014).

Increased Diversity

Today most immigrants come from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Each of these continents alone host a variety of cultural differences. However, large percentages of immigrants from three major continents all traveling to the United States, for example, bring a whole set of nuanced challenges (Pakulski et al. 2014). A number of studies warn that with significant diversity can come a lot of conflict (Li 2011, Pakulski et al. 2014). Examples used to illustrate this point include that of mass murders in Norway, as a form of backlash terrorism (Pakulski et al. 2014). These researchers identified that religious differences between Muslim immigrants and Christian locals in Europe created a lot of political conflict, including debates about assimilation or expected integration during which some politicians claimed "illegal" immigrants were "abusing the system" (Pakulski et al. 2014). In France, politics became framed as "anti-immigrant" or "pro-assimilation" (Pakulski et al. 2014). Greece saw the rise of extremist groups like Neo-Nazis begin to gain popularity (Pakulski et al. 2014). Yet, these same sources also highlight that this is not the only possible outcome. These aggressive political debates are a result of mismanagement of diversity. Pakulski et al. (2014) proposes that countries need different management strategies for diversity, or in other words, multiculturalism. Using Australia to illustrate this concept, Pakulski et al. (2014) argued these political debates do not have to build up to such high levels of tension if approached differently - as Australia appears "immune to radical backlashes" due to its "integrative, reciprocal and respectful" approach to multiculturalism.

Economic Development

Another characteristic that distinguishes migration in the 21st century is the tendency of migrants to move from less economically developed countries to more economically developed regions including the United States (Li 2011, Pakulski et al. 2014). This trend is made possible by two other factors: 1.) demographics - fertility in developing countries is declining below replacement levels, while the population is aging (Li 2011); and 2.) demand - the first situation is creating an increase in the demand for highly skilled foreign immigrants. In fact, shortages of skilled workers in North America led the US and Canadian governments to amend immigration laws, which have created new opportunities for skilled international workers to immigrate, while creating barriers for less skilled immigrants (Li 2011). Among the new opportunities for skilled immigrants is that of pursuing a degree in higher education.

Statistics

The United States is the largest market for international students studying abroad. As part of the globalization trend, the past 20 years has seen the number of international students studying in the US more than double from 481,280 students in 1997 to 1,094,792 students in 2017 (IIE 2018). Significant benefits accrue to the US economy as a result. In 2017 alone, international student tuition, room and board and other expenses contributed $42.4 billion to the U.S. economy (Morris, 2018). Of the one million international students in the US, the largest numbers come from China (321,625 students), then India (142,618), followed by South Korea (56,186 students) and Saudi Arabia (54,709) (UNESCO 2017). These countries have remained the top four sources of international student immigration to the United States for many years (Desilver 2013).

Despite the consistent increase in the number of international students migrating to the United States over the past decade, since 2016 the annual rate of growth has declined from 10% in 2015, to 1.5% in 2018 (2018 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange). Literature on international student barriers and immigration discuss how Trump Administration policies, which have impacted international student migration have contributed to the decline - such as the imposition of visa restrictions and a travel ban for specific Muslim countries (Farnsworth 2018, Rose-Redwood 2017).

However, immigration is not the only barrier international students face when traveling to another country. Literature on education and psychology have documented a wide variety of issues that challenge international students when studying abroad.

Identifying International Student Challenges

"International students" in the United States are generally students of other nationalities studying abroad in the U.S. The act of going to another country and living there for one to four or more years comes with a whole set of challenges. Challenges can take on a variety of forms: from getting accustomed to living in an environment where people speak a new language, to adjusting to a different academic system with unfamiliar expectations regarding what to do in the classroom, to how to relate to professors, how to navigate pop culture, religious practice in daily life, different styles of dress and meanings when greeting people. Such challenges can be difficult to adapt to and lack of adjustment can negatively affect anything from a student's academic adjustment to a student's mental health (Glass and Westmont 2014, Baklashova et al. 2016, Farnsworth 2018, Poyrazli and Grahame 2007, Poyrazli et al. N.A., Smith and Khawaja 2010, Wu et al. 2015). Different fields have studied the international student experience from

various perspectives. Some psychological research has focused on the belongingness international students feel on their college campuses (Glass and Westmont 2014). While other educational research has focused more on the need for structural or systemic changes to mediate international student stressors (Poyrazli and Grahame 2007, Wu et al. 2015). For the purpose of this study, I have compiled and identified 6 main types of stressors, or challenges, that international students face when studying abroad: 1.) language proficiency; 2.) social, emotional or psychological challenges; 3.) cultural differences; 4.) academic differences; 5.) immigration and legal issues; and 6.) site specific challenges. It is important to note that some challenges (e.g. beliefs about how to address a professor in a classroom) may be categorized under more than one category (e.g. academic difference and cultural difference). Categories are meant to be descriptive, rather than mutually exclusive. The following section will outline each category more specifically.

1. Language Proficiency

English can be taught in formal, often homogenous settings and students may have different levels of exposure to and proficiency in English. As a result, it can be challenging for international students to understand different accents, rates of speech and pronunciation. Many students have to invest significant time to improve their English in order to study more effectively (Poyrazli and Grahame 2007; Smith and Khawaja 2010; Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015). Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) cite a study that found that language proficiency is positively correlated with freshmen academic performance.

2. Social, Emotional & Psychological Challenges

Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) found that international students face feelings of isolation from their predominantly domestic classmates in multiple spaces including the classroom, student led clubs and social spaces more generally. Differences in communication can create awkwardness and present challenges in informal social settings (Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015). International students also experience prejudice and discrimination in both academic and social contexts (Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015). One student interviewed explained that domestic students "do not like international students. I am not sure why." But "I am still willing to share my background" (Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015). It seems international students want to relate to domestic students, but often feel that the sentiment is not reciprocated. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) argue that social adjustment is critical to consider when discussing international student life in college because lack of social support frequently leads to lower academic achievement and negative psychological experiences including tension, confusion and depression. International students, in comparison to their domestic counterparts, do not have similar resources to combat the stress of negative psychological experiences (Poyrazli and Grahame 2007). When combined with a lack of resources, stress - including feelings of homesickness, disorientation, depressive reactions and feelings of isolation, alienation and powerlessness - can lead to depression or anxiety (Poyrazli and Grahame 2007). The research suggests that it is imperative that colleges consider the mental health of their international students. Nevertheless, doing so can be complex. Although psychological services may be offered in institutions of higher education, lack of awareness, stigma and varying cultural beliefs about mental health may prevent students from seeking support (Farnsworth 2018; Smith and Khawaja 2010).

3. *Cultural Differences*

International families frequently have different expectations of their children's college experience, than those of most domestic families. Some international students, for example, can feel added pressure to perform well academically due to the high costs of study abroad, financial and otherwise (Farnsworth 2018; Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015). Studies also point out that students can experience culture shock due to differences in beliefs and value systems between home and host cultures (Farnsworth 2018; Hanassab & Tidwell 2002; Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015). These differences can encompass anything from variation in social values (Smith and Khawaja 2010) to dissimilar notions of punctuality (Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015).

4. *Navigating Academic Norms*

Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) found that international students can find it difficult to interact with professors. One interviewee shared that "in Korea, it is not acceptable to interrupt a professor's speaking" (Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015). The student had tried raising their hand as a strategy that would allow class participation, without violating cultural norms that discourage students from "interrupting" their professor. Yet, the student often found that this strategy did not work, as it would often go ignored or unacknowledged when in competition with domestic students who were comfortable starting conversations with the professor without raising their hand. Other studies found similar patterns (Poyrazli and Grahame 2007). Students also express that the grading systems and writing norms are different in host countries, and that this difference takes time to adjust to (Baklashova et al. 2016, Poyrazli et al. N.A., Wu et al. 2015): "How they graded the paper was very different from what I knew. For example, they wanted me to write my

idea in a more direct way, rather than in a sophisticated way" (Wu, Garza and Guzman 2015).

5. Immigration & Legal Issues

Immigration rules and visa requirements are a primary concern for all international students (Hanassab & Tidwell 2002), though specific concerns can vary. Post 9/11, the United States shifted their immigration policy to create more barriers of entry for people originating from predominantly Muslim countries, creating a legal challenge for international students of affected nationalities (Farnsworth 2018, Poyrazli et al. N.A.). Additionally, student visas place restrictions on jobs, limiting international students to work on campus only. This can contribute to the financial stress of international students, if they are unable to find a job, or are forced to work inconvenient shifts (e.g. late hours of the early morning) (Farnsworth 2018, Poyrazli et al. N.A.).

6. Specific Challenges

One study (Poyrazli and Grahame 2007) found that international students felt the need for transportation services for everyday purposes (e.g. for purchasing groceries, clothing and other supplies). This may be a more specific need due to the fact that the institution reviewed had a graduate program. This may be less applicable to universities or colleges with on-campus cafeterias and undergraduate students that do not yet have to balance studies with daily life with a spouse or a family.

The Problem: This Study

Analysis of the Literature

The literature on international student stressors helps identify the challenges international students face when coming to the United States to complete higher education. This literature also speaks to a greater reality that can be summarized as follows: 1.) despite the fact that international students have been coming to study in the United States for decades, the cultural challenges they confront have remained significant; 2.) categorizing students as "international" , both defines ingroup identity by the fact that they are all "foreign", while also minimizing cultural diversity within this group; and 3.) "international" students studying at institutions of higher education appear to be expected to overcome the majority of stressors identified in the literature on their own.

The Gap

While the literature proposes considerations for institutions to take into account - should they be interested in addressing "international student stressors" - it also leaves a number of questions unanswered. It is clear that institutions have found international students financially valuable. What is unclear is whether institutions actively value the cultural diversity that international students bring to U.S. campuses or the extent to which international students can contribute to strengthening the process of globalization and its role in education. More importantly, however, it does not address the variation in available resources and programming across institutions or identify and explain the variables that influence the creation or elimination of resources and programming.

My Inspiration

      As an international student, myself, who was born and raised outside the United States with one American parent, I have ties to both international and domestic cultural contexts. My experience working with these challenges as a freshman in college in the United States motivated me to take on student leadership and become president of the International Student Club at Bates College for two years in an effort to create a broader social network among international students and develop new resources that would allow students to navigate the challenges of attending college in the U.S. (e.g. orientation for international students). These experiences have allowed me to observe the differences in perception between international and domestic students, as well as the experiences and challenges they face at college in the United States. My personal experience with this topic has inspired me to continue to pursue this topic in my academic work within sociology.

This Study

      This study aims to explain the variability in resources and programming offered to international students across different institutions of higher education. Chapter 1 presents an overview on how changes in the patterns of globalization have increased the supply and demand for international students in higher education, as well as the challenges such students typically face. Chapter 2 discusses the literature on multiculturalism, diversity and minority students. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in creating and analyzing the three case studies. Chapters 4 analyzes the differential resources and programming offered to international students at the three colleges observed. Chapters 5 and 6 of the study discuss how four variables interact: 1.) student agency, 2.) awareness and understanding, 3.) organizational structure and alignment,

and 4.) resources and programming, to determine the outcomes and experiences of students at institutions of higher education. In Chapter 7, the author presents a conceptual model that emerges from an analysis of the data, to explain the interactions among these variables and their outcomes. Implications are discussed with examples from the three higher educational institutions observed. The conclusion in Chapter 8 summarizes the main argument of the thesis and considers the limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: MULTICULTURALISM, DIVERSITY & MINORITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Overview

An expansive literature highlights systemic inequity in higher education. Minority groups face unequal access (Chambers 2005, Fletcher et al. 2003, Gurin et al. 2002, Iverson 2005, Michalski et al. 2017, Shirvani 2010), display low retention rates (Brooms 2018, Fletcher et al. 2003, Fortson 1997, Hunn 2014, Michalski et al. 2017), lack resources (Brooms 2018, Fortson 1997, Michalski et al. 2017) and must navigate numerous additional challenges to graduate, with little support. As a result, research studies have called on institutions of higher education to change their education models. Some of these efforts have resulted in new programs created with the intention of working specifically with ethnic minority groups to support a variety of areas including: academic performance (Brooms 2018, Shirvani 2010), academic skills and self-concept (Fortson 1997), educational experiences (Brooms 2018, Gurin et al. 2002) and challenges to socialization and inclusion (Fletcher et al. 2003, Gurin et al. 2002, Hunn 2014). Despite such efforts, the research concludes that these programs are often flawed due to three main tendencies: 1.) programs are "designed and implemented without clear understanding of the unique academic and psychosocial needs" (Fortson 1997) of minority students (Fortson 1997); 2.) "well-intentioned attempts to create a more inclusive campus may unwittingly reinforce practices that support exclusion and inequity" (Iverson 2005); and 3.) efforts are not extensive enough (Chambers 2005, Geoffrey et al. 2000, Guo and Jamal 2007, Otten 2003, Shirvani 2010). Overall, the research shows evidence that programs do make a difference (Brooms 2018,

Shirvani 2010). Criticism of these inititiaves argues that, while action is critical, further efforts to develop, expand and improve such programs is needed.

In this chapter, I outline literature on minority groups in higher education, specifically focusing on discussion of diversity, multiculturalism and minorities. I highlight the gap in the literature relevant to understanding variation in programming and resources for international students in higher education.

The literature on diversity and ethnic minorities in higher education highlights three main issues: 1.) access, 2.) retention and 3.) inclusion. The following section will outline these issues and explore definitions of diversity and minorities in the US context.

Diversity & Multiculturalism: Research within Higher Education

Groups of different racial and ethnic backgrounds do not have equal access to education (Chambers 2005, Fletcher et al. 2003, Gurin et al. 2002, Iverson 2005, Michalski et al. 2017, Shirvani 2010). Yet, as the demographics of the United States change, diversity is increasing - as illustrated in the context of global migration patterns in the previous chapter. This trend is also true in that populations historically considered ethnic minorities within the United States have increased in size over time. In 2010 the United States Census Bureau looked at how population distribution by race had changed over the 50-year period between 1940 and 2010 and found that the percentage of White people had decreased by 17%. A Pew Research study published in 2016 predicted that "the United States will not have a single racial or ethnic majority by 2055" (Cohn and Caumont, 2016). Even when specifics differ, other research predicts similar demographic shifts in the coming decades (Carnevale and Fry 2000). Although these studies do not consider how the Trump Administration or the COVID-19 pandemic influence these patterns, the

sustained increase of non-white immigrants over recent decades shows that the American population is diversifying at ever higher rates - making the issue of access to higher education ever more relevant.

Although the challenges US minorities and international students face differ, there are similarities on the surface level. The literature identifies that different groups of students face a variety of challenges due to a larger problem of inequality. In discussions of diversity and minorities in higher education, research considers different populations including students whose parents did not attend postsecondary education (Michalski et al. 2017), students of low-income backgrounds (Michalski et al. 2017, Shirvani 2010), students with immigrant status (Michalski et al. 2017), students from single-parent or other "non-traditional" families (Michalski et al. 2017), students of First Nation ancestry (Michalski et al. 2017), students with disabilities (Michalski et al. 2017, Shirvani 2010), students across gender (Fortson 1997), students of different cultural backgrounds (Chambers 2005, Guo and Jamal 2007, Krishnamurthi 2003, Otten 2003, Tiezni 2007) and students of different racial or ethnic backgrounds (Brooms 2018, Chambers 2005, Fletcher et al. 2003, Fortson 1997, Geoffrey et al. 2000, Gurin et al. 2002, Guo and Jamal 2007, Hunn 2014, Shirvani 2010, Tiezni 2007). Of these different identified minorities, there is a large literature that focuses on Black or African American students in higher education (Brooms 2018, Fortson 1997, Hunn 2014) and, within this context, also literature specifically on Black or African American male students (Brooms 2018).

While each of these minorities may have unique or intersectional characteristics, they share some common challenges. The most significant concerns highlighted by the research include: the issue of low retention rates of African American students and other ethnic minorities both in higher education generally (Brooms 2018, Fletcher et al. 2003, Fortson 1997, Michalski

et al. 2017) and at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Hunn 2014), low academic performance (Brooms 2018, Shirvani 2010), lack of resources (Brooms 2018, Fortson 1997, Michalski et al. 2017), lack of academic skills and self-concept (Fortson 1997),poor educational experiences (Brooms 2018, Gurin et al. 2002) and challenges to socialization and inclusion (Fletcher et al. 2003, Gurin et al. 2002, Hunn 2014). Some of these issues are more pertinent to certain ethnic minorities than others.

In reference to these challenges, the literature has advocated that institutions take action and address these matters at an institutional level, at a state level and at a national level (Brooms 2018). The research has called for structural changes to: improve access (Chambers 2005, Fletcher et al. 2003, Gurin et al. 2002, Iverson 2005, Michalski et al. 2017, Shirvani 2010), actively build community or support systems and encourage student-adult mentoring (Brooms 2018, Chambers 2005, Michalski et al. 2017, Fletcher et al. 2003, Gurin et al. 2002), create a more inclusive campus climate (Fletcher et al. 2003, Geoffrey et al. 2000, Gurin et al. 2002, Hunn 2014, Michalski et al. 2017), enhance academic performance (Brooms 2018, Fortson 1997, Shirvani 2010), increase diversity in the student, faculty and staff population (Chambers 2005, Geoffrey et al. 2000, Michalski et al. 2017) and incorporate diversity in the curriculum (Chambers 2005, Krishnamurthi 2003).

Research shows evidence that programs do make a difference in addressing these challenges (Brooms 2018, Shirvani 2010). Yet this is just the beginning. In fact, research identifies that programs created to address the challenges of minority groups are often flawed because of three main tendencies: 1.) programs are "designed and implemented without clear understanding of the unique academic and psychosocial needs" (Fortson 1997) of minority students (Fortson 1997), 2.) "well-intentioned attempts to create a more inclusive campus may

unwittingly reinforce practices that support exclusion and inequity" (Iverson 2005) and 3.) efforts are not extensive enough (Chambers 2005, Geoffrey et al. 2000, Guo and Jamal 2007, Otten 2003, Shirvani 2010). Much of the literature (Chambers 2005, Fortson 1997, Geoffrey et al. 2000, Guo and Jamal 2007, Iverson 2005, Krishnamurthi 2003, Otten 2003, Shirvani 2010) highlights the importance of assessing institutional initiatives in order to measure the impact of and continue to improve such efforts.

International students, when grouped together and defined by the common characteristic of holding a foreign passport, are viewed as a minority group on college campuses. However, this definition does not accurately represent the intersectional identities of international students. Significant diversity exists within this group. Additionally, racial diversity can allow different international students to identify with racial minorities or majorities existing within the United States, regardless of their racial status - as part of a minority or majority - in their home country. International students can, thus, maintain intersectional identities being grouped both together as a minority and separately as part of larger racial minorities or majorities existing within the United States.

Institutions must learn to acknowledge this intersectionality and continue to develop ways of addressing the lack of cultural, racial and general diversity and inclusion in higher education. In order to guide these efforts, various researchers contribute suggestions to this ongoing dialogue. Geoffrey et al. (2000) offers the following distinction. Ethnic diversity increases the possibilities of a classroom, which can enhance educational outcomes, and is therefore "essential, but not sufficient for creating the most effective educational environment" (Geoffrey et al. 2000:1). Thus, increasing access and having more racial and ethnic diversity in the student, faculty and staff of an institution of higher education is only the first step and not the

end goal of creating a more inclusive education system for all students. Gurin et al. (2002), builds on this idea arguing that policies like affirmative action and diversity efforts generally are not only important in terms of increasing access, but also essential in terms of fostering students' academic development and social growth. Their paper also highlights the "educational and civic importance of informal interaction among different racial and ethnic groups during the college years" (Gurin et al. 2002:330) and expands on how peer interactions support cognitive growth and identity construction (Gurin et al. 2002). Together, these arguments explain why a diverse student population is fundamental in higher education. Otten (2003) suggests that the value of diversity and intercultural learning at institutions of higher education remains vague beyond mission statements. Otten continues with a discussion about study abroad programs to elaborate why experiences of diversity are critical to higher education in fostering intercultural learning:

> "The outcome of intercultural learning is intercultural competence, a long-term change of a person's knowledge (cognition), attitudes (emotions), and skills (behavior) to enable positive and effective interaction with members of other cultures both abroad and at home (Bennett, 1993; Dignes & Baldwin, 1996). It results from the experience of differences that causes cognitive irritation, emotional imbalance, and a disruption of one's own cultural worldview." (Otten 2003:15)

Otten (2003) emphasizes that institutions cannot assume that intercultural encounters inherently increase the intercultural competence of students. Designing structures that foster intercultural competence requires much awareness and intentionality. The academic and social benefits of fostering this successfully are abundant (Krishnamurthi, 2003).

Krishnamurthi (2003), begins to offer a different view by combining the work of many researchers to create a theoretical outline of how internal and external variables that shape institutions of higher education interact and how professionals can approach diversifying education. Krishnamurthi's (2003) research contextualizes diversity within a greater discussion

of multiculturalism in education before outlining relevant theories that provide a framework for understanding what variables need to be developed in order to cultivate a more effective, inclusive and equitable postsecondary curriculum.

First off, what is multiculturalism and how does it relate to diversity? Krishnamurthi (2003:263-264) quotes Morey & Kitano:

> "[Multiculturalism]...seeks to promote the valuing of diversity and equal opportunity for all people through understanding of the contributions and perspectives of people of differing race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and physical abilities and disabilities. A multicultural curriculum provides a more comprehensive, accurate, intellectually honest view of reality; prepare all students to function in a multicultural society, and better meet the learning needs of all students … (Morey & Kitano, 1997)."

While the word "diversity" in higher education is often used as if it were synonymous with ethnic diversity specifically, Krishnamurthi, Morey and Kitano propose "multiculturalism" as a concept that encompasses multiple, if not embracing all forms, of diversity – including and stemming beyond race and ethnicity, and touching on the multitude of ways that humans can differ across the globe: of which cultural and religious diversity can be among the most significant. Despite not being a comprehensive list of all forms of diversity, other variables such as socioeconomic status are also implicitly among this list. Using the concept of multiculturalism as a means of encompassing different forms of diversity from a perspective of understanding people and mutual learning in order to gain a more complete worldview, Krishnamurthi (2003) expands on Morey and Kitano's (1997) ideas of creating a multicultural curriculum to outline the various levels of the educational system that shape and reshape an institution's practices. However, this research specifically targets an institution's curriculum and, thus, contributes less to the discussion of resources and programming.

Individual research papers tend to either focus on studying a particular minority (i.e. African American male students) or discuss diversity or multiculturalism more generally, referring to many minority groups. The literature does not clearly merge these two lenses to define whether institutions of higher education should approach different minority groups individually, collectively or both when designing resources and programming for students. Thus, the research presents a fragmented view of how institutions should approach designing structural support for students.

While much of the literature on minority groups, diversity and multiculturalism speaks little of international students specifically, the research does inform the broader argument that diversity, and international students within that, greatly enhance learning and should be incorporated more inclusively in the design and structure of higher education.

The literature shows evidence that diversity and multiculturalism have begun to be more highly valued in higher education. For example, research begins to emphasize a critical need to understand the unique characteristics of different minority groups. Existing efforts to address these challenges need more attention and development. In the case of international students, intersecting identities must also be considered. Incorporating diversity and multiculturalism at all levels of education allows valuable opportunities to engage with learning on a deeper level in ways that sustain academic, social and personal growth. However, despite advocating for the need of specific resources for and greater inclusion of minorities in higher education, and perhaps with that international students, this literature does not offer insight into the variation in resources and programming available to international students specifically.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Institutions of higher education vary a lot in size, curriculum and geographic location. Given limited time and resources, I chose to focus on three liberal arts colleges of relatively similar size in the United States. Each have undergraduate populations of 1,000 to 2,000 students, of which at least 5% are international. This choice is intended to minimize the variability of extraneous factors and allow focus on the internal variables of small U.S. liberal arts colleges with a similar percentage of international students. Future studies can expand the sample to different kinds of schools including public, large or research-oriented institutions. These three schools are located on the East and West Coast of the United States. I selected them primarily because I believed, ahead of time, that they would reflect important variations in their approach to international students, and I had contacts at each.

Treating each institution as a case study, I conducted interviews with the head of international student services, student services and other staff members when deemed useful or recommended. See Appendix for interview questions. Beyond interviews, I asked the head of international student services for sources related to the resources and programming their department or institution provides for international students. This included handouts, presentations, orientation, program descriptions, and events.

Contact information for the head of international student services, student services and other staff members at each institution was gathered using information available on college websites. Each contact was sent an email (see Appendix for Initial Email) requesting an interview. In cases where no response was received electronically after 3-7 days, I called the office phone numbers

provided online to request an interview using the same information. After interviews, I sent a follow-up email thanking the interviewee for their time and requesting textual or visual sources including presentations, pdfs or handouts used for programming or events (see Appendix for Request for Resources Email).

All of the data gathered on each institution was collected to form a case study of what each institution offers its students, with over one hundred double-spaced pages of transcripts and over seventy pages of information from webpages, presentation slides and handouts. Interviews were first recorded using a phone and later transcribed using Transcribe – Speech to Text, an application downloadable from the Apple Application Store, that uses algorithms to transcribe audio to text. I then reviewed and corrected the transcripts to match the audio, as the algorithm does not interpret the audio perfectly. Later I reread the transcripts multiple times, highlighting and making notes on different patterns and themes that emerged from the interviews. For example, in the first read I highlighted all the descriptions pertaining to resources and programming offered at each institution. Next, I reread the transcripts to capture critical interviewee opinions or comments, further annotating strengths, weaknesses and challenges to the structure, or work of the department or institution. On a final read through, I highlighted and categorized the themes that stood out to me as being unique to each college. Taken together these annotations showed emerging patterns that were categorized and recategorized to identify the key variables that appear to explain the differences in interviewee opinion or commentary and the ways in which each institution interacts with the categorized resources and programming. The variables and interactions observed are described in the following chapters and outlined in the conceptual model in Chapter 7.

For the purposes of this study, I define "international students" to encompass what the institutions interviewed call their "international community". This definition includes students on F-1 visas, dual (triple or more) citizens,students with US passports that grew up outside of the United States, non-US passport holding students who received education in the United States prior to college, US students born to foreign parentsfirst generation US-citizens and generally any student who self-identifies with the international community.

An initial analysis of the data for each institution was made to identify the resources and programming offered by each. Then the data was categorized to determine which of the six international student challenges cited in the literature review is addressed by each college, to describe how each institution approaches mediating each of these challenges. Table 1, included in Chapter 4, was created to visually depict the categorization of resources by challenge and institution. A more indepth written analysis in Chapter 4 further describes the types of resources that each institution provides to mitigate the six identified student challenges.

Next, the similarities and differences in organizational structures are analyzed across all three institutions in regard to the offices responsible for delivering international student resources and programming. Descriptions of organizational structure and design at each institution are provided in Chapter 5. This is followed in Chapter 6 by a description and comparison of the awareness and understanding of international student experiences by student service providers or other external offices at the three colleges. Chapter 7 posits a conceptual model to describe the interactions among the variables described in Chapters 5 and 6 and their affect on resources and programming, as well as on student experiences and outcomes. Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes

the main argument of the thesis and states the limitations of the study, along with suggestions for

future research.

CHAPTER 4: RESOURCES AND PROGRAMMING

What resources do institutions create to mediate the challenges international students face in college? Table 1 (on the following page) categorizes resources by institution and by the challenge they address. The following section outlines how different institutions approach the same challenge.

Concerning Table 1

The goal of this table was to outline the structural resources provided by each college to address the challenges international students face at institutions of higher education as informed by the literature (i.e. programming, events, services). One-on-one student appointments were not counted towards events or programming, as they depend on individuals taking initiative and they vary in content. Orientation workshops were categorized separately by what challenge they addressed in this table. All orientation programming included in the table refers specifically to *international student* orientation programs. Orientation leaders were only categorized as addressing social challenges, as they are not explicitly responsible for addressing cultural differences, academic differences or other challenges and may only do so informally if the social relationship develops. Mentorship programs are instead categorized as addressing social challenges, cultural differences and academic differences, because their responsibility or purpose is broader. Student led clubs are also listed under both social and cultural categories since international student clubs have both a social and a cultural purpose. Events initiated and led by student clubs are not included in the table (e.g. potluck dinner, movie night). Information on informal structures, or additional detail, is provided in the discussion. Resources listed in more

Table 1. Challenges Addressed in Programming or Events Across Various Institutions of Higher Education

	College A	College B	College C
Language Proficiency		1. Language Program (2-14 students per generation) 2. Language Immersion Exchange Program (host)	
Social Challenges	1. Student Led Club 2. Resident Assistant training (RAs meet international freshmen) 3. Orientation Activities	1. Orientation Leaders 2. Student Led Club 3. Orientation Info. Session 4. "Reunion" after Orientation 5. Friday Coffee Hour (open space in office lounge) 6. International Education Week (thematic week) 7. Mental Health Activity (awareness, normalization) 8. Resident Assistant training (awareness, student experiences, mental health + stigma)	1. Mentorship Program 2. Student Led Club 3. "Quality of Life" workshops 4. Resident Assistant training (awareness, inclusive language, mental health + stigma) 0. Cross-Cultural Learning Community (mixed nationality thematic dorm)
Cultural Differences	1. Annual Dinner (international students cook for all) 2. Orientation Session 0. Student Led Club	1. Sexual Assault Awareness & Prevention Orientation Information Session 2. Annual Dance with Performances (students perform) 3. Annual Festival (food, music, student led booths) 0. Student Led Club	1. Orientation Info. Session (transitions, etc.) 2. Annual Festival (food trucks, student led booths) 3. Cross-Cultural Dialogues (thematic discussions) 4. Cross-Cultural Learning Community (mixed nationality thematic dorm) 0. Mentorship Program 0. Student Led Club 0. Resident Assistant training (awareness, inclusive language, mental health + stigma)
Academic Differences	1. Orientation Academic Panel	1. Mentioned in Orientation Info. Session	1. Orientation Info. Session (high school vs. college) 0. Mentorship Program
Immigration + Legal Issues	1. Orientation Session 2. Employment workshop (for seniors) 2. Tax workshop	1. Orientation Info. Session 2. Employment workshop	1. Orientation Info. Session 2. Employment workshop 3. Tax workshop
Site Specific Challenges	1. Winter Shopping Trip (with financial aid)		1. Winter workshop (how to dress, have fun, mental health)

* Note: X-axis categorizes resources and programming by the institution that offers them, while the y-axis categorizes the same by what challenge they address.

than one category are recorded as a number above zero, when they are listed in the most pertinent category on the table (i.e. mentorship program, student led club), and recorded as zero when listed a second or third time in potentially less pertinent categories. Numbering on the table is intended to reflect the quantity of resources designed to address specific challenges.

Language Proficiency

Written, formal language and spoken, colloquial language are often significantly different. How can an international student improve their written skills for an essay or their oral skills for a presentation?

College B

College B offers a language program that allows two to fourteen incoming students, who are less proficient in English than their regular applicants, to study and graduate from their institution - regardless of whether they are international or domestic. The program requires that students take a series of five courses in their first year designed to help students "polish up their academic English". College B also offers a language immersion program that allows international high school or university partners to send groups of international students to study English and American culture for three or four weeks. (Such courses do not count towards college credit).

Based on this information, it appears that College B has identified English language proficiency as a barrier to access to higher education and has created a program, for a small number of students, to address it. They also value maintaining partnerships with institutions based in other countries and host other institution's students in their classrooms.

College A and C

In contrast, neither College A or C offer programming to improve the English language proficiency of their incoming international students. The lack of resources to address language proficiency suggests that international students lack the structural support to mediate such challenges at these colleges.

<u>*Social Challenges*</u>

International students live abroad for an average of four years in college. How does one learn and adjust to different social norms or overcome the psychological challenges that come with living in a different culture, away from home?

College A

In previous years at College A, student led clubs formed the main structure that mediated social challenges. In the last academic year (2019-2020), two programs were added. First, the international student club designed and implemented the first international student orientation program offered by the college in over three years. Second, the head of international student services was asked to provide training on international student challenges to resident assistants (RAs). The training mainly consisted of resident assistants being given the opportunity to meet and talk to international freshmen for five to ten minutes. The intention of this conversation was to increase the exposure and interaction between international students and RAs.

The data described suggests that College A has not historically prioritized addressing social challenges faced by international students. In fact, the college even eliminated their previous

international orientation program. Yet, very recently, student agency has had a lot of success and the institution is beginning to support the creation of new programming.

College B

Image 1. Slide from Presentation: "An Introduction to the International Student Experience"
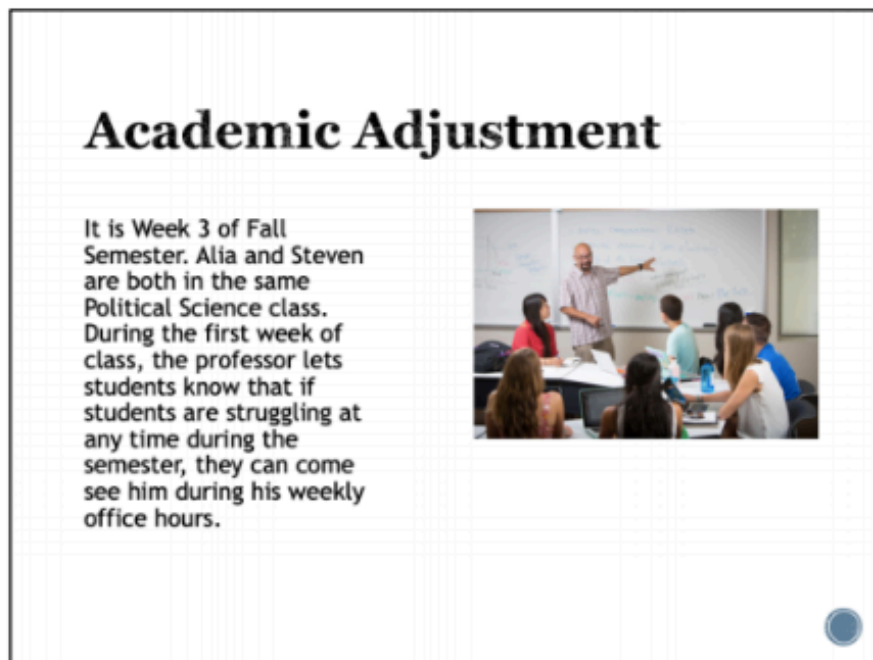
_____(Narrator): It is Week 3 of Fall Semester. Alia and Steven are both in the same Political Science class. During the first week of class, the professor lets students know that if students are struggling at any time during the semester, they can come see him during his weekly office hours.

_____(Alia): I have a quiz and 2 papers due this week! My high school counselor was not joking when she told me there would be more homework and writing in college. Hopefully when I go see my professor during office hours on Thursday, she can help me with one of my papers.

_____(Steven): Today in my political science class my professor was talking about the US "senate" and "congress" and I felt like I was the only one in my class who didn't know what these things meant. My professor said that if we were having trouble during the course we could speak with her at her office, but I don't want to bother her with simple questions that I probably should already know the answer to.

Note: Alia represents a domestic student. Steven represents an international student.

To address social challenges, College B includes an information session during international student orientation to describe the international student experience at college, in contrast to the domestic student experience, as seen in the powerpoint slide above. Parts of this presentation are used as an ally training for College B's Student Affairs Office. During orientation, students are also assigned orientation leaders that can become informal mentors during the first year of college. After students have gone through both the international and general orientation, the office of international student services invites them to their lounge for a "reunion". The office continues to host gatherings in their lounge every Friday for an informal "coffee hour". Once a year they celebrate International Education Week. During this week a variety of activities and events are organized, including a mental health activity aimed at normalizing and building awareness around mental health. Last year, this encompassed making personalized "wellness bags" with face masks, handouts (including handouts designed for international students specifically) and tissues. The term "wellness" is used instead of "mental health" intentionally to avoid negative stigma. Resident assistants also receive a training that covers topics including awareness of international student experiences and how international students may use different words (i.e. *very tired* instead of *depressed*) to express their mental health, due to lack of awareness or negative stigma in their home country. College B also has a student led club which aids in navigating social challenges.

College C

In addressing social challenges, College C supports a mentor program where international upperclassmen can volunteer to mentor two to three incoming international students or exchange students. This institution also has a student led club whose community helps to navigate social

challenges. Additionally, the international student services office hosts "quality of life type workshops", including an optional winter information session categorized under site specific challenges. Resident assistants receive training that aims to create more awareness around: what international students experience, use of inclusive language, how mental health stigma can vary by culture and how this may affect what language students choose to express their feelings.

Overall at Colleges B and C

In comparison to College A, College B and C provide more structured resources both to facilitate the transition into college life in the United States and to mediate social and psychological challenges after arrival. College C is also more aware of how to adjust the framing of resources (e.g. *mental health* is rephrased as *wellness*) to accommodate international students.

Cultural Differences

What are cultural differences? The American Sociological Association defines culture as "the languages, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environments meaningful" (ASA 2020). How do you navigate studying in a new school where your culture and understanding of the world is different from the culture and understanding of those around you? These are important differences.

When it comes to cultural differences, institutions tend to create spaces where cultural differences can be celebrated (generally at a more surface level), as well as spaces where they can be shared and discussed more in depth.

College A

To celebrate cultural difference, College A hosts an annual dinner where international students volunteer to cook in groups and bring different dishes for hundreds of people. The event is open to all community members: students, faculty, staff and locals. Student led clubs also provide spaces for cultural celebration, as well as informal networks to discuss cultural differences and related challenges. Structurally, College A has also created an area with an office and several lounge rooms with a kitchen, as a space designated for diversity groups on campus. Part of this space includes small prayer rooms designated for the practice of different religions in a separate hallway. While appearing responsive to cultural needs, it has also been noted that most international students avoid these prayer rooms because the same hallway is shared with the band room, where students regularly play loud instruments including over four Taiko (Japanese) drums with no sound proofing in between.

College A has one main celebratory event every year and has created an office and a space for diversity. Praying spaces are provided but have limited functionality. Programming and resources addressing international cultural differences remain at surface level. Student led clubs can add more depth to cultural sharing.

College B

College B celebrates cultural diversity on a large scale. It organizes an annual festival with food and music from around the world and student led booths that encourage domestic and international students to both share and engage with aspects of other cultures. Once a year the institution also arranges a formal dance that features student performances including singing, dancing and other talents to showcase culturally diverse traditions. Additionally, College B has a

student led club that creates spaces to share and address cultural differences. During international student orientation, the institution also includes an information session on sexual assault awareness and prevention that introduces relevant English terminology and discusses the context in which assault occurs on US college campuses.

College B has two large annual events that, in comparison to College A, expand beyond food to include music and dance in the mix. College B also makes an effort to discuss sexual assault awareness and prevention in the context of US college campuses. While structures like student led booths allow for more interaction and dialogue around cultural sharing, engagement is still dependent on the individual, thus also maintaining a somewhat shallow discussion of culture.

College C

Image 2. Culture Shock Presentation – Slide on Roller Coaster of Cultural Adaptation
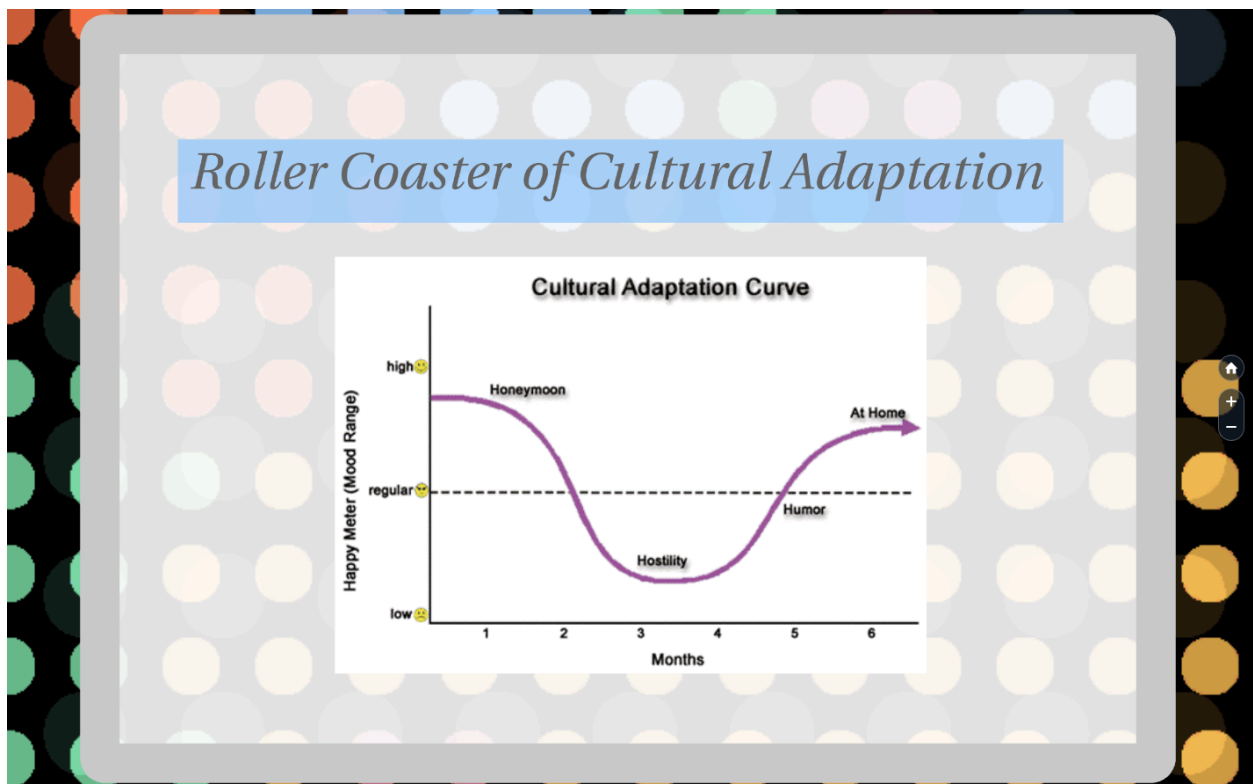
Only College C seems to add more depth. An informational session during international orientation addresses cultural differences and transitioning into college life both in the United States and at the specific institution (see Image 2 above). An annual festival celebrates cultural diversity with food trucks (e.g. Puerto Rican and Lebanese food trucks one year) and student led booths. Booths represent a nation, a region or an ethnic group. Students organize booths to share food or interactive activities like "paint your own kabuki mask" that introduce the community to different cultural traditions. College C also organizes cross-cultural dialogues - usually three, throughout the year - that allow students to share their own perspective and discuss opinions held by home cultures on different themes. Past themes include dating and relationships, as well as pop culture - what pop culture looks like in your home country and why. This year, a mixed nationality theme house was introduced on campus. Around fifty percent of the students living in the house are of domestic nationality and about fifty percent are international. Together they host the "cross-cultural learning community" and use their house to create a space where all students can share multicultural food and discussion informally, as well as plan more structured events for interaction and learning. The idea of the cross-cultural dorm came from a political science professor who had been in a similar dorm in his time at college and found it to be a transformative experience.

College C provides opportunities for both surface and in-depth cultural sharing. The institution hosts one large celebratory event a year, bringing food from outside campus. Both domestic and international students are encouraged to organize booths that allow people to interact with cultural symbols and food. This makes cultural engagement more accessible in bite size, visually appealing pieces. These pieces can spark interest and curiosity but are mostly introductory in purpose. To facilitate deeper learning and sharing, College C organizes: 1.) an

orientation session that describes the process and discusses the challenges of transitioning into college life in the United States (see Image 2); 2.) thematic discussions where people can engage in personally meaningful topics in smaller groups and 3.) themed housing where a group of students of both domestic and international origin can apply to live together in a house designed with the purpose of sharing daily cross-cultural learning and building community. Over the past ten years, College C has added programming and resources to encourage its students to engage with cultural differences more frequently and in greater depth. The institution aims to continue making cultural awareness and sharing a more central role in daily learning at the college.

Academic Differences

What is the difference between academics in a liberal arts college in the United States and the academics of the high school you went to in your home country?

College A

To address academic differences between former education systems and the US college experience, a student panel is held specifically for international students during orientation. Around three to seven international sophomores volunteer to talk about their academic experiences at College A and answer questions from the incoming students.

College B

At College B, academic differences are mentioned in the presentation highlighting the difference in experience between international and domestic students during international student

orientation (see Image 1). Informally, it is up to the individual to ask their peers or orientation leaders for advice on these differences.

College C

At College C, an information session during international orientation addresses academic differences by comparing experiences of high school to that of college at this institution.

Overall

Each of the three colleges share a similar approach, using an informational session during orientation to address either the differences between domestic and international experiences in academics or to simply address relevant issues in the international student experience. The biggest difference between the institutions is that at College A students share their own experience, while at College B and C similar information is presented by staff members of the international student services office. The benefit of having students share their experiences is that incoming freshmen receive peer advice, which may come across as more credible and engaging. Possible drawbacks of this model may include the variation in the content year to year. However, for the purposes of this analysis, both methods seem effective.

<u>*Immigration & Legal Issues*</u>

Legal and immigration processes for the majority of international students are briefly summarized below, followed by a comparison of practices among the three colleges. After being accepted at an institution, students must apply for F1 or student visas. These visas are valid from one to five years, depending on policies that reflect the ongoing relationship between home and

host countries. After arrival to the college campus, a designated school official must annually sign an updated I-20 form. The I-20 form serves as a legal travel document that validates the fact that a student is studying in the United States. The form contains specific information including what college the student studies at, the major(s) the student has declared and the expected graduation date of the student. International students studying in the United States on student visas are not allowed to work off-campus. In order to work, students must apply and receive a social security number and apply to jobs on campus. International students may not be paid for more than twenty hours of work per week. After graduation, international students with F-1 status can apply for Optional Practitioner Training (OPT), a one to three year period where students are permitted by the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) to stay in the United States and work towards getting practical training to complement their field of studies. Science majors are allowed to apply for extensions to remain in the US for up to three-years after graduation to work in areas related to their field of study. F-1 visa students, without a Bachelor of Science degrees, must either return to country of origin or apply to graduate programs after working in the United States for one year. Students who do not find a job after a number of months must also return to their home countries. While studying in college, international students must also file taxes and maintain other legal transactions including those related to health insurance. What resources do institutions provide to inform international students and help them navigate immigration and other legal aspects of remaining in the United States?

College A

During orientation, College A holds an information session that covers all the necessary information regarding I-20 forms and jobs on campus. Signatures for I-20 forms and applications for social security numbers and on-campus jobs are addressed on an individual basis. Should students encounter delays in acquiring student visas or experience difficulty with travel, the head of international student services addresses challenges on an individual basis. During the winter semester, the head of international student services holds various workshops to help international students file their taxes. Over the last two years, the head of international student services has also held an employment workshop for seniors to discuss applying for an OPT and work opportunities in the United States and in home countries after graduation. Informational handouts are available for students unable to attend.

College B

At College B, workshops offer international students an opportunity to learn about immigration and related legal topics (e.g. finding a job, receiving work authorization, conducting job interviews and filing for taxes). Students are also able to make individual appointments with the campus head of international student services, who advises international students on how to navigate individual immigration concerns.

College C

College C organizes an information session during international orientation and reviews how to maintain "good" immigration status in the United States. Employment and tax workshops are held at other times of the year.

Overall

Overall, all three colleges have designed structural processes to inform international students of mandatory application steps and how to maintain up to date legal documents. Specific challenges are dealt with on an individual basis.

Site Specific Challenges

Some challenges are not applicable to all institutions. For example, colleges in more northern parts of the United States have snowstorms, while colleges in more southern parts of the United States may be vulnerable to forest fires. What resources are available to mediate the challenges that are institution specific?

College A

Since College A is further north and experiences cold winters, the head of international student services organizes an annual shopping trip to purchase winter clothes and shoes. This event is relevant for international freshmen who lack winter clothing and financial aid is provided when appropriate. The only information explaining how to prepare for winter is an email written by the previous president of the international club on campus, circulated informally to international club members over the last three years, detailing "everything you need to know about how to dress for winter".

College B

College B does not appear to have any site-specific resources. There is not enough information to analyze this.

College C

Like College A, College C also experiences cold winters. An optional winter workshop explains everything students need to know about winter, including what to expect (temperature, snowfall, winter storms, snow-days), what to wear (layering, outwear, footwear, accessories, where to shop), how to have fun (indoor and outdoor activities) and how to stay healthy (preventing the cold & flu, cold & flu care, seasonal affective disorder or SAD, skin care, frostbite).

Overall

College C provides a useful description and guidance on the implications, expectations and necessary preparations for winter. College A does not provide this information. College A does provide financial aid, when deemed appropriate.

Informal Practices and Student Agency at College A

Table 1, along with the analysis of the formally provided resources, outlines the structural approach taken by each of the three institutions. In the case of College A, additional information showed evidence of informal practices and student agency that may mediate or fill gaps in structural resources. These were not included in Table 1 because whether or not they mediate challenges is still largely dependent on individual initiative taken to make use of such practices and, therefore, is not equally applicable to all international students or in all institutional contexts.

The head of international students at College A makes it a point to build individual relationships with every international student on campus and encourages students to ask him

questions on any topic they would like (e.g. academics, immigration, social and cultural differences, small talk in the U.S., basketball, baseball) throughout their college career. He gives many students his personal cellphone number and tells all international students during orientation to call him or message him anytime, even during the weekends, at whatever hour they need (however, not beyond 10 pm unless it's an emergency because he also needs to sleep). This emphasis on building individual relationships may allow international students to acquire mentorship more easily from the head of international students at College A. This mentorship serves as an informal resource that may mediate stress from any number of the previously mentioned challenges.

Similarly, in cases where students felt resources were lacking, some took it upon themselves to demand institutional action. In the last two years at College A, two significant changes were added as a result of student agency. In the 2018-2019 academic year, a new policy allowed "students who receive financial aid and have calculated family contributions of $10,000 or less" (College A website) access to meals during academic breaks (e.g. Thanksgiving break) for no additional charge. This policy was suggested by a group of activist African American students at the institution. Last year, 2019-2020, the institution had its first international student orientation in over three years. This program was suggested and designed by the international student club at College A. Student agency can play a significant role in changing the programming and services that are offered at various institutions. However, student agency is a product of individual variation and not all students contribute to creating institutional change.

College A

Of the three institutions included in this study, College A provides the least structural support for its international student population. It does not offer resources to help with language proficiency, it has historically eliminated resources designed to facilitate the transition into college life in the United States and offers limited and relatively shallow opportunities for engagement with, or space for, cultural practices. College A does offer resources to help students navigate immigration and legal challenges. To address academic differences, incoming international students receive advice from peers, who were in their shoes only one year before during orientation (meaning advice exclusively from sophomores). International students also receive financial aid to purchase warm winter clothing, as appropriate.

Informal practices and student agency play a big role in navigating challenges and creating new resources at College A. The head of international student services makes it a point to develop individual relationships with international students, acting as a mentor to address any and all challenges. This may help mediating structural gaps and allow individualized support. Alongside this, student clubs on campus have made proposals and worked with administration to propose, research and design new resources that mediate international student challenges. This has been especially true over the last two years and may create new opportunities for the future.

College B

College B, in comparison to College A, offers greater support in mediating challenges. The institution offers selective groups of students access to different programs designed to help

students improve their language proficiency for academic or linguistic purposes. A number of different resources from international student orientation, to small social events, to activities normalizing topics of mental health help facilitate and navigate the transition to college life in the United States. Although still at a shallow level, College B offers more diverse engagement with different cultural traditions. Academic differences are also explained and addressed during international student orientation and structural resources are provided to help students navigate immigration and legal issues.

College C

Overall, College C offers the most developed resources for helping international students navigate the challenges of college in the United States. So much so, that College C goes beyond the focus of international students as an isolated group and begins to think about the interaction between domestic and international students and how these interactions contribute to the college learning experience. In the words of the head of Student Success at College C, "part of our job as administrators is to socially engineer experiences, and I use that word very intentionally, … that allow students to engage with difference". The head of international student services builds on the idea that resources should also be designed to encourage engagement with people different than oneself, to explain one of the long term aims of their programming: "One of the things that I think we're trying to do here is talk with the domestic students about global literacy."

To summarize the resources College C offers their students: they do not offer resources that aid in language proficiency. However, they do offer a robust set of resources and programming to address social and cultural challenges. These include a peer mentorship program, "quality of life" workshops, residential assistant training that involves discussions of

mental health stigma and reflections on cultural norms,a theme house that becomes a space for cross-cultural learning, student led clubs, information sessions addressing the transition into college life during orientation, annual festivals and cross-cultural dialogues that allow opportunities for more in-depth discussion. Academic differences are explained at an information session during orientation and mediated through their mentorship program. Immigration and relevant legal issues are also addressed at an information session during orientation, as well as through employment and tax workshops during the year. Furthermore, a winter workshop covers how to dress, have fun and stay healthy - both physically and mentally - during winter months at College C.

Each of these three colleges offer different resources. Yet, in talking to the heads of student services and international student services at these colleges, other differences begin to appear. Note that the head of Student Success at College C talks about the importance of "socially engineering experiences that allow students to engage with difference", while the head of student services at College A highlights the importance of addressing immigration above everything else:

> "those journals tend to tend to have scholarly articles related to education, development student services, student affairs. They tend not to be about immigration stuff, but tend to be more about kind of the education the international student experience, unique and distinctive effective programs around whether it's orientation, for example, or mental health …then on the immigration side, there's a whole [journal] and they do a lot of work with kind of international students around programs certainly, but they also are very attentive to the immigration issues at play and I can't underscore enough."

The head of student services at College B emphasizes the separation between his office and that of international student services:

> "I'm the [title of position]. And, so, my staff work with International students as they would any other student because we also have at [College B] a pretty robust study abroad and international student department, which is actually separate from student affairs.

And, so, they are the ones to carry the bulk of the special relationship with any of our International students."

The following chapter discusses what other structures may influence the resources and programming available at different institutions.

CHAPTER 5. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

This chapter explores the organizational structure of the offices responsible for the delivery of resources and programming for international students at each of the three colleges. It also examines lack of alignment between formal and informal organizational structure, while interpreting the implications for availability of resources and programming for international students, at two of these colleges.

College A

College A combines study abroad and international student services under one office: the Center for Global Education. This structure is outlined in Figure 1 below. Previously, study abroad and international student services were separate offices. The Center for Global Education, the formal structure of the institution today, is almost three years old. However, evidence suggests that although this shift happened formally, the informal structure under the title of the new Center for Global Education remains the same as the previous model (see Figure 2 below), suggesting no change in availability of international student resources and programming.
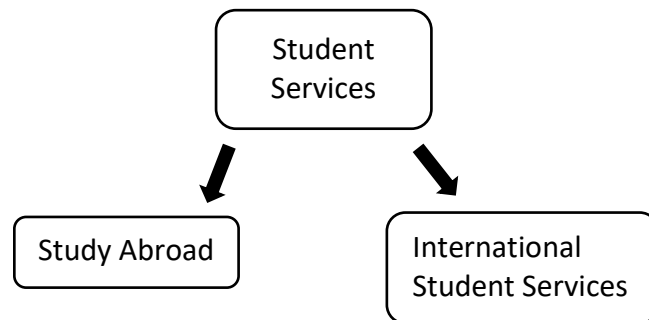
Figure 1. Formal structure at College A
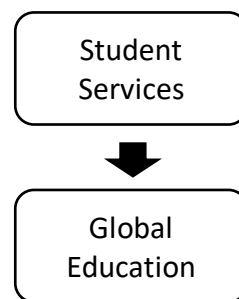
* Arrows in Figure 1 mark hierarchal relationships.

Figure 2. Informal structure at College A

* Arrows in Figure 2 mark hierarchal relationships. Rectangles with no connecting arrows are of equal hierarchal position.

College A: Perspective of International Student Services

When asked, the head of international student services said the members of the new Center for Global Education were still having trouble defining the office's purpose and expressed disagreement with its formal structure.

In his description of the term *global education*, the head of international student services explained:

> "the school has identified there is great flexibility in terms of defining what global education is. And, we, the members of this office, have decided to - I guess in a certain sense - move slowly in the articulations of *what* it is specifically. And so, we have ideas.. and we're looking to expand the ideas and have the ideas evolve and change and get better. So. If you just take the two words "global", "education", millions of topics on the earth will equal "education about global topics" … One of the things we will look at first is a study abroad program - a very active one that we've been told from many angles is a very strong one. So, our students go around the earth, and study. Within that, there's some attention to how far and wide can our students go? And can they go on their own rather than in groups? you know - which is the kind of common big conversation these days"

The head of international student services argues that, even three years after the inauguration of the Center for Global Education, its office members are struggling to define the purpose of the Center. Remarking: "If you just take the two words 'global', 'education', millions of topics on

the earth will equal 'education about global topics'". Instead, he said, we still approach goals that assume the same individual roles of international student services and study abroad (i.e. "how wide can our students [travel]"), rather than creating a goal that bridges both (e.g. increased global literacy of all students – a goal mentioned by College C).

Furthermore, the head of international student services insisted that College A has historically understood these services as being separate from study abroad and student service offices:

> "I thought that the international student support - and [College A] has accepted this premise - as kind of a distinct and separate category from study abroad and student support. And the fact that various countries are involved in the Center for Global Education, you know, …. However, there is this model out there [refers to international student services as a separate office] and it's there and the people who have the model, to colleges and universities that have the model, there's always something going on. They can promote it. It's always some energy there around the programs."

He argues that there is no need for change. In his words, "I don't think we should have reinvented the model".

The evidence suggests that while College A has formally combined international student services and study abroad to form the Center for Global Education, members of neither office are able to clearly define the new Center's aims. Instead, they seem to have created an informal, structure that operates much as the offices did before creation of the Center. This informal model allows communication between all members of the formal office, but otherwise maintains the roles of international student services and study abroad separate from each other. This lack of alignment between formal and informal structures suggests that College A has not succeeded in changing or redesigning their approach to international student services or study abroad. There is no new vision, nor changed expectations regarding resources and programming provided to international students. College A has effectively changed the name and location of these offices

on campus, their formal structure, without changing the way they work, their informal structure, or results.

College B

Similar to College A, College B combines their study abroad and international student services into one office. In this case, the Study Abroad and International Student Programs Office. According to the head of international student services at College B, "more than half our office works with sending students on study abroad to different programs, most of them outside the US, but some inside the U.S." This joint structure has existed for more than eighteen years at College B and members of the office consider it the norm at their college. The head of international student services at the office comments:

> "We have both of those together so that the out bound, you know, the staff that works with out-bound students [referring to study abroad] and staff that works with inbound students [referring to international students] is together. So, and it makes sense. I mean, it's not the normal. I don't see why, because it makes a lot of sense to me. We're dealing with a lot of the same broader intercultural issues in terms of you know Intercultural education and learning and adapting that way - I think more schools are moving towards that - housing everyone under the same roof that way."

Although they acknowledge that other institutions have different structures, the representative of the joint office expresses strong agreement with its structure and sees similarities in the work between the subsections of the office, reframing their focus as two sides of the same phenomenon: "outbound and inbound students". Unlike the sentiment at College A that highlights two separate roles, from two separate offices, this language emphasizes the similarity of these office branches and suggests the two function as a whole. This implies that the formal

and informal structure of the Study Abroad and International Student Programs Office are in alignment.

That explains the internal structure of College B. Additionally, the study abroad and international student office also works in tandem with an intercollegiate office, referred to as International Place, that's purpose is to create and organize programming for international students at the consortium of colleges. The primary focus of the international student office based within College B is to assist international students in meeting the demands of US immigration. Figure 3 outlines the structure relevant to international student services of College B and its intercollegiate partners.

Figure 3. Structure at College B
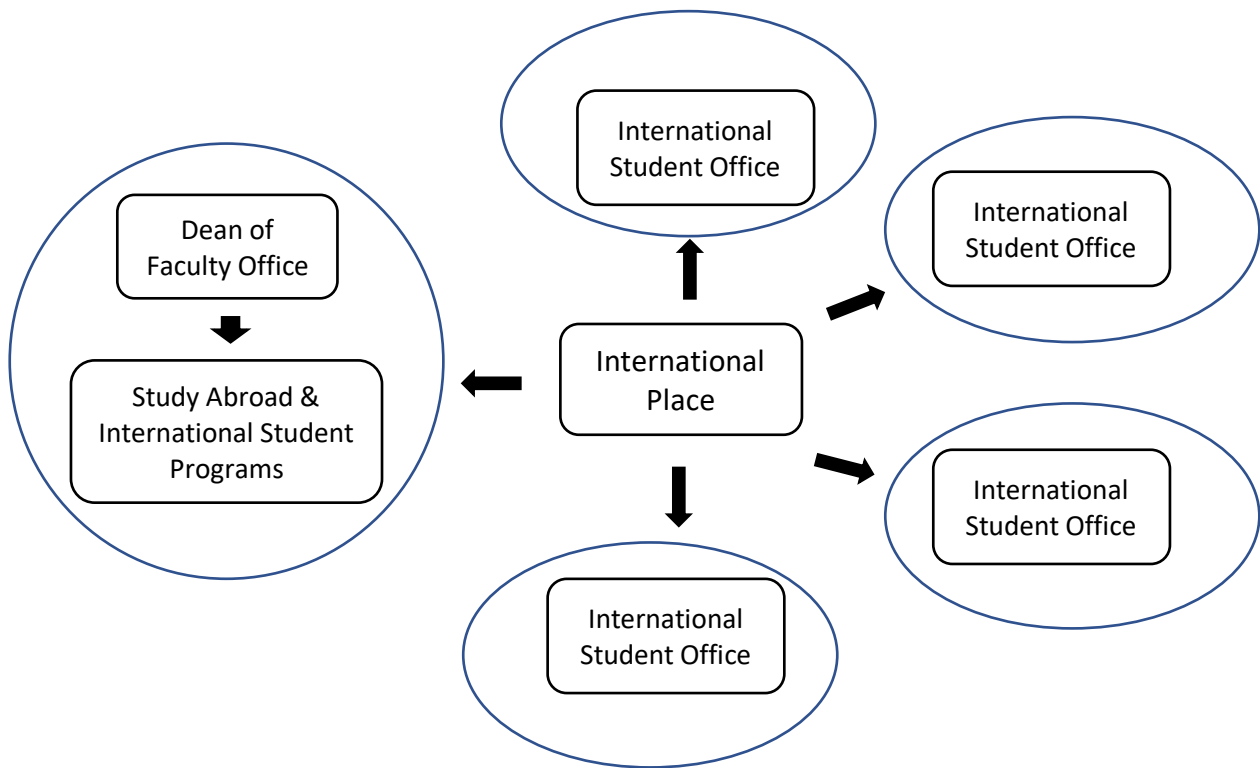
* Arrows in Figure 3 mark hierarchal relationships. Rectangles represent offices, while circles represent institutions.

While the Study Abroad and International Student Programs Office that functions within College B appears to be stable and aligned, this is less clear in regards to the intercollegiate structure of International Place:
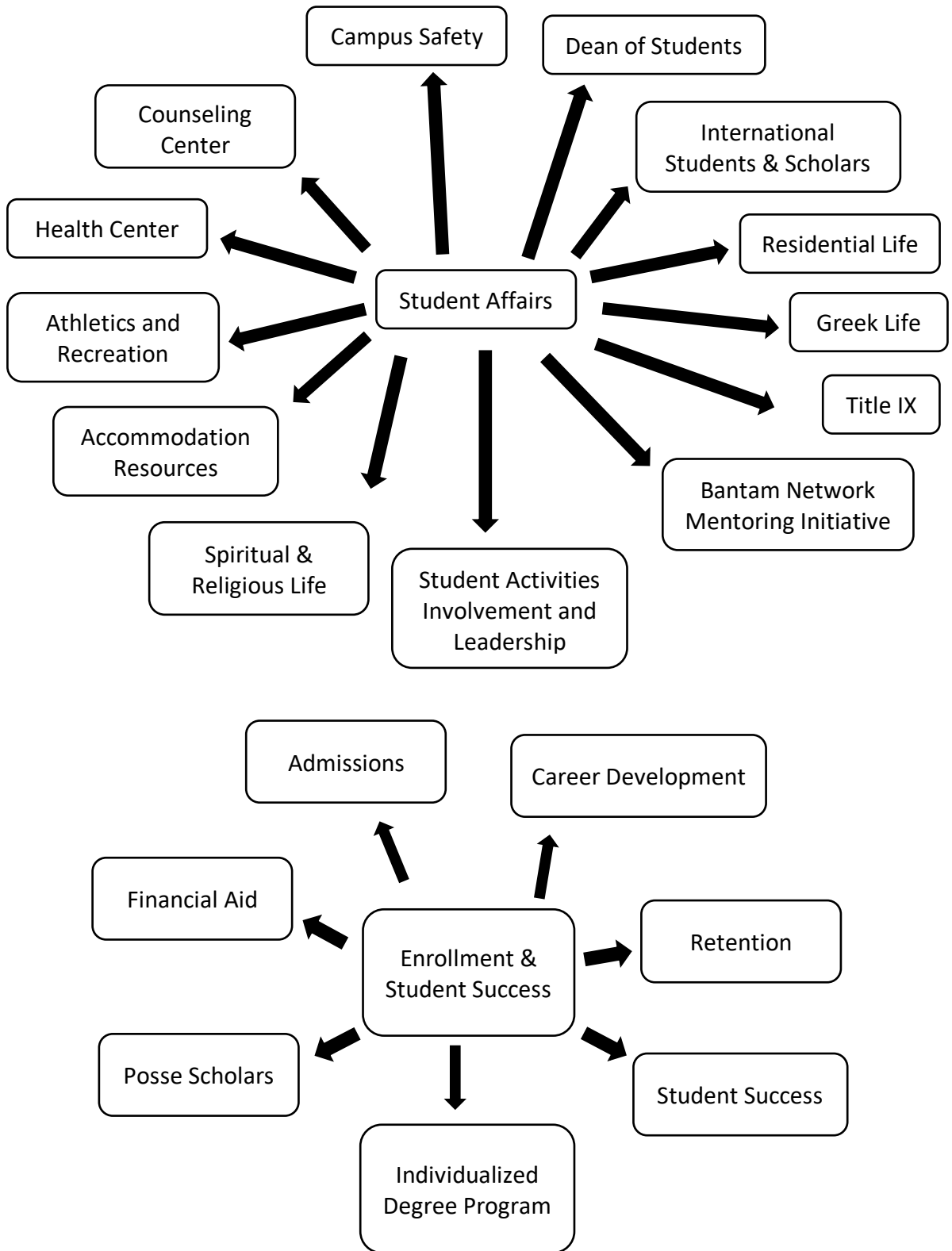
> "I think that there is a lot for you know Administration, like Administration as well as faculty, to learn about international student support. I think there are few faculty and staff on each campus really understand, but I think that we kind of have a long way to go and understanding that and I say that because my office actually is under review right now. …It's structurally underneath - like the structure of it - is under review, because I think it's, you know, while the [intercollegiate grouping] seems very cool from the outside. I think it's also difficult for them to work together sometimes; while they all have their own kind of mission and you know principles and that sort of thing. And so I think International students have started to be in the conversation, but I think that even Administration would say they have quite a bit to learn about how to support International students and kind of what the big issues are."

It seems that, while creating an office that serves as a structure to connect all the international students within the group of different institutions has its benefits for students, the intercollegiate design also presents significant challenges. The group of institutions must share and maintain a common mission and principles in order to ensure success. It appears that this alignment is currently in question.

College C

College C appears to have two main offices that organize different aspects of student life: the Student Affairs Office and the Enrollment and Student Success Office. The structure of these offices is outlined in Figure 4 (on the following page):

Figure 4. Structure at College C

Campus Safety

Dean of Students

Counseling Center

International Students & Scholars

Health Center

Residential Life

Student Affairs

Athletics and Recreation

Greek Life

Title IX

Accommodation Resources

Bantam Network Mentoring Initiative

Spiritual & Religious Life

Student Activities Involvement and Leadership

Admissions

Career Development

Financial Aid

Enrollment & Student Success

Retention

Posse Scholars

Student Success

Individualized Degree Program

* Arrows in Figure 4 mark hierarchal relationships.

The office related to international student services, the International Students and Scholars Office, is categorized under Student Affairs.

Interviews at College C, did not suggest any significant differences between the formal and informal structures of the two key offices, outlined in Figure 4 above, responsible for the delivery of resources and programs affecting international students.

Chapter Conclusions

This chapter has described the organizational structure of the key offices responsible for the delivery of international student resources and programming, at each of the three colleges. It has also emphasized the importance of alignment between formal and informal organizational structures, highlighting how the lack of alignment at colleges A and B is likely to alter the type of resources and programming available for international students at these colleges.

CHAPTER 6. UNDERSTANDING & AWARENESS

The previous chapters have covered the types of resources and programming that colleges offer and discussed the alignment of the various student service offices that provide them. This chapter focuses on the understanding and awareness of the administrators of student services, or similar offices, by determining how well the head of student services is able to: 1.) identify the resources their office, or institution, offers international students, 2.) speak to the purpose of those resources, or vision of the institution, 3.) identify the challenges international students face in college, as discussed in academic literature (systemic challenges) and 4.) speak to the general experience of international students (anecdotal). Differences in understanding and awareness of the international student experience and their importance are discussed.

College A

Resources at College A

Of the programs and resources available at College A, the head of student services was able to identify five: 1.) orientation; 2.) psychological services; 3.) help with student visas and 4.) help applying for curricular practical training (CPT) or 5.) optional practical training (OPT) programs that allow international students on F-1 visas to hold internships or jobs, respectively, for a limited time in the United States.

Purpose or Vision

When talking about goals, the head of student services explained:

"I think about the access and success … our goal is to ensure that we're giving our International students a platform to be successful here, to have a good experience and be successful here and also to spend their time focusing on the things that are most important - which are about their own education development, which doesn't mean always removing every barrier to conflict or difficulty. I mean part of college is learning how to navigate difficult complicated or conflicted situations."

He highlights the goal is to ensure the success, defined as "educational development", without "removing every barrier to conflict or difficulty". Interestingly, he did not mention support or mediation of challenges.

What challenges was he able to identify?

Challenges

In his interview, the head of student services identified the importance of health care, health insurance, mental health and cultural stigmatization of mental health. A special emphasis was given to the topic of immigration in the context of visas and post-graduation employment (i.e. CPT, OPT), as well as an overall repeated focus on "access" to resources and "how our race, class, ethnicity, nationality …play together" in the context of bias and discrimination. The head of student services again emphasized racial and economic differences in mental health stigma and identified a general "increasing fear around law enforcement" (referring to racist police brutality in the US). These challenges were often stated and not described. The challenges emphasized, through more description, involved the mention of contracting a translator for communication with parents, the importance of access to the cafeteria during breaks and the challenge of jet lag during orientation.

Overall, even when asked specific questions, the statements made by the head of student services remained broad. For example, when asked to address whether the institution believes

that an international student orientation program has a negative impact on the formation of friendships between international and domestic students, because it may encourage international students to form friendships among themselves (a reason given by another office head for eliminating international student orientation), the head of student services generally responded by restating the premise of the question without confirming, denying or providing detail on the topic in question. Below, the question:

> "I believe that there was an orientation at College A for international students a number of years ago, but that was taken out because of a concern as to whether it was creating a barrier for relationships between international students and domestic students. I know like in the literature this is a big topic… generally speaking, some literature supports the idea that international students being friends with each other can have a lot of benefits. For example, creating a support system. But another literature kind of - speaking to those detriments - says that it can sometimes reinforce in-group membership and reinforce the differences between in-group and out-group members. And, so, it's kind of like this thing of pros and cons."

The response to this question, was:

> "It is a challenge. So, their intention with one another. And, so, the question for us and me always is are they in *healthy tension with one another*. And let me use a different example. So, let's step away from International students. For example. We had - we have about roughly ten percent of our students are first-generation to college students. Meaning that neither parent or parents went and completed a four-year degree - college degree. And so, and in some cases, that correlates or is associated also with being a low-income student or middle-income student. And we actually know through the literature that are first-generation college students and their families actually have a different set of needs - like a distinct set of needs. There's an extensive research on it. And, so, when we were designing the (first generation) program this kept coming up, you know, I felt like when I go to there's this very kind of culture of "treat everybody the same" treat everybody the same "don't create groups" Etc.
> And I would put I push back on that, and I do today - that if you know a population has a distinct set of needs then *why would you opt to not attend to those* and just treat them like quote everybody else and in American higher education that usually is code for white American upper income or middle upper income college students, right like everybody else like that's the default but nobody owns call it that that's just what they don't it's coded, right? Um and yet so for so but yet that seems to actually work against best meeting the

needs of our students and supporting their success. So, I see the same thing with International students."

In this case, the main point argued is that minority students have specific needs and that academic literature supports this view. With regard to international students specifically, the head of student services highlights the importance of immigration again and again. Nearing the end of the interview:

> "I think there are distinct needs and interests of international students that we should not ignore and in fact ignoring them would be really problematic. Not looking out for the interests of international students' immigration is an easy thing to point to, be it OPT, CPT, visas, etc."

It is difficult to infer any detail from these statements, either because they are too general or, in some cases, because one statement contradicts the meaning of the previous statement:

> "we also don't want to constantly pull them [international students] out and treat them as if they are separate from, different than, and so we're constantly in this dance. That's what I would say. … But I'm not an advocate of treating everybody the same. That is not my guiding philosophy."

Regardless, the head of student services was not able to describe the general challenges international students experience at college in the United States, nor a single social challenge they face. He did mention one cultural challenge: that some cultures stigmatize mental health more than others. He was unable to identify any academic challenges. Instead, throughout, he emphasized the importance of addressing immigration challenges.

Interestingly, when asked about what literature the office of student services uses to inform the development of resources for international students, the head of student services mentioned research that recommends the creation of resources to mediate the social, cultural and other challenges international students face in college. Although he is aware of the existence and

argued significance of these resources, he appears to diminish their importance and instead highlight immigration as the seemingly singular challenge to studying in the United States:

> "those journals tend to tend to have scholarly articles related to education, development student services, student affairs. They tend not to be about immigration stuff, but tend to be more about kind of the education the international student experience, unique and distinctive effective programs around whether it's orientation, for example, or mental health …then on the immigration side, there's a whole [journal] and they do a lot of work with kind of international students around programs certainly, but they also are very attentive to the immigration issues at play and I can't underscore enough."

International Student Experience and Anecdotes

The head of student services only spoke of specific examples of international students once in his interview. Here, he spoke of European students critiquing the drinking culture and the racialized "concept" of college life in the United States:

> "I was talking to a couple of students - my first year was fascinating and they're like, 'What's this whole like social scene and – they were European students - and amount of drinking that happens here' and not just the amount of drinking with the kind of excessive, pervasive, like this kind of American college, white American college concept, and they were just like trying to wrap their head around it."

The only other time the head of student services came close to giving more detail about specific experiences was when he rhetorically asked, "how do we think about our Varsity athletes that are international students"? Interestingly, of the many proposed questions, including what followed: "how we think about counseling and psychological services and mental health" were only answered with opinion - such as "I think that we've done a great deal to move in the right direction", with no examples or further description. Follow-up questions were responded to with more rhetorical questions and broad statements, followed by reflections that led to changes in the topic.

Overall

The head of student services at College A is aware of the resources and programming recommended by academic literature. Yet despite the recommendations, they emphasize the importance of immigration, without placing an equal emphasis on the other challenges that international students face. The emphasis on one challenge, repeatedly mentioned, suggests that College A may not fully understand the other challenges international students face or the significance of addressing them. An institution that is not aware of the challenges its students face, or does not understand the significance of these challenges, cannot be expected to address them, or to create the appropriate resources and programming necessary to support its students in facing or overcoming a challenge.

<u>College B</u>

Due to differences in the organizational structure of College B, and limited time to conduct more interviews, the Dean of Faculty Office (the office through which international student services are provided) was not interviewed. Hence, it is difficult to infer much about the awareness and understanding of administration, regarding the needs and challenges of international students. However, due to the comments of the representative of International Place (an office that programs international activities among a consortium of colleges, with which College B is affiliated) it is clear that awareness and understanding play a key role in the formation and maintenance of the organizational structure of the offices responsible for the resources available to international students:

> "I think that there is a lot for you know Administration, like Administration as well as faculty, to learn about international student support. I think there are few faculty and staff on each campus who really understand, but I think that we kind of have a long way to go and understanding that and I say that because my office actually is under review right

now. ...It's structurally underneath - like the structure of it - is under review, because I think it's, you know, while the [intercollegiate grouping] seems very cool from the outside. I think it's also difficult for them to work together sometimes; while they all have their own kind of mission and you know principles and that sort of thing. And so, I think International students have started to be in the conversation, but I think that I think even Administration would say they have quite a bit to learn about how to support International students and kind of what the big issues are."

This information suggests that the organizational structure created to facilitate resources for international students is, to some degree, in jeopardy as a result of differences in understanding and awareness of international student needs and how to mediate them. A representative of the Student Affairs Office also made a comment that supports similar conclusions:

"Americans tend to be pretty egocentric about these things. And, so, the kind of awareness to take advantage of a global perspective is often times lost on Americans... no, I don't think there is any systematic cultural consistency in and taking advantage of a global perspective, especially that would come from our international students."

The evidence suggests that institutions remain largely unaware of international student experiences and undervalue the diversity that such experiences offers to enrich learning opportunities in higher education.

College C

College C has a different structure than College A and College B, in that there are two larger offices: 1.) Student Affairs and 2.) Enrollment and Student Success that relate to student life in college. Due to time and access limitations, only the head of the Office of Enrollment and Student Success was interviewed. This perspective is especially interesting as the office is further separated from international student services than Student Affairs.

Resources at College C

Of the resources available at College C, the head of Enrollment and Student Success emphasizes the importance of their international student orientation, explaining that

> "the way we think about orientation is a little different at [College C]. We think about it as a year-long process, not just: you come in, you're with us for three days, and then good luck."

He also talks about College C's peer mentor program for first year international students and the bonding activities organized at the beginning of the year, stating that throughout the rest of the year, "we try to create events around particular cultures: 1.) one, so that students can learn from each other. But then 2.) also that International students feel connected back to home". He implies that the international student office was created to facilitate events for such purposes. Besides the office, there are also a number of international, student led clubs and an international house:

> "We also have, now, an international house where students who are - they could be International, but they could also be American - who are just very, very passionate about international issues; they live in that house, and when they live in that house, they commit to doing international focused programming and education of the community."

After explaining these, he stops. "That is the short version of, many, many things that happen." Despite not going through a list of all the available resources for international students at College C, which may have taken more than the limited time of the interview, the level of detail and variety of resources described suggests that the head of Enrollment and Student Success is well aware of the resources offered by the college.

Challenges

The first question of the interview asks the interviewee to describe the role of their office and their office's interaction with international students. Within the first minute, the head of Enrollment and Student Success at College C explained the following:

> "we need to help support [international students] a little bit more than our domestic students because there's not just the, you know, transition to college but it's also the transition culturally, there is the transition to American culture, that stress sometimes, transition to language, and there's also the sort of cultural norms not just a the US, but learning small liberal arts colleges, which is a whole other world and language that I think a lot of students don't know."

Immediately, he described the categories of challenges identified in the literature: language proficiency, social challenges, cultural differences, academic differences. It is interesting to note that these four categories of challenges are so easily identified by the head of Enrollment and Student Success office, and yet, in the whole interview, he does not once mention visas, CPT, OPT or employment. He does mention financial aid but does not otherwise talk about any immigration related challenges. Although the College does offer workshops addressing each of these immigration related topics, it is interesting that the head of Enrollment and Student Success does not focus on them.

Purpose or Vision

> "Our goal - the way that I sort of describe it to people is that my goal is to make sure that any challenge that an international student bumps into and they are on campus they have a One-Stop shop. Maybe we don't have the answer, but we are going to help them get that answer so that they feel fully supported in the transition experience."

More than anything, this response focuses on support. The aim of the Enrollment and Student Success office seems to be supporting its students - in this case, international students. Unlike the

language used at other institutions, the head of Enrollment and Student Success describes this system as a "cradle-to-grave approach" with "a lot of hand-holding". There is an implicit emphasis on the psychological aspect of this support. Furthermore, this psychological support is emphasized as a positive and intentional part of College C's structure. This clashes with the language used by College A ("our goal ..is to ensure that we're giving our international students a platform to be successful here … which doesn't mean always removing every barrier to conflict or difficulty") and B ("I don't think you should depend on programming to do it all [refers to the goal of supporting students] either. It shouldn't be that the only way that that interaction happens is through, you know, a potluck mixer or some kind of event") that often emphasizes a more individualistic approach described as a need for international students to go through challenges on their own. This difference in language becomes more apparent as a difference in structural beliefs when the head of Enrollment and Student Success at College C highlights the importance of socially engineering experiences.

Yet, before that, he explains that there is an office for international students, created for the purpose of "1.) so that students can learn from each other. But then 2.) also, that International students feel connected back to home." He continues, explaining, "then there's the mentorship of the international student club" and includes there are a number of different international student clubs on campus.

It is interesting to note, then, that the stated purpose of these resources is described as *learning*, *connecting* and *mentoring*. Each of these words emphasizes support, community building and inclusivity. The language itself seems to reflect the goals of the institution or, at the very least, the office of Enrollment and Student Success.

Then, later in the interview, the head of the Enrollment and Student Success office

discusses the purpose and design of orientation:

"part of our job as administrators is to at least socially engineer experiences and I use that
word very intentionally socially engineer because that is what orientation is: experiences
that allows students to engage with difference and that if we do not at least create that for
them, sometimes it would be really hard for 17, 18, 19 year-olds to do that, right.
Because, most kids didn't go to [an international boarding school]. They're coming from
very homogeneous places."

It is clear that the head of Enrollment and Student Success feels that institutions of higher

education have a responsibility for creating spaces that are designed to encourage students to

engage with people who are different – implicitly referring to differences including those of race,

ethnicity, class, culture, religion, nationality, gender and sexual orientation. This responsibility

also suggests that 1.) there is value in "engaging with difference" and that 2.) "intentionally

socially engineering" domestic and international students to engage with each other adds value to

the learning opportunities of an institution of higher education.

"I am passionate about creating those spaces for people to interact whether it's through
orientation or through the kinds of activities that you know, the parties and festivals and
all those things that we grow for students during the year so that they're interacting and
engaging with students that *maybe they wouldn't necessarily have engaged with before*."

International Student Experience and Anecdotes

The level of detail included in explaining the challenges international students face, for

example, as referred to in the section on challenges above, shows that the head of Enrollment and

Student Success understands the international student experience. His knowledge and awareness

is again observable when asked to explain how College C balances creating spaces that allow

international students to bond with each other with spaces that encourage bonding with domestic students. He speaks to this challenge by juxtaposing conceptual ideals with daily practice:

> "I'll be a hundred percent honest. I do have mixed feelings about it because you know, I again would love the experience of most students here to be that they have friends from all over the world and they feel comfortable in spaces whether they're with students who are wealthy or poor or you know from Africa or Latin America or Americans. And I would love that right. But I also, you know, I do a lot of listening to students - because that's how I sort of learn about how we might be more helpful - And you know, some of the students say look we do need our spaces to be able to reconnect."

He is able to challenge his own conceptual framework by recognizing that the experience of international students cannot always be reduced to fit an ideal. He then goes on to explain how to balance these two, seemingly opposite aims with the previously mentioned discussion of "engagement with difference".

Overall

Overall, the head of student support at College C shows great awareness and understanding of international student challenges and their experience in college in the United States. He is also able to explain the role of international student services and includes both: 1.) ways in which students have opportunities to take leadership to create new events that further the sharing and 2.) growth of the student community, as well as 3.) ways in which the institution takes action to intentionally design opportunities for interaction between domestic and international students. Throughout this discussion, he places an emphasis on the psychological experience of support, and on the value that international students add to the college community.

CHAPTER 7:   CONCEPTUALIZAING THE INTERACTION OF IDENTIFIED

VARIABLES

This study was originally focused on identifying the resources and programs available for

international students at different institutions with discussion on how these mediate the

challenges international students face in institutions of higher education in the United States. It

was clear that different institutions shared different perceptions of international students, the

challenges they face in college and how different resources may influence the experience of

international students in college. As the case study continued, patterns began to emerge in the

data. Eventually there was evidence that these patterns were being affected by similar variables.

Figure 5 (see following page) outlines the variables identified in the data and how each interact

in order to create observable outcomes.

Each of the previous chapters, shows evidence of and analyzes the nature of the four

variables outlined in Figure 5 (see the following page) at each of the three institutions: 1.)

student agency, 2.) awareness and understanding, 3.) organizational structure and alignment, 4.)

resources and programming. This chapter posits a model for the interrelationship among these

variables, with one or two examples to illustrate each. It should be noted that the conceptual

model has no defined beginning or end. Arrows are only used to give directionality to the

interactions between variables based on the data collected. Finally, implications are drawn for

how this model affects international student outcomes and experiences, with examples at each of

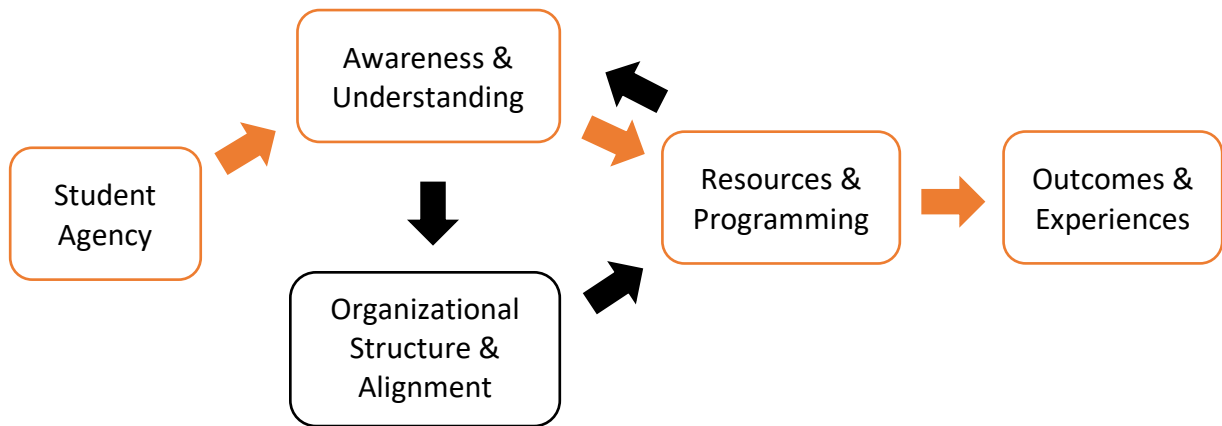the colleges.

Figure 5. Interaction of Variables
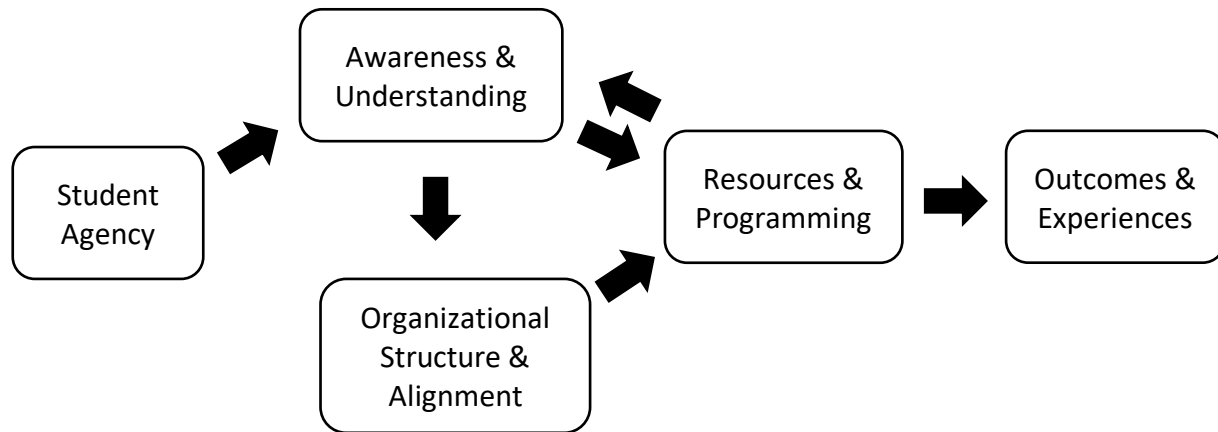
* Arrows in Figure 5 mark the flow of information and influence.

Student Agency

Student agency refers to the decision of students to take action, as individuals or a group, in ways that (directly or indirectly) impact either awareness and understanding, resources and programming, or outcomes and student experiences. This action often engages with organizational structures like the office of international student services, the office of student services or other administrative offices. Engagement can include anything from a conversation between two individuals, to meetings with administrators or non-violent demonstrations. This engagement can lead to positive or negative direct changes in understanding and awareness, and changes in organizational structure and alignment. These changes can lead to the creation or elimination of resources and programming, which in turn changes student outcomes and experiences at an institution.

Figure 6. Example 1: The Creation of International Orientation at College A

* Arrows in Figure 6 mark the flow of information and influence. Orange is used to highlight the conceptual path used in the example given.

An example of this process is the creation of the current international student orientation at College A (see Figure 6, above). Three years ago, the president of the International Student Club at College A felt that there needed to be an orientation specifically for international students. She discussed this idea with other club members and they agreed. They spoke to the head of international student services in the Global Education Office who recommended they write a proposal and meet with the president of the college. The students followed that advice and the president of the college agreed that an orientation specifically for international students made sense. Club leaders sent their proposal to the head of international student services, who in turn met with the president, vice president and other administrators at the college. The proposal was rejected, on the basis that administrators felt there was insufficient evidence of need for an international student orientation. Instead the administration hired a researcher to conduct a study on the formal and informal resources available to international students at College A. Five

international students accepted to support the researcher conduct the study, three of whom were leaders of the international student club, including the club president. One year later, after the results of the research were presented to the administration at College A, the international club leaders again submitted a proposal for the creation of an international student orientation. This time the proposal was accepted on the basis that the researcher presented results that point to a need for an international student orientation. Last year, the international club leaders designed and led the first international student orientation at College A in over three years. In this example, student agency was able to affect the understanding and awareness of student needs enough to create a new program expected to mediate the challenges of incoming international freshmen (see Figure 6, on the previous page).

Awareness and Understanding

In this study, awareness and understanding specifically refers to the awareness and understanding of college administrators, as measured by their ability to identify, or speak to: 1.) the challenges that international students face in college in the United States, 2.) the resources or programming available to international students at the given institution, 3.) the mission or purpose of the resources or programming relevant to international students and 4.) the international student experience (e.g. with anecdotes).

Figure 7. Example 2: International Place (office) Under Review at College B
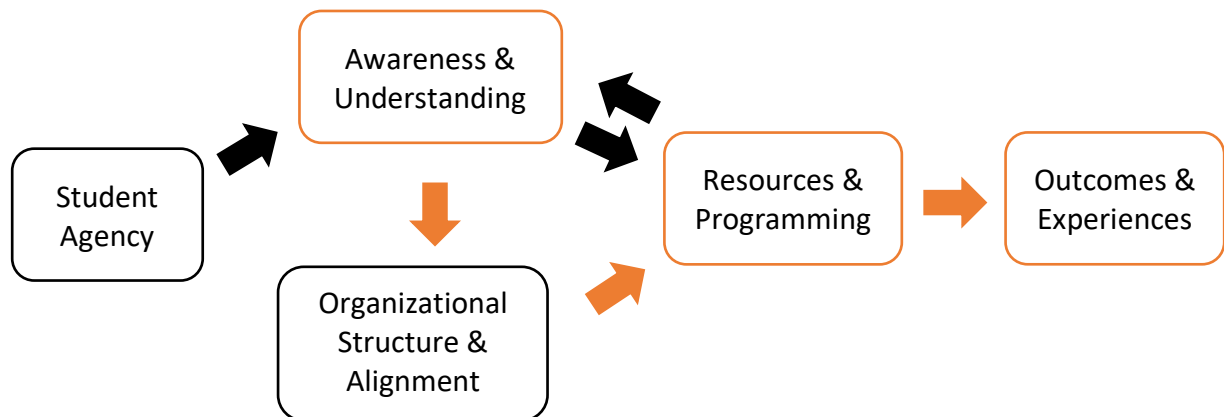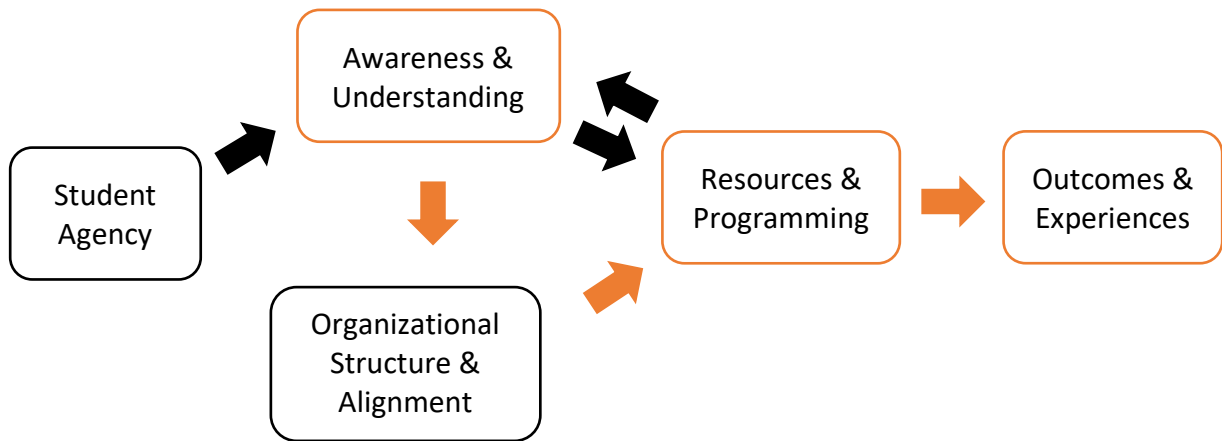

* Arrows in Figure 7 mark the flow of information and influence. Orange is used to highlight the conceptual path used in the example given.

How does awareness and understanding affect this process? Take the example of International Place at College B. Their structure is "under review":

> "I think that there is a lot for you know Administration, like Administration as well as faculty, to learn about international student support. I think there are few faculty and staff on each campus really understand, but I think that we kind of have a long way to go and understanding that and I say that because my office actually is under review right now. …It's structurally underneath - like the structure of it - is under review, because I think it's, you know, while the [intercollegiate grouping] seems very cool from the outside. I think it's also difficult for them to work together sometimes; while they all have their own kind of mission and you know principles and that sort of thing."

This commentary suggests that, due to a lack of awareness and understanding, the organizational structure of the office is being reconsidered. This reconsideration, should it result in changes, would also change how or what resources and programming is offered, which would then influence student outcomes and experiences at the college (see Figure 7, above).

Figure 8. Example 3: International House at College C

* Arrows in Figure 8 mark the flow of information and influence. Orange is used to highlight the conceptual path used in the example given.

College C is another great example. How is it that College C provides resources that offer opportunities to engage more deeply with cultural difference? They are the only institution out of the three that has an international house, where both domestic and international students live together with a commitment to lead activities and host events to engage the college community in experiencing cultural differences on a more frequent basis. They are also the only institution that facilitates "cross-cultural dialogues" to give students a structural opportunity to share their own perspectives and discuss opinions held by home cultures on different themes, such as pop culture (what pop culture looks like in your home country and why), dating and relationships.

What is so unique about College C, that makes it so different from College A and College B? College C shows evidence of the greater awareness and understanding, as the head of an office - unrelated to that of international student services - so eloquently described, in terms of international student experience and outcomes. This level of awareness and understanding - observable even outside of the office of international student services - shows evidence that the

institution's structure is better aligned, as it relates to the College's mission that includes international students. College C *as a whole* begins to show evidence of a more holistic, integrative and inclusive approach that values the added depth that cultural diversity provides learning institutions of higher education.

Organizational Structure and Alignment

Organizational structure and alignment in this study refers to: 1.) the structure, or design, and purpose of the offices at an institution, and 2.) whether the members of these offices implement the formal structure, or create an alternative "informal" structure that has a purpose distinct from the formal one.

Structure and *design* are defined as: whether the study abroad office shares the same office with international student services, or whether they exist as two separate offices. *Purpose*, is defined as: increased global literacy, increased awareness around campus, or a focus specifically on serving international students.

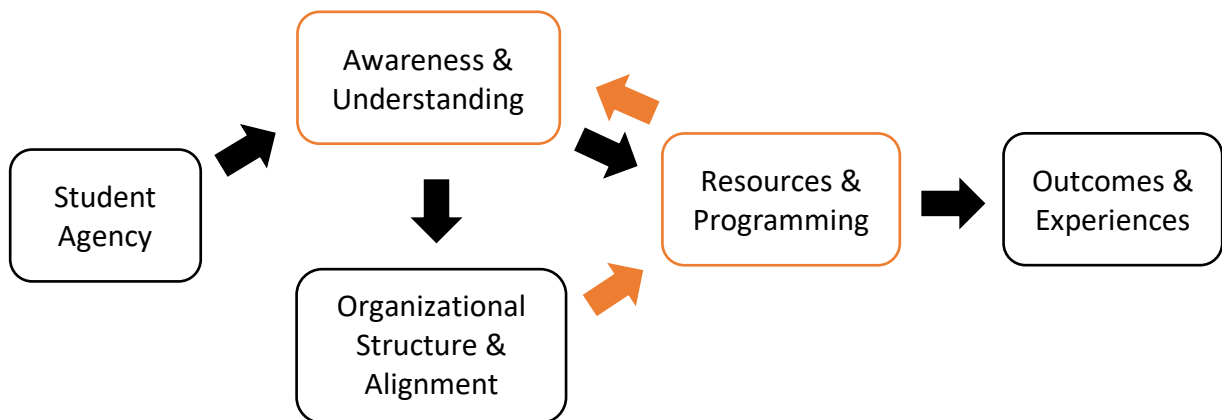**Figure 9.** Example 4: Lack of Structural Alignment at College A
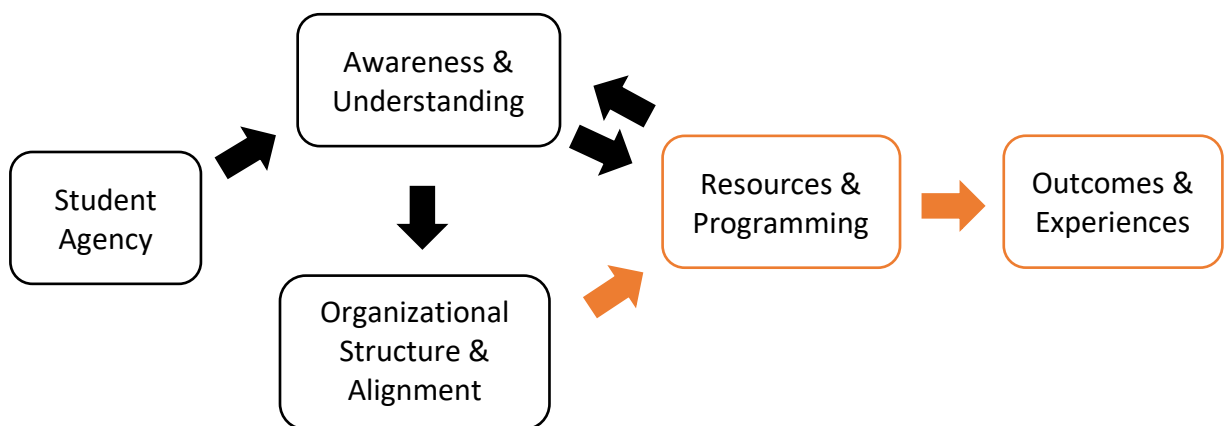
* Arrows in Figure 9 mark the flow of information and influence. Orange is used to highlight the conceptual path

used in the example given.

In the case of College A, for example, the head of international student services expresses *strong disagreement* with the institution's choice of joining the study abroad and international student services offices - to form the Center for Global Education. This lack of alignment between the formal and informal model at College A means that, in practice, the members of the joint office still define their roles and goals as separate from one another. These disjunctive goals shape the resources and programming available at College A, which affect the outcomes and experiences of students and staff (see Figure 9, above).

The opposite occurs at College B, where the head of international student services expresses *strong agreement* in the institution's choice of joining the study abroad and international student services offices to form the Office of International Students and Scholars.

Figure 10. Example 5: Office Under Review at College B

* Arrows in Figure 10 mark the flow of information and influence. Orange is used to highlight the conceptual path used in the example given.

In a different example of these variables at College B (Figure 10, on the previous page), the representative of International Place spoke of "creating awareness of the international population on campus" as one of the goals of the office. She would like to create a new program that would increase the awareness of Administration:

> "for awareness, we've also done something that I would like to expand on that - We created a sort of like a presentation on the international student experience. So, we do like a side-by-side scenario of how a US student kind of goes through their college experience versus an international student and we would like to turn that into like an ally training for staff and faculty as well as mentors."

If this ally training were created and successfully implemented, it could increase the awareness and understanding of the international student experience among staff and faculty on campus (see Figure 10, on the previous page). Her ability to create new resources can be increased or inhibited by the stated purpose and design of her office.

Resources and Programming

Resources and programming refer to the structural supports created by an institution to mediate any of the six identified challenges that international students face in college in the United States: 1.) language proficiency, 2.) social challenges, 3.) cultural differences, 4.) academic differences, 5.) immigration and legal issues and 6.) site specific challenges. Each of these six challenges were identified from the literature, as discussed in Chapter 1. Examples of resources and programming addressing these six challenges at each institution is described in more detail in Chapter 4, Table 1. A copy of Table 1 is provided again in this chapter for ease of reference:

Table 1. Challenges Addressed in Programming or Events Across Various Institutions of Higher Education

	College A	College B	College C
Language Proficiency / **Social Challenges**	1. Student Led Club 2. Resident Assistant training (RAs meet international freshmen) 3. Orientation Activities	1. Language Program (2-14 students per generation) 2. Language Immersion Exchange Program (host) 1. Orientation Leaders 2. Student Led Club 3. Orientation Info. Session 4. "Reunion" after Orientation (college experience – international vs. domestic students) 5. Friday Coffee Hour (open space in office lounge) 6. International Education Week (thematic week) 7. Mental Health Activity (awareness, normalization) 8. Resident Assistant training (awareness, student experiences, mental health + stigma)	1. Mentorship Program 2. Student Led Club 3. "Quality of Life" workshops 4. Resident Assistant training (awareness, inclusive language, mental health + stigma) 0. Cross-Cultural Learning Community (mixed nationality thematic dorm)
Cultural Differences	1. Annual Dinner (international students cook for all) 2. Orientation Session 0. Student Led Club	1. Sexual Assault Awareness & Prevention Orientation Information Session 2. Annual Dance with Performances (students perform) 3. Annual Festival (food, music, student led booths) 0. Student Led Club	1. Orientation Info. Session (transitions, etc.) 2. Annual Festival (food trucks, student led booths) 3. Cross-Cultural Dialogues (thematic discussions) 4. Cross-Cultural Learning Community (mixed nationality thematic dorm) 0. Mentorship Program 0. Student Led Club 0. Resident Assistant training (awareness, inclusive language, mental health + stigma)
Academic Differences	1. Orientation Academic Panel	1. Mentioned in Orientation Info. Session	1. Orientation Info. Session (high school vs. college) 0. Mentorship Program
Immigration + Legal Issues	1. Orientation Session 2. Employment workshop (for seniors) 2. Tax workshop	1. Orientation Info. Session 2. Employment workshop	1. Orientation Info. Session 2. Employment workshop 3. Tax workshop
Site Specific Challenges	1. Winter Shopping Trip (with financial aid)		1. Winter workshop (how to dress, have fun, mental health)

* Note: X-axis categorizes resources and programming by the institution that offers them, while the y-axis categorizes the same by what challenge they address.

The goal of this table was to outline the structural resources - programming, events and services - provided by each college to address the challenges international students face at institutions of higher education as informed by the literature. One-on-one appointments, such as for advice on immigration, were not counted towards events or programming because they depend on individuals taking initiative and they vary in content. Orientation workshops were categorized separately by what challenge they addressed in this table. All orientation programming included in the table refers to that of *international student* orientation programs, specifically. Orientation leaders were only categorized as addressing social challenges as they are not explicitly responsible for addressing cultural differences, academic differences or other challenges and may only do so informally if the social relationship develops. Mentorship programs are instead categorized as addressing social challenges, cultural differences and academic differences because their responsibility or purpose is broader. Student led clubs are also listed under both social and cultural categories since international student clubs have both a social and a cultural purpose. Events initiated and led by student clubs (e.g. potluck dinner, movie night) are not included in the table. Informal structures or additional detail is provided in the discussion. Resources listed in more than one category (i.e. mentorship program, student led club) show a number above zero when they are listed in the most pertinent category on the table and show number zero when listed a second or third time in potentially less pertinent categories. Numbers are intended to show the quantity of resources primarily designed to address specific challenges.

Outcomes and experiences refer to campus climate, student experiences, relations between international and domestic students (such as friendships among international students, and between international and domestic students), inclusion, diversity, stereotypes, multiculturalism and respect between students. Below, examples are provided that describe how the resources and programs provided at each of the three colleges impacts student outcomes and experiences.

At College A, for example, the creation of an international student orientation program influences the outcomes and experiences of incoming international students, in that it helps facilitate the transition to college life by providing information on some of the academic and cultural differences at College A, while explaining what resources and programs are available to help students with immigration/legal issues and creation of student peer support systems.

College B organizes an annual festival with food and music from around the world, as well as culturally themed student led booths. This celebration impacts international student outcomes and experiences, in that it serves as a way of introducing domestic and international students to the customs of other cultures. This exposure can spark interest, appreciation or curiosity for other cultures, as well as facilitate greater awareness of the diversity that can be found globally, thereby impacting student learning at the college.

College C's international house and cross-cultural dialogues affect student outcomes and experiences in that they allow for deeper engagement with both the customs, norms and practices of other cultures, as well as the personal experiences and perspectives of both domestic and international students alike.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

<u>*Conclusion*</u>

This study set out to identify the variables that influence the resources and programming offered to international students across different institutions of higher education. Chapters 1 and 2 of the study discuss the existing literature as it relates to several topics ranging from: the needs and challenges that international students face in higher education - with suggestions concerning resources and programming to mediate these challenges - to the importance of international students and the value of diversity and multiculturalism for learning at institutions of higher education. However, the literature does not discuss or explain the differences in programming and resources offered to international students across institutions of higher education.

In Chapter 3, the methods of data collection and analysis employed in the ensuing chapters is presented. Chapter 4 discusses the resources available to international students at each of the three colleges observed. Chapters 5 and 6 offer an analysis of the data collected at each college to identify and explain how: 1.) student agency, 2.) awareness and understanding, and 3.) organizational structure and alignment, affect 4.) the institutional resources and programing made available to international students at college. Finally, in Chapter 7, a conceptual model, based on an analysis of the data presented in the earlier chapters, is developed to explain how the interaction among these four variables, in turn, determines the outcomes and experiences of international students in college. The model is presented as a tool, for the analysis of institutional variation in addressing international student challenges, as well as to improve resource allocation and programming at institutions of higher education.

Limitations

The data collected on each of the three institutions is limited by the following factors. One, the research for this study was conducted part-time over the duration of two college semesters, where the researcher was able to interact with one institution in person and two additional institutions only through telephone interviews. This inherently meant that more information was available on the institution to which the researcher had greater access. Two, the researcher was only able to conduct interviews with up to three representatives at each institution. Three, the data collected (interviews, internal documents and published sources) was limited to three liberal art institutions of higher education, with less than two thousand undergraduates each, and an international student population of five percent or more. The possibility of conducting further interviews, at the three institutions observed and an additional two that were considered, was limited by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considerations for Future Research

Future research should consider expanding the study to include additional interviews with other offices and representatives, as well as to include more institutions. At the same time, it would be valuable to conduct surveys and focus groups to include data on student perceptions, and otherwise find ways to deepen and broaden the data. The conceptual model should be tested further, both in its application to mediating the challenges international students face and in its application to mediating the challenges of other student groups. Additional variables and relationships among the variables should be considered, including interactions between student outcomes and experiences, and student agency that might suggest a circular conceptual model.

APPENDIX

<u>*Semi-Structured Interview Questions*</u>

1. What is your department's role and interaction with international students?

2. What programs, activities or resources do you have available for international students?

3. What goals do you have for these programs, activities or resources?

4. To what extent do you feel these goals have been met?

5. Is there any literature that has informed the development of programs or goals for international students?

   (If so, could you share it with me?)

<u>*Initial Email*</u>

Subject: Thesis Student from Bates College

Text:

Dear _____,

I hope this email finds you well.

I am a student from Bates College writing my sociology thesis on the relationship between administration and students in institutions of higher education. The focus is on resources available for international students. Could I interview you for 30 min. over a call at a time that is convenient for you? I understand you play an important role on this front at _[institution]_. All information will remain anonymous and will not be linked with the specific institution.

I realize you are very busy and will therefore greatly appreciate your time. If relevant, please know that the results of the study will be shared with your institution (I am conducting

interviews with five small liberal arts colleges) to better inform the institution of its standing (or strengths and weaknesses) relative to other institutions.

I very much look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your attention;

Francesca

Request for Resources Email

Subject: Interview Follow-up

Text:

Hi ____,

Thank you so much for your time this [morning/afternoon]! _[Personalized message.]_

As I mentioned in our conversation, I am trying to collect as much data as possible from each of the three institutions I am studying in order to create three in-depth case studies that I can learn from. Could you send me any sources (e.g. handouts, PowerPoint presentations, handbooks, fliers) on the different resources (e.g. orientation, _[examples specific to institution]_) that your department or _[institution]_ in general offers to international students?

I would love to stay in touch throughout my study and share my thesis with you when it's completed.

Much appreciated!

I hope you have a great day!

Best,
Francesca

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