

**Success Programs for International Students:
A Program Initiative at New York University
Silver School of Social Work**

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International Student Enrollments

Despite a small decrease after September 11, 2001, international study in the United States has been steadily increasing over the last decade. The International Institute of Education (IIE) reports that new international student enrollment in the United States is at an all time high. New international student enrollments for the 2007-2008 academic year increased by 10% (IIE, 2008). This is almost a third more international students than the 2004-2005 academic year when new international student data was first reported by IIE. Furthermore, the total international student acceptance rate is expected to increase 25% by 2025 (Bohm, Davis, Meares & Pearce, 2002). As student affairs professionals, it is important to remain cognizant of the changing demographics in higher education to adequately support student needs. At the New York University Silver School of Social Work, an International Student Advisory Group was initiated to address concerns and provide academic, social, and professional development support for international students. Since instituting the Advisory Group and a new program initiative, it has become evident through improved student grades, evaluations, and anecdotal information received from faculty that international students are better supported academically. In addition, they are contributing to the greater community's social capital, an unintended albeit positive outcome.

International Student Challenges

It is important for student affairs professionals to consider the transitional support services that are needed to foster student success. As they transition into new communities, international students experience varied academic expectations and modes of communication that may function as barriers to their acculturation. These barriers may include communication styles, fear, and homesickness, as well as lowered self-esteem, and can impact students' academic success (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Noh & Kaspar, 2003). Additionally, international students sometimes withdraw from sharing their experiences because they may feel uncomfortable in new environments, such as a university, and unsure how to fit in with the host culture.

International Student Support at Silver School of Social Work

With knowledge of the struggles international students may face and in an effort to support the academic, professional and social development of the international student body, the NYU Silver School of Social Work (SSSW) implemented a pilot project to support this unique population. An international student Advisory Group was formed, comprised of a student affairs officer, an academic affairs officer, and a field internship faculty member. The Advisory Group's composition represented each of the major areas within the School where student learning and support services intersect. This group was formed in order to assess international student needs and provide coordinated support services.

The pilot project was initially modeled on a presentation by representatives from NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at the 2007 NYU Student Affairs Conference. An initial student survey was conducted in the summer 2007 semester to assess international student needs at SSSW. The survey was sent to 75 students and alumni and generated ten responses. Respondents stated that the academic and writing support services at the time were inadequate. Additionally, 60% of the respondents indicated that they did not participate in any co-curricular programs or groups. Because of the survey responses, the Advisory Group piloted several New Student Orientation programs to assist international students with the transition into their roles as social work students.

New international students attended a mandatory half-day orientation that preceded the Master of Social Work (MSW) student orientation. The table below (Table 1) identifies each of the programs offered, the topics covered, and the intended goals.

Table 1*New International Student Orientation Program*

Program Title	Topics Covered	Intended Goals
Group Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduction of Faculty and Administration ○ Ice Breaker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students become acquainted with each other • Familiarize themselves with faculty and School Administrators
What It Means to be an International Social Work Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Academic Policies ○ Curriculum Sequencing ○ Classroom Expectations ○ Academic Advisement ○ ESL Resources ○ Field Placement Expectations ○ Role of a SW Student Intern ○ Issues of Confidentiality/ Privacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give students an introduction to the Academic & Field Requirements • Help ease concerns around expectations • Discuss possible resources for Writing/Language concerns
SSSW & NYU Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Role of Student Affairs Office ○ Introduction to Office of International Students and Scholars ○ Introduction to University Counseling Services ○ University Activities & Resources ○ SSSW Activities/Student Groups/Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make students aware of services and resources available to them • Encourage active participation and engagement across school and campus
Ice Breaker with 2 nd Year International Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Current students discuss their experiences in the MSW Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afford new students the opportunity to connect with continuing students • Discuss academic success strategies
Building & Campus Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tour of Social Work Building ○ Tour of NYU Campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquaint students with NYU facilities, SW Offices, classroom and local eateries and NYC area
International Student Wrap-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Q&A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure students get all their orientation questions answered • Prepare for first week of classes

Additionally, on the 2007 survey, students identified needing more support to meet academic and field expectations, write for the profession and connect with other international students. Therefore, various programs were offered during the students' first semester (see Table 2).

Table 2
Skill Building Workshops

Program	Topics Covered	Intended Goal
Introduction to U.S. Social Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Development of the US Social Welfare system ○ Policy formation and implementation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with an overview of the history of Social Welfare and policy development in the United States
APA Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review APA Guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarize students with the accepted method of writing a research paper • Properly citing sources • Avoiding plagiarism
Writing Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Proper grammar and sentence structure ○ Writing a research paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help student develop writing strategies • Identify reading and writing techniques
Field Learning & You	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Helping students prepare for their roles as social work interns ○ Addressing concerns & anxieties ○ Identifying learning goals and expectation for field learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review with students their roles and ensure student readiness to begin field internship • Help students understand expectations and work through normal anxieties associated with being an intern

In addition to the above programs, an International Student Support Group was formed through the University Counseling Center. The group met weekly and afforded students the opportunity to discuss any stress they were experiencing. Further social support systems were implemented through International Student Networking Socials that were offered twice per semester. These socials encouraged new and continuing students to network and discuss various topics such as upcoming registration, advisement, holiday plans, and career planning. There were also many campus-wide programs that international students were strongly encouraged to attend, including

English as a Second Language conversation groups and workshops offered by the Office of International Students and Scholars. To better coordinate and enhance communication, the SSSW Student Affairs Office developed a bi-weekly calendar listing and updated all relevant events.

Results and Unintended Outcomes

The feedback received from students indicated that the intended goals of the above programs were met. In a survey conducted to solicit feedback on the international student orientation, 45.5% rated the half-day program as 'Excellent' (based on a Likert scale with 1 as poor and 5 as excellent). Students indicated their appreciation for the opportunity to get to know other students. This interaction provided them with a sense of security, as they were able to see and talk with other international students. A second survey was conducted in the summer of 2009 to assess the first two years of the program initiative. When asked the question "How would you rate the support you received in the following areas?" which was intended to assess the students' perception of their own academic preparation, preparation to go into field, writing for social work, and cultural awareness, student responses reflected increased satisfaction in these areas (see Table 3).

Table 3

Responses to 'How would you rate the support received'

	2007 Responses of Very Adequate/ Adequate	2009 Responses of Very Adequate/ Adequate	% Change
Academic Preparation	50%	86%	41.9%
Preparation to go to the Field	60%	58%	- 3.5%
Writing for Social Work	50%	71%	29.6%
Cultural Awareness	33%	71%	53.5%

As shown in Table 3, most areas indicated an improvement in the two years after implementing the program initiative. Additionally, it appears that the Advisory Group and the programs implemented have had a positive impact on students' academic progress. While a direct correlation has not yet been identified, it is noteworthy that in the years following the pilot project, the average GPA for international students rose 5.6% to 3.92 out of 4.0. Anecdotally, the advisory group members collaborated on all

student concerns and coordinated efforts to resolve various issues (i.e. academic challenges, language barriers, field experience issues, etc.). The Advisory Group also established a rapport with the students that made it easier for them to address concerns with the Advisory Group members.

In examining the outcomes of this program initiative, the authors have found that in addition to helping students achieve academic and professional development, the results also reflect the construction of social capital. While there is debate on a succinct definition, Roberts & Lacey (2008) surmised that social capital is anything that fosters individual or collective action, trust, social norms, reciprocity, networks, and social relationships. In addition, social capital reflects interactions, building of relationships, and social networks (Schuller, 2001). Glaeser (2000) asserts that education and social engagement can influence the development of social skills and confidence thus contributing to the formation of social capital. Similarly, Astin (1999) discusses the role of student affairs professionals in promoting engagement and its potential impact on academic persistence. Therefore, helping students become engaged can have positive impacts on both social capital and students' academic development.

Based on the survey responses and feedback from students and faculty, the Advisory Group believes that the combination of the orientation programs and the coordinated support provided by the advisory group has led to more international student involvement in the Silver School of Social Work. For example, students established the Asian Student Association (ASA), which initiated the publication of an ASA Newsletter and have taken on active leadership roles in the Graduate Student Association, the student government organization for the MSW Program.

Since the beginning of the Advisory Group's work and based on discussions with students (international and non-international), the following has been observed of SSSW international students and the impact on the community:

- International students are more self-assured and willing to engage intellectually in classroom discussions
- Classroom discussions have included and explored international social systems that add to classroom discourse and perspectives
- International students have added to community development through their collaboration on projects with non-international students
- Increasing attendance by non-international students at ASA events
- Non-International students are now invited to be on the leadership core of ASA
- International students now meaningfully participate in school community-building events (Monthly Socials, Winter Ball, etc.)

- Other student groups discuss opportunities to address issues or integrate themes important to international students in our community
- International students now request field placement outside of their traditional comfort zone (type of populations their internship covers, location, etc.)

The authors' findings indicate that international students at the SSSW are more engaged, contribute a great deal to the classroom and community, and succeed academically. As international student enrollments continue to grow, student and academic affairs professionals need to be prepared to adequately support the social and intellectual development of this student population. It is also evident that social capital or social and intellectual development may be achieved through providing support services to international students that help them acclimate to the academic and social environments of their respective campus.

As universities and colleges continue to see growth in international student enrollments, student and academic affairs professionals need to be prepared to adequately support the social and intellectual development of this student population. The SSSW program initiative, though small (cohorts of 17-20 students), shows great promise in supporting international students. The outcomes suggest that international students at SSSW are socially engaged, contribute in the classroom and to the community, and are succeeding academically. With its proven success, this initiative could serve as a basic framework for other student and academic affairs professionals. In addition, we suggest replication research of the SSSW model with a larger international student cohort. If social capital can be developed and students' social and intellectual capacities enhanced via support program initiatives such as the one presented here, not only will students benefit but the profession of student and academic affairs will reap the rewards as well.

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