

International Office and Disability Services: Collaboration Methods and Maintenance

Presented at The Seventh International Conference on Higher Education and Disability by Monica Malhotra

Goal: Increase collaboration between the International Office and Disability Services to help international students with disabilities achieve their educational objectives. Ensure a strong foundation between the two offices in order to recruit international students with disabilities to the US to further advance disability education and access around the world.

Current Challenges:

- International office staff and students: Disability Services? Which disabilities and what services?
- International Office staff: Are there any community resources?
- International students: What is US disability culture and terminology?
- Disability Services:
 - What are some cross-cultural factors affecting international students?
 - Are there any affects certain accommodations may have on an international student's immigration status?
 - Are there any international resources that assist international students with disabilities?

International Student Services:

- Understanding of federal immigration regulations
- Cross-cultural expertise: training students and staff
- Knowledge of international resources to assist international students with disabilities: Mobility International, AHEAD, NAFSA, EducationUSA, AMIDEAST
- Intercultural programming to assist with cultural adjustment: field-trips, language/cultural exchange, and family/friendship program
- Orientation activities : Student organization and student services information fair, information sessions, intercultural programs
- Financial aid for international students
- Sponsored Student Services : working closely with Fulbright programs and various sponsoring agencies that support the recruitment of international students with disabilities

Disability Services:

- Understanding of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Understanding of Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)
- Student services and accommodations
- Campus and community resources for accessibility purposes
- Disability resource page
 - Scholarships for students with disabilities
 - Campus outreach regarding services and disability culture
 - Strong relationship with Counseling Center and Health Center

Collaboration Methods:

Administrative

- Evaluate web resources for each office
- Update websites for easier navigation
- Collaborate on financial assistance eligible for international students with disabilities

Staff Development

- Designate a liaison for each office to maintain communication
- Arrange professional development trainings for each office
- Collaborate with the counseling center on campus
- Conduct outreach as a collaborative unit to connect with off campus resources
- Create pre-departure resource check-list for staff

Student Services

- Invite Disability Services to international student orientation and information fairs
- Connect international and US students with disabilities together for peer support
- Create pre-departure resource check-list for international students arriving to the US
- Collaborate on welcome materials for students: cultural aspects of disability in the US and relevant on and off campus resources
- Create information sessions for students hosted by the International Office

Maintenance Plan:

- Conduct regular meetings with liaisons from each office
- Schedule training sessions for staff at least once per year
- Schedule presentations for students
- Review and update web resources each semester
- Track statistics of international students using Disability Services
- Attend workshops for continued education regarding international student resources
- Create an assessment strategy to ensure the offices are meeting stated goals



Cross-Cultural Issues Affecting International Students with Visible and Invisible Disabilities



INTERNATIONAL OFFICE
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Common obstacles for ALL international students

- Language barriers
- Academic pressure
- Lack of support
- Cultural adjustment

Added difficulties affecting international students with disabilities

- Psychological distress
- Exacerbated symptoms due to adjustment process (preexisting challenge worsens with the additional stress) and Health Center

Why students have difficulty seeking help

- Students from collective societies may find it more comfortable to seek help from family/friends rather than “strangers”
- Pride/shame issues: Students may be embarrassed at the thought of getting help, especially if they are used to always succeeding in their home country without assistance
- Status: Some students do not believe they qualify for assistance since they are not US citizens
- Stigma of mental illness and disability

How to sell the services

- Communicate with student how the service will help achieve their goals (high GPA and graduating on time)
- Address concerns by using a more directed approach- ask questions that lead to answers
- Make suggestions and examples relevant to the student
- International Office and Disability Services Collaboration

Other suggestions

- Advise students to focus on their improvement and long-term goals
- Understanding that some students are financially dependent on their parents therefore may find it helpful to role-play to help explain their challenge to their parents back home
- Understand international students struggle to adjust to the US and to university culture

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Resources:

Disability Resources

- Association on Higher Education and Disability
<http://www.ahead.org/>
- University of New Orleans; Training, Resource, and Assistive-technology Center (TRAC)
<http://www.trac.uno.edu/>
- Americans with Disabilities Act
<http://www.ada.gov/>
- The ABCs of Success for Students with Disabilities
Kathie Schneider, UW-Eau Claire Counseling Services
<http://www.uwec.edu/counsel/pubs/abcs.htm>

International Resources

- Crossing Cultures – Disabilities Represented by International Students
<http://www.miusa.org/publications/books/communitycolleges/internationalstudentspecifics>
- Mobility International, National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE)
<http://www.miusa.org/ncde>
- NAFSA- Association of International Educators
<http://www.nafsa.org/>
- EducationUSA Advising Centers
<http://www.educationusa.info/centers.php>
- AMIDEAST
<http://www.amideast.org/>
- Mobility International, NCDE's funding international exchange
<http://www.miusa.org/ncde/financialaid/fundingtousa>
- European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education- Agency Projects
<http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects>
 - Higher Education Accessibility Guide (HEAG)
<http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/heag>
 - Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education
<http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/multicultural-diversity-and-special-needs-education>

University of Texas at Austin

- Working with UT International Students with Psychological Disabilities
Sylvia Chen, Counseling and Mental Health Center, University of Texas at Austin
- Services for Students with Disabilities
<http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>
- International Office, International Student and Scholar Services
<http://www.utexas.edu/international/iss/>



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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Monica Malhotra,

International Student Advisor, International Office

Phone: (512) 232-9428

Email: monicam@austin.utexas.edu