

A Conceptual Framework for Comprehensive International Student

Orientation Programs

Jinghua Deng Meyer

International student orientation is a crucial element to international students' transition and a significant part of a multi-faceted approach to their retention. Enrollment of international students does not guarantee their graduation. Designing effective comprehensive orientation programs to help the transition of international students is one of the important challenges facing American campuses. Synthesizing the existing research on general orientation, international students' adjustment problems, cross-cultural education, and general theories of human development and programming, this article presents a conceptual framework for effectively designing and conducting comprehensive international students orientation programs.

This conceptual framework provides ideas, principles, and suggestions for international student affairs professionals to design and conduct effective comprehensive international student orientation programs. It takes a broad view of the fundamentals of international student orientation. It is composed of four concepts: the needs of international students (Needs), the principles of designing and conducting comprehensive international student orientation programs (Principles), the components of comprehensive international student orientation programs (Components), and the approaches to comprehensive international student orientation programs (Approaches). Figure 1 illustrates the relationships of these four concepts within the conceptual framework.

The needs of international students are the base upon which comprehensive international student orientation programs build. The needs of international students determine the principles. The principles provide the guiding ideology for effectively designing and conducting comprehensive international student orientation programs that meet the needs of international students. The needs of international students and the principles together guide the choice of components for a comprehensive international student orientation program and the approaches that best present the components. The components include the structural and content compositions of comprehensive international student orientation programs. Once the components are determined, they function as one of the elements that determine the choice of approaches. Approaches are determined by the needs of international students, the program designing principles, and the components of the programs. They provide specific ways in

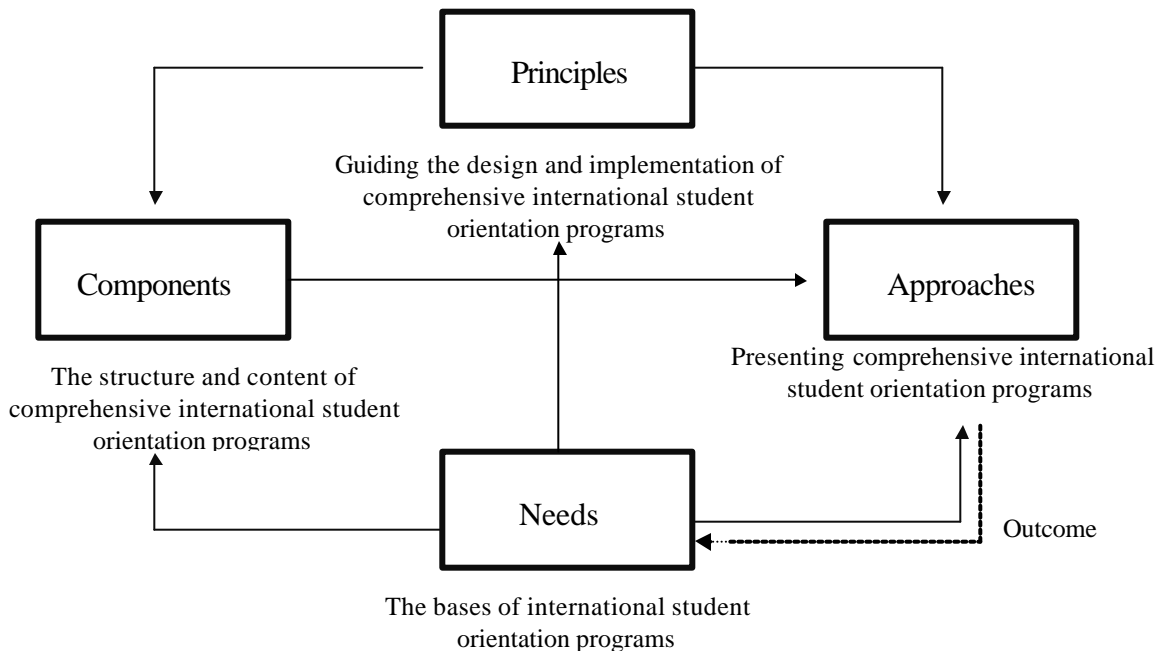


Figure 1. The Relationships of the Four Concepts of the Conceptual Framework for Designing and Conducting International Student Orientation Programs

which comprehensive international student orientation programs can be presented to meet international students' needs. In Figure 1 the dotted line shows that the outcomes of the comprehensive international student orientation program is meeting international students' needs. In the following sections, each concept is described in detail.

The Needs of International Students

According to Jacobs (1988), "All too often student affairs professionals justify programs and policies by their current menu of programs rather than by any documented evidence of the developmental needs of students" (p. 145). It is very important to think about students' needs when initiating and designing any programs. Assessing whether or not international students' needs have been met is the most basic standard for determining whether an international student orientation program is effective. It is also the base upon which effective comprehensive international student orientation programs build. The more we know about international students, their needs, interests, and academic preparation, the better the comprehensive orientation programs can help international

students' adjustment. Therefore, understanding the special needs of international students is crucial in providing effective orientation programs for their successful transition to American colleges.

International students come from various countries around the world; and, as a group, they will display a wide range of difference among them. It is important to recognize that all international students are unique individuals, and have their own culturally conditioned conceptions, expectations, sensitivity, and understanding, which will influence their adjustment and learning. Equally important to recognize is that, however different international students may seem, they share some common concerns. They also share some common needs brought about by being far away from their familiar cultural and educational environment and from their family and social support network, and by facing an entirely new environment. The literature review on international students' adjustment problems found seven unique needs shared by international students. These needs, which are described below, provide the bases for the conceptual framework.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment

Far away from their native country, exposed to a new land, seemingly strange people, a new language, and different customs, many international students find themselves confounded and confused on their arrival. Researchers and practitioners have identified culture shock is one of the major problems facing international students (Alexander & Shaw, 1991; Lin, 1998; Thomas & Althen, 1989; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). In order to have a successful and enjoyable experience in the US, international students need to cope with cross-cultural adjustment stress. They need to develop strategies and skills that will facilitate cross-cultural understanding, communication and adaptation. A comprehensive international student orientation can help them develop these strategies and skills.

Adjusting to the American Educational System and Achieving Academic Success

Achieving academic success is a common need of all college students. Some differences exist, however, between international students' and domestic students' needs of achieving academic success. First, as the literature revealed, international students generally place a higher value on academic success than do domestic students (KaiKai 1989, Wehrky 1988). The majority of international students devote the largest percentage of their time and effort to achieving academic goals, and much of their stress is academically related.

Academic success is imperative [for international students]; failure is not an option for most of these young people because they feel enormous pressures from their families or their own governments to succeed in the disciplines in which they have been sent to study. (Wehrly, 1988, pp. 4-5)

Second, educational systems between the international students' country and the United States are often dramatically different (Carpenter, 1991; Constantinides, 1992); international students must quickly come to terms with these differences if they want to be academically successful. Third, the majority of international students are from non-English speaking countries (Institute of International Education, 1998), and, therefore, they have to academically succeed in their second language. These differences make achieving academic success difficult and stressful for international students. In order to cope with educational shock, and to be academically successful, international students need to know the American educational system, adjust their academic routines and classroom behavior, and develop new learning strategies. Comprehensive international student orientation programs can provide them with information about the American educational system and help them develop new learning strategies.

Enhancing English-Language Proficiency

Language is the most basic tool of learning and communication. Many studies on international students identify language as a common major barrier for international students (Alexander & Shaw, 1991; Lin & Yi, 1997; Mohr, 1994; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992). The contribution of perceived language skill in reducing stress outweighed the contribution of all other variables. In order to be academically successful and enhance communication ability, international students need to strengthen their perceived English-language skills. Comprehensive international student orientation programs can help them develop their language skills.

Establishing Interpersonal Relationships and Social Support Networks

Most students who are far away from home for the first time worry about finding new friends and establishing effective interpersonal relationships in a new environment. For international students, such worries and concerns are even more critical and stressful. This is because international students are completely uprooted from the family, friends, and cultural environment in which they have been reared, thrust into a world of strangers, with new culture, new customs, new values, and (for most international students) new language. Kaczmarek et al. (1994) compared international and U.S. students' adjustment subscale scores in Baker & Siryk's (1989) Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). They found that Social Adjustment and Institutional Attachment subscales for

international students were significantly lower than for their U.S. counterparts. Many studies have identified social isolation as one of international students' most difficult adjustment areas (Alexander & Shaw, 1991; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994; Paige, 1990; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Thomas & Althen, 1989; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Therefore, in order to have successful and happy experiences on American campuses, international students need to learn how to relate to people different from themselves; deal with faculty, administrators and domestic students; establish interpersonal relationships; and develop social support networks. Comprehensive international student orientation programs can help them develop new interpersonal skills and social support networks.

Maintaining Physical and Psychological Well-being

A healthy body and mind, though not the only requirements for successful and enjoyable academic and living experiences, are the basic capital one needs. Existing research (e.g. Fitzgerald, 1998; Junius, 1997; Lin, 1998; Lin & Yi, 1997; Sharif, 1994) indicates that various adjustment needs often put a pressure on international students that impacts their health. Health problems, in turn, intensify their adjustment problems. The intensified adjustment problems further aggravate their health problems causing a vicious circle. In order to have a successful and happy experience in the United States, international students need to be made aware of the stress of cross-cultural adjustment and the methods of dealing with the stress; to understand that maintaining physical and psychological well-being involves disease prevention and health promotion practices; to know how the American medical system works, and to know campus services and programs that help them with physical and emotional problems.

Comprehensive international student orientation programs can provide them with information about the American medical system and campus health services and recreational programs, and help them develop strategies to maintain physical and psychological well-being.

Managing Finances

Research shows financial pressure is one of the most commonly expressed concerns of international students (Fitzgerald, 1998; Junius, 1997; Lin, 1998; Lin & Yi, 1997; McCoy, 1996; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Most international students are undergraduate students. Many of them lack independent living experience. Political change and the economic crisis in their home country or the rising cost of American education may affect their private financial support source. Therefore, dealing with a new currency and cost of living

in a new cultural and social environment can become a big challenge. They need to know the cost of living and studying in the United States; to be aware of the possibility of campus financial support to international students and the limitations of that support; and to learn how to appropriately and effectively manage their various financial obligations, such as: tuition, books, rent, board, health insurance, transportation, personal expenses, family expenses, and recreation. A comprehensive international student orientation can provide them with financial information, and help them develop skills to manage their finances effectively.

Knowing Immigration Regulations

International students have a special legal status. They are not U.S. citizens and do not have the same rights as citizens. International students have to follow special immigration laws, such as they must maintain full-time student status, they can not drop in and out of school, and they can not reduce their course load. The employment rules are strict for international students; employment is usually limited to part-time work. They do not have access to social welfare services. Americans take the law very seriously. Legal problems may result if the rules are bent. International students have the need and responsibility to know the immigration regulations. In a survey of international students' campus experience (Kelsey, 1998), 84% of the respondents stated there should be immigration information available on the campus web site. Comprehensive international student orientation programs can provide international students with immigration regulations related to their status as students.

The needs described above are the building blocks upon which comprehensive international student orientation programs are built. These needs must be understood in order to effectively design and conduct comprehensive international student orientation programs. Understanding the needs, however, is not sufficient. The design and implementation of effective comprehensive international student orientation programs need to follow some guiding principles.

Principles for Designing and Conducting Comprehensive

International Student Orientation Programs

In order to effectively design and conduct comprehensive international student orientation programs that meet the international students' needs, eight principles are suggested. These principles provide international student affairs professionals with a guiding ideology for designing and conducting effective comprehensive international student orientation programs. These principles arise out of an analysis and synthesis of the experience of

international student education professionals as well as of intercultural education and training professionals who have developed, delivered, evaluated, and generally tried to understand and improve orientation. They are also built upon the research and program evaluation findings as well as the general theories and principles of student development and programming.

The Principle of Meeting International Students' Needs

Meeting international students' needs is a basic principle for effectively designing and conducting international students orientation programs. Total quality efforts focus on clientele needs as the main ingredient in quality improvement (Deming, 1986). "It is a good idea to abide by the basic principle that whatever services, programs, and facilities we offer must meet the needs of our clientele" (Terenzini & Upcraft, 1996, P. 29). Applying this principle in designing and implementing international student orientation programs means that the planner of the programs should:

1. Analyze what kind of orientation programs international students need, based on international students' and staff perceptions, institutional expectations, and research on international student needs.
2. Design and conduct comprehensive international student orientation programs to follow the sequence of needs development. For instance, according to Maslow (1954), human being's needs are not all at the same level. The hierarchy of needs, from lowest level to highest level are: (a) physiological needs -- basic bodily needs for sleep, food, stimulation, or activity; (b) safety needs -- protection against bodily harm or injury and security against threat; (c) belongingness and love needs -- acceptance, affection, approval, and warmth; (d) esteem needs -- self-respect, status, and worth; (e) self-actualization or fulfillment needs -- development of full individuality and realization of potential. A person can not attend to higher level needs when basic needs are not yet met. Therefore, an effective and well-balanced comprehensive international students orientation program should include components targeted at various levels of the needs hierarchy. It should start by addressing the most basic needs such as physiological needs and safety needs, and move towards addressing higher level needs such as belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs (in the following section "The Components of Comprehensive International Student Orientation Programs", this issue will be discussed in detail).
3. Make sure the components of comprehensive international students orientation programs cover the different levels of needs of international students.

4. Choose appropriate orientation approaches that meet international students needs.

The Principle of Definite Purpose

The design and implementation of effective comprehensive international student orientation programs should be based on explicitly stated purposes. Orientation is a goal-oriented process. If the purposes are not clear, the planner of the orientation program will have difficulty in developing effective programs. Applying this principle in designing and implementing international student orientation programs means that the planner of orientation programs should:

1. Understand the institution's educational mission.
2. Have a clear ideal for the purpose of orientation.
3. Set up long-term, short-term and intermediate goals for orientation (Mestenhauser, 1988).
4. Decide the contents of orientation programs based on the institutional mission and purpose of orientation, and international student needs.
5. Set up the specific task of each orientation program based on the main purpose of orientation.
6. Let orientation leaders and participants know their roles and the purpose of orientation.

The Principle of Theory Guiding Orientation Practice

The "CAS Student Orientation Programs Self-Assessment Guide" (Council for Advancement of Standards, 1988) states that, among other things, "student orientation programs must be based on or related to theories and knowledge of human development and learning characteristics" (p. 22). The design and implementation of effective comprehensive international students orientation programs should be based on theories and knowledge of human development and learning characteristics. Theories are the crystalization of human practices. They come from practice then, in turn, begin to guide practices. There are two kinds of theories, informal and formal. In order to design and conduct the most effective international students orientation programs, we should use formal theories to guide our orientation practice, because the formal theories are operationally and explicitly defined, and systematically tested (Dannells, 1993). "Their explicitness enables us to test our work against them, check the goodness of our outcomes, and craft the kinds of quality programs that characterize professionalism in our work" (Dannells, 1993, pp. 9-10). Applying this principle in designing and conducting comprehensive orientation programs means that international student orientation professionals should:

1. Realize the importance of using formal theories and knowledge of human development and learning characteristics to guide the design and implementation of comprehensive international student orientation programs.

2. Be familiar with and obtain relevant human development theories, such as Maslow's theory of human needs development (1954), Erik Erikson's theory (1963, 1968) on psychosocial development, and adult motivation theory (Knowles, 1980; Wladkowski, 1985).

3. Integrate the theories as they relate to international students when applying any American student development theory in designing comprehensive international student orientation programs. Because these theories are rooted in the values of the American culture and educational system, international student orientation professionals should consider international students' characteristics when applying and evaluating theory. They should strive to develop theories that cut across cultures and value systems, and help provide new meaning to international education.

4. Follow the "practice to theory to practice to theory" model (Upcraft, 1993, as cited in Dannells, 1993). Upcraft (as cited in Dannells, 1993), summarized, adapted, and applied Wells and Kniefelkamp's 11-step practice-to-theory-to-practice model to orientation. These steps can also be the guideline references for applying theory to comprehensive international student orientation practice.

- Identify pragmatic concerns. What problems or issues need to be addressed?
- Determine orientation goals. What specific outcomes . . . are desired?
- Examine which theories may be helpful . . . [and relate] to the desired goals . . .
- Analyze student characteristics from the perspective of each theoretical cluster. Which theory or theory cluster seems to best fit the students involved? How might it help in both formally and informally viewing those students? . . .
- Analyze environmental characteristics from the perspective of each theoretical cluster. Which theory or theory cluster seems to best fit the environment? How might it serve as a "filter" for viewing students in the environment? . . .
- Analyze the source of developmental challenge and support in the context of both student and environmental characteristics. What are the specific sources of challenge and support? What is the optimum balance for these students in this environment? Seek to ensure that balance.
- Re-analyze orientation program goals. Are the students "ready" to learn all that is hoped? Should the goals be modified?
- Design the orientation program using methods that will facilitate the accomplishment of the intended outcomes. . . .
- Implement the orientation program.
- Evaluate the program. Has it accomplished its goals? . . . Are the staff and students satisfied? Develop suggestions for the future.
- Redesign the orientation program if necessary. (pp. 20-21).

To this eleven-step process, Upcraft (as cited in Dannells, 1993) added a twelfth:

- Revise or confirm the theory on the basis of its practical application. After a fair trial of several interventions based on the theory, it may become obvious that it is the theory, not the practice (orientation program), that should be revised. (p. 21)

The Principle of Facilitating Learning and Helping Student Learn How to Learn

Facilitating learning and helping students learn how to learn is a fundamental principle to follow when designing and implementing international student orientation programs. This is because (a) international students' main purpose is study; in general, they place greater importance on their academic and professional goals than they do on nonacademic concerns; (b) there is much for them to learn beyond the coursework in order to adjust to the new environment, eventually master an enormous quantity of complicated knowledge and behavioral skills, pursue their study, and obtain a degree; (c) we can not teach international students everything there is to know about American culture; to pretend to do so would be unethical at best and dangerous at worst (Hughes-Weiner, 1984, as cited in Martin, 1986b). Therefore, international students orientation programs should facilitate learning and enable international students to actively use their knowledge and understanding in new situations and to learn for themselves. This means orientation programs should:

1. Provide interesting, stimulating, practical, and rewarding information to help international students prepare themselves for the adaptation and learning tasks they will encounter (Clarke, 1988; Felsing, 1988).
2. Help international students adjust to the new educational environment and demands, and teach them how to handle the other aspects of their lives that affect academic success and to learn as efficiently, effectively, and extensively as possible.
3. Prepare, assist, and guide international students to confront difficult, real-life learning tasks.
4. Help international students take responsibility for their own learning.
5. Teach international students how to find and use sources that are relevant to their academic learning and real-life learning tasks.
6. Teach international students skills in learning how to learn, so they can continue the process of cultural and academic learning that was initiated during the orientation (Gamboa, 1988).
7. Encourage international students to participate in nonacademic activities such as student and campus organizations, as well as social and cultural events.

The Principle of Promoting Intercultural Learning and Cross-Cultural Adjustment

The principle of promoting intercultural learning and cross-cultural adjustment stems from the need to address culture shock and educational shock. Immersion in an unfamiliar cultural and educational environment results in a high degree of novelty that often creates high stress for international students. It is not the novel patterns themselves that cause stress and fatigue; but, rather international students' inability to predict novel values, thoughts, and behaviors that are characteristics of the United States, as well as to participate or respond appropriately. Stress, on the one hand, can provide the motivation and condition for learning about the new environment, but on the other hand, overly high stress can lead to culture shock and educational shock. Therefore, to help international students effectively cope with culture shock, we should apply the principle of promoting intercultural learning and cross-cultural adjustment into the design and implementation of international student orientation programs. Applying this principle can reduce the degree of unpredictability that international students have to face, and enhance international students' ability to participate or respond appropriately. This principle means designing and conducting international student orientation programs to:

1. Expand international students' knowledge of the new cultural, social, and educational environment, and help them become at least somewhat familiar with knowledge or skills that previously were unfamiliar.

2. Help international students to reduce a common tendency of people to view and judge other people and cultures in reference to their own culture's values, habits of thought, and patterns of behavior, as well as the conscious or unconscious assumption that one's own group is better than another group.

3. Assist international students (a) to respond to different habits, thoughts, and behavior patterns of all types with interest, openness, flexibility, and objectivity. (b) To see and interpret situations from the perspective of members of the other culture. And (c) to understand the relation of values to culture, social contexts and ethnic traditions, and recognize that they are entirely workable and sensible for those people.

4. Persuade them to temporarily lower their self-expectations for competent and successful behavior in order to reduce their sense of failure and feeling of stress (Grove & Torbiorn, 1986).

5. Make them aware of the process of cross-cultural adjustment and the symptoms of culture shock. Help them wrestle with assimilation and acculturation (Paige, 1986). Emphasize that cross-cultural experience requires them to make some different behavioral and attitudinal choices.

6. Inform them that when severe culture shock happens that individual counseling is always available.

Because many international students have a negative view about seeking counseling help (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; American College Health Association, 1997; Constantinides, 1992), it is necessary to explain how counseling works, how people in America view counseling, and how popular it is here. Let them know counseling services provide programs that deal with developmental issues not just mental illness.

7. Help international students to develop coping strategies that facilitate adjustment and minimize defensive reactions.

The Principle of Cultural and Language Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is not natural. It has not characterized most of human history. “Cross-cultural contact often has been accompanied by bloodshed, oppression, or genocide. Clearly, this pattern cannot continue. Today, the failure to exercise intercultural sensitivity is not simply bad business or bad morality -- it is self-destructive” (Bennett, 1986, p. 27). There is no absolute standard of “rightness” or “goodness” that can be applied to cultural behavior. For the most part, cultural difference is neither good nor bad, it is just different. Since a lack of cultural sensitivity is the legacy of human culture, when designing and implementing international student orientation programs, cultural sensitivity should always be a conscious focus. Language sensitivity should also be a conscious focus because most international students come from cultures where English is not a native language. Applying the principle of cultural and language sensitivity in designing and implementing comprehensive international student orientation programs means:

1. Choose warm, open, patient, and friendly individuals to conduct orientation programs.
2. Pay special attention to language in speaking with and presenting to international students: (a) speak slowly and enunciate very clearly, (b) emphasize and repeat important words, (c) use simple sentence structure and vocabulary, (d) avoid using slang, allusion, metaphor, jokes, and unfamiliar references without explanation, otherwise, these will confuse international students who are not familiar with American culture, (e) check often for comprehension, and (f) use visual aids such as posters and handouts to make the presentation more effective.
3. Respect the international students’ sensitivity about pride in their own culture.

4. Express interest in international students' countries. However, staff and student participants should refrain from volunteering knowledge about an individual international student's country, unless it is certain that such information will not make the student feel uncomfortable and jeopardize interaction with him or her.

5. Avoid talking about, and judging, religion and politics.

The Principle of Collaboration

Orientation is a collaborative activity and the joint responsibility of various constituencies within those institutions that enroll international students. A comprehensive international student orientation includes a wide range of tasks. It strives to integrate the institutional mission and the personal growth of entering international students; to help international students with their adjustment to the academic and social environment; to increase faculty involvement and enhance service delivery, and so forth. These tasks can not be completed by any single expert, or single group. International student orientation may start on a small scale. The ultimate aim of comprehensive international student orientation over time is to enhance international students' academic, social and personal development and to involve all people who can help international students' transition. Effective orientation programs do not just happen; they are complex endeavors that need strong organizational skills and wise, better informed attention to organizational effectiveness by all parties who have a stake in the process. "The best orientation experience occurs when there is a total campus commitment to the process and results from the collaborative efforts of students, senior administrators, faculty, and the broad spectrum of student affairs and educational support programmers" (Smith & Brackin, 1993, p. 35). Applying this principle in designing and conducting comprehensive international student orientation programs means that:

1. Comprehensive international student orientation programs should have adequate and qualified professional staff to fulfill their missions and to implement all aspects of their programs. "The orientation director must be extremely proficient in coordination, negotiation, supervision, and public relations in order to effectively meander through the institutional milieu and implement a meaningful and successful program or a series of programs" (Mullendore, 1992, p. 43).

2. While the foreign student adviser within the Office of International Student Services normally coordinates comprehensive international student orientation, it is very important and wise to involve as many others as possible.

3. Invite the president of the institution to formally greet the international students at the arrival orientation, which will be discussed in the components of comprehensive international student orientation. If it is possible, introduce the representatives of student service offices with which the new international students need to contact.

4. Coordinate with other departments/offices or community support organizations to develop special subject-based, on-going orientation programs.

5. Try to get those faculty members who understand the importance and the objectives of international student orientation to become involved. Invite them to present information about the U.S. academic system or U.S. society and culture, attend department orientation, or participate in social events.

6. Involve, select, train, and supervise experienced international and domestic students to participate in comprehensive international student orientation programs.

The Principle of Orientation Program Followed by Assessment

Did the orientation program complete its goal? Did the program contribute to the international students' transition to American campus? Is there anything we can do to improve international student orientation programs? What are students' perceptions about the orientation programs? In order to answer these questions, improve the orientation program, and demonstrate that orientation does what we say it does, we need to assess the program. Assessment is a goal oriented process. If orientation programs lack specific, clear, and shared goals, assessment as a process can push international student orientation professionals to clarify the programs' aims and standards. It also brings attention to where and how organization goals will be offered and implemented. Applying this principle in designing and implementing comprehensive international student orientation program means that the planner of comprehensive international student orientation programs should:

1. Make assessment a component of a comprehensive orientation program. Evaluate the orientation program immediately upon its completion.

2. Think ahead to what the institution and international students really care about, and what kind of assessment approaches will produce evidence that the relevant parties will find credible and applicable to the orientation program effectiveness.

3. Involve as many people as possible in assessment because assessment questions can not be fully addressed without participation by international students, international student orientation professionals and other people in the educational community.

4. Compare international student orientation program with the ones in other institutions. This can provide the benefit of the wisdom and success of others.

5. Ensure that the results of assessment are compiled in a concise format for reports and future planning. To be effective, reports must be distributed and read.

The eight principles described above, when combined with the specific needs of international students, provide a guideline and a base for determining the components of comprehensive international student orientation programs.

The Components of Comprehensive International Student

Orientation Programs

The components of a program include its structural and content composition. How does one determine the components of comprehensive international student orientation programs? Smith and Brackin (1993) suggested that:

To determine the components of a comprehensive orientation program, begin by asking three basic questions:

What is the nature and mission of the institution?

What is the mission of the orientation program?

What orientation program content will accomplish this mission? (p. 35)

Three more questions need to be added to these basic questions: (a) who are the objects of the orientation program? (b) what are the needs of the objects? and (c) what orientation program contents will meet the objects' needs? The mission of the orientation as stated by CAS is:

facilitating the transition of new students into the institution; preparing new students for the institution's educational opportunities; and initiating the integration of new students into the intellectual, cultural, and social climate of the institution. (Miller, 1997, p.133)

This mission, however, can not be accomplished without an understanding of and concern for the needs of orientation objects.

Determining the components of comprehensive international student orientation programs must synthetically consider the mission of institution, the mission of orientation, and the needs of international students. The components of comprehensive international student orientation programs can be addressed from two perspectives: structure and content.

The Structure of Comprehensive International Students Orientation Programs

Orientation is an ongoing process of personal, intellectual, and academic development. It begins with the first contact between the student and the admissions staff and continues throughout the academic years, culminating for many with graduation. The structure of that process for a comprehensive international student orientation program should include the elements of pre-departure or pre-arrival orientation, arrival orientation, on-going or continuing orientation, and returning orientation.

Pre-departure orientation. Comprehensive international student orientation programs should begin before students leave their countries. In some countries orientation programs occur for departing students with instruction covering both the generalities and the specifics to be anticipated in their experiences in the United States. Some countries, however, do not have any kind of orientation available, or have orientation programs that not cover the unique aspects of a local situation. It is necessary, therefore, for each institution enrolling international students, regardless of the number, to provide a pre-departure orientation to its newly enrolled international students.

The main goal of pre-departure orientation is to provide the necessary information to prepare international students for their arrival to the United States and to reduce anxiety and possible culture shock. Pre-departure orientation should focus on international students' basic needs. Information should be mailed that provides local, and practical instructions to international students, on the kinds of documents to bring; suggested clothing and gifts; monetary requirements; how to get on campus; how to find a place to live; how to register; and so forth. The program does not have to be elaborate and costly. Each institution can design its own pre-departure orientation based on its available resources and time.

Arrival orientation. Shortly after international students arrive on campus and before classes start, institutions should provide an arrival orientation. The main purposes of arrival orientation are to help international students get physically situated (e.g., find a place to live, become familiar with the campus setting, register for class, etc.) and psychologically prepared for their education and life here. Therefore, the arrival orientation should: (a)

focus on international students' basic arrival needs, such as picking them up at the airport or the train station, assisting them with accommodations, orienting them to the community, and helping them to become familiar with the campus setting, and get acquainted with other entering international students; (b) welcome international students and provide opportunities for them to meet campus resource persons and community volunteers; (c) make international students aware of the process of culture adjustment; (d) provide factual information and specific and practical guidance that will help their adjustment to the campus; (e) increase international students' knowledge about American culture and its educational system.

Arrival orientation can range from a few days to a few weeks, but should probably last at least 2 days. The length of orientation and its structure may vary based on the size of the institution or the number of international students. At institutions with a large number of new international students, arrival orientation could last a week. "A self-paced or do-it-yourself orientation may be appropriate if the number of international students is small, the size of the staff or budget is limited, or new students arrive at varying times to begin different academic programs" (Reiff & Kidd, 1986, p. 40). It is important, however, that arrival orientation programs, regardless of how they are offered, should meet international students' basic needs and cover topics that are necessary to students' initial adjustment and long-term well-being.

On-going orientation. Comprehensive orientation programs should not conclude after the arrival orientation. Cross-culture adjustment does not happen in a few days; it is a long term task. International students' adjustment follows a U-curve (Lysgaard, 1955). Usually their arrival and the early part of their stay are characterized by feelings of elation, curiosity, and optimism. As students become more involved in relationships, daily life, and social life, and as they encounter frustrations in achieving certain goals, they become confused, depressed, and sometimes negative toward the host culture. Comprehensive international student orientation should have programs to meet this characteristic of international students' adjustment. The arrival orientation's main task is to help international students set up a good starting base. The purposes of on-going orientation or continuing orientation are to: (a) strengthen the starting base; (b) assist international students with cultural conflicts, to achieve a balance between participating in the new culture and maintaining their own cultural identities; (c) help international students to deal with advanced and long term needs such as integration into campus and American life; (d) help international

students understand and follow immigration regulations; and (e) help international students to deal with new situations, such as submitting a complete and accurate income-tax statement.

On-going orientation programs can address a broad range of topics, but should be designed according to specific objectives that arise from international students' needs.

Returning orientation. Upon obtaining their degrees, many international students return to their home countries. Research has found that cross-cultural adjustment not only happens when sojourning to a new cultural environment. It also happens after returning home from a long term overseas sojourn (Marion, 1986; Sussman, 1986). Therefore, complete comprehensive international student orientation programs should include a returning orientation as a final component. In the literature, returning orientation is called re-entry orientation (Huntsberger, 1989; Marion, 1986; Pusch & Loewenthal, 1988; Sussman 1986). Re-entry, however, also can refer to an international student's re-entry into America after returning to his or her home country. To avoid this confusion, I use "returning" instead of "re-entry."

"Adjustment to the foreign culture, adjustment to the home culture, and the accompanying 'shock' phases are similar in that they involve transition and change for the individual" (Martin, 1986a, p. 148). The purpose of returning orientation is to help international students anticipate the readjustment process of returning home, lessen the impact of reverse culture shock, and provide a positive strategy for coping with returning home. Three topics can be addressed in returning orientation (Sussman, 1986): (a) becoming aware of changes, such as changes in the individual's thinking and behaving that differ from what he/she held at initial departure; changes in home culture; and changes in the home culture's expectations of the returning students; (b) understanding the cultural adaptation process and reverse culture shock; and (c) coping strategies.

The Contents of Comprehensive International Students Orientation Programs

Comprehensive international student orientation programs should address several broad categories of issues. The detailed content of topics that address these issues may vary from institution to institution, depending on local circumstances. The following content areas arise from the existing research literature and the assessment of international students' needs and their limitations.

Basic Needs. Before and after international students enter a new cultural and educational environment, some basic things must be addressed before they can focus on pursuing their educational and career goals.

Orientation should help international students address these needs, and enable them to build a safe and secure base on which to start their higher education in America. Based on the existing literature (Althen, 1990; NASFA, 1964, 1996), and personal experience and observation, the topics relating to international students' basic needs that should be appropriately covered in comprehensive international student orientation programs are:

1. Information on preparing for departure: documents that are needed to enter the United States; documents that should be brought (e.g., birth certificate and marriage certificate if the student is married); the climate and weather in the area the campus is located; suggestions for personal items and gifts; the "report date" (the day by which international students must arrive); money needs (e.g., cash needed during the trip to America and for the first month after arrival); travel tips; and transportation and directions to campus.

2. Housing: information for living-on and living-off campus; sources for locating a place to live; criteria for choosing a place to live; relative cost of housing in communities surrounding the campus; things to look for in a lease; and ways of getting help in finding a place to live.

3. Food and shopping: locations and types of restaurants, department stores, and grocery stores; second hand stores; garage sales; sale advertising; and the yellow pages of the telephone book.

4. Personal and health services: information about haircutting, laundry, dry cleaning, drug stores, medical insurance, clinics, and emergencies.

5. Campus facilities and services: information regarding the registrar, housing office, and office of international student services, etc.; location of these facilities and services; and suggestions about how to use them.

6. Financial matters: local general living cost; currency; banks and banking services; checks; budgeting and financial record keeping; and shopping for bargains.

7. Communication: using telephones; getting a telephone; mail service; campus bulletin boards; newspaper; internet; and e-mail.

8. Transportation: campus shuttle (if available); public transportation (if available); taxi; and owning and operating a car.

Cultural and Social Adjustment. Cultural and social adjustment is a challenge facing international students. While each person must develop his or her own ways of coping, addressing the following issues in international student orientation will help international students' adjustment.

1. Typical characteristics of U.S. culture: individualism; materialism; informality; time consciousness; and limited friendship.
2. General knowledge of culture shock: what is culture shock; symptoms of culture shock; and how to cope with culture shock.
3. Appropriate social conduct: classroom and office behavior; behavior for social events; behavior for guest and friendship partners; use of names and titles; gift-giving; male-female relationships; and social relationships in general.
4. Information on social support: campus social support organizations; community social support organizations; cultural and religious associations.
5. Information on campus life and activities such as student clubs, cultural activities, movies, sports, and exhibitions.

Educational adjustment. The American higher education system differs in many ways from most other educational systems. In order to help international students better adjust to a new educational system and be academically successful, the following issues can be addressed in comprehensive international student orientation programs:

1. The structure of American higher education: academic calendar; curriculum structure; registration procedure; credits and grades; graduation requirements; and department and faculty autonomy.
2. Learning skills and strategies: how to choose courses and a program of study; how to schedule study time; how to prepare for classes and exams; how to improve English language proficiency; and how to seek academic help.
3. The role of faculty members.
4. The role of the academic advisor.
5. The role of the foreign student advisor.
6. The responsibilities of students; what is expected of students.

Immigration regulations. Immigration regulations is a very important content of international student orientation because international students are responsible for knowing them. Orientation should cover the following regulations:

1. Maintaining student status.
2. Academic changes.
3. Transferring to another institution.
4. On-campus and off-campus employment during the academic term.
5. Employment after completed study.
6. Travel and reentry.
7. Changing status (e.g., from student status to working status).

Physical and Psychological Well-being. How to stay healthy, both physically and psychologically, is a big concern of international students. Comprehensive international student orientation should address health-related issues such as:

1. Campus safety and security regulations and services.
2. The importance of obtaining comprehensive health insurance.
3. How to choose a health-insurance plan.
4. Where and how to obtain medical care.
5. Counseling services and how to use them.
6. Exercising, eating right, and having healthy habits.
7. Sports, entertainment and team activities.

The components described above provide the content and structure of the comprehensive international student orientation programs. The specific means with which to deliver the components, however, has got to be determined.

The Approaches of Comprehensive International Student Orientation Programs

What are the ways in which comprehensive international student orientation programs can be presented? The choices of the approaches are determined by the needs of the international students, the principles, and the components of comprehensive international student orientation programs. Like the general student orientation, a comprehensive international student orientation can not be effectively completed by any single approach. Good and effective comprehensive international student orientation programs will incorporate a variety of approaches.

There are many different ways to present orientation programs. Lecture, discussion, tour, and handouts are some common ways. A synthesis of information on existing campus international student orientation and cross-cultural orientation programs, and the available literature on this topic, lead to the following recommended approaches.

Web Posting

Using the computer to deliver and present orientation programs is a very useful approach. International student orientation professionals and contemporary technology can work as allies in providing comprehensive international student orientation programs to international students. As mentioned before, a comprehensive international student orientation does not end at arrival orientation. Cross-culture adjustment takes time. International students will not encounter all of their adjustment problems at once. New international students often arrive at erratic times. After arrival orientation, new international students will go to different academic departments and have different class schedules. The planner of a comprehensive international student orientation program, therefore, should create and maintain a campus web page upon which to place information for newly admitted international students, such as: cultural and educational adjustment, immigration regulations, on-going and returning orientation programs, important links that help international students' adjustment, and so forth.

In order to make this approach most effective, the link to the page with international student information should be easy to find. A link on the institution's main page, not only makes web posting more effective, it also sends a message to the world that your institution is committed to student diversity and global education. This approach can make orientation convenient and timely to international students. It allows for student-centered programs that focus on international students' needs, concerns, and adjustment beyond the regular orientation routine.

Networking with Current Experienced International Student

This important and useful approach involves the campus International Student Association and experienced continuing international students in international students orientation; provides incoming international students formal and informal opportunities to associate with International Student Association members and current international students, especially those who are from the same country; and pairs new international students with experienced, continuing international students for significant interactions. In general, International Student

Association members and experienced international students often feel an obligation to take part in international student orientation, and be of assistance to incoming international students. They can usually be relied upon to contribute significant time. They have experienced being new international students and, therefore, can better understand the new international students' needs.

To network with current, experienced international students, especially ones from a student's same country, will help new international students maintain their cultural identity, quickly develop friendships, overcome home sickness and loneliness, and meet their need to belong. Research shows, and common knowledge tells us, that interaction and friendship normally happen easily among people who have the same cultural background, and speak the same language. Networking with current international students can help new international students to build a secure base. As with children coming to a strange environment, if their parents are with them, care for them and encourage them, they will gradually feel confident to explore the new environment. The base built by new international students through networking with current, experienced international students can help them feel confident to explore the new culture and to interact with others who are not like them.

Networking with current, experienced international students is an important approach and will help new international students' adjustment, but it is not sufficient. Cross-cultural adjustment never can happen without interacting with domestic students. We need another approach to fulfill the insufficiency of this approach.

Networking with Current Experienced Domestic Students

Networking with current, experienced domestic students involves training campus student organizations and experienced current domestic students to participate in international student orientation; provides in-coming international students formal and informal opportunities to associate with campus student organization members and current domestic students; and pairs new international students with experienced domestic students for significant interactions. Research shows (Miller, 1996) when pairing new non-European international students who have had no direct contact with Western culture before coming to the United States, with domestic students as roommates, the majority (71.4%) of the roommate relationships were unsuccessful. Therefore, when pairing new non-European international students with domestic students as roommates, there should be some steps taken to help them develop relationship-building skills that are unfamiliar in their own cultures. Otherwise, this kind of pairing may be ineffective.

Networking with current experienced domestic student, can (a) make new international students feel welcomed by the host country; (b) help them to learn the new culture, social customs and behavior norms; (c) help them experience and practice cross-cultural interaction; (d) provide non English speaking international students the richness and immediacy of real life conversations, and enable them to listen to and participate in real life conversations, which enhances their English fluency. Assisting with orienting new international students, hearing the new students' reactions to things, and trying to answer their questions, can (a) provide domestic students a new viewpoint on their own society and culture; (b) provide domestic students opportunities to learn things about other cultures; (c) allow domestic students to experience and practice cross-cultural interaction; and (d) help domestic students enjoy the good feeling of knowing they have been of assistance to people who need their help.

In both cases, it is usually not enough merely to secure current students' agreements to participate in the orientation programs. The planner of comprehensive international student orientation programs should provide some training and supervision to student participants; require them to have warm, friendly, open, and patient attitudes; give them basic information that new international students very likely need, acquaint them with places to which they can refer questions they can not answer, and provide them with the basic requirements and skills that are needed for better inter-cultural communication.

Networking with Local Community

This approach involves the community in helping ease international students' adjustment to American culture; provides opportunities for international students to meet and make friends with individuals and families in the local community; and based on common interests, pairs international students with American hosts -- families or individuals who seek to welcome, befriend, and know international students, for occasional interactions during a certain period (usually a year). The American hosts include international students in a variety of activities that routinely occur. International students do not live with the hosts, nor do hosts assume any financial responsibility.

This approach provides international students a fun and valuable way to learn American custom and values, and practice their English and cross-cultural interaction. It gives international students a culturally rich experience outside the classroom, and a great opportunity to observe American family life and develop cross-culture friendship. It also offers local citizens the opportunity to know different cultures of the world, to make international friends, and to experience the pleasure of knowing and helping international students.

Experience has shown that when American hosts assist international students during the early, uncertain weeks of their stay in the United States, friendships become more enduring (University of Kentucky, 1998; New York University, 1999). Therefore, the program organizer may want to pair the new international students and American hosts as soon as possible, even before newly enrolled international students arrive.

Many professionals consider this approach to be one of the most effective ways of helping international students adjust to American culture, and promoting substantive cultural exchange in the community (Reiff & Kidd, 1986). To ensure that this approach is effective, the organizers should have an orientation for both international students and American hosts. A list of recommended activities that American hosts can do with their international students is useful for the American hosts. Written tips regarding how to establish a satisfying relationship for both international students and their American hosts will be very helpful. It is important to periodically monitor the relationship of international students and American hosts to divert difficulties that may arise and ensure that the goals of the program are being met.

Cultural Coffee Hours

This approach involves using coffee or tea to bring new international students together with current international students, domestic students, faculty, and community members in a casual atmosphere, for informal interaction and exchange. The purpose of coffee hours is to encourage personal contact and interaction, and, through these contacts and interaction, to increase one's awareness of both the new culture and one's home culture. Though this is an informal approach, for a better effect, each coffee hour should have hosts and a theme. It should be well publicized through the web, posters, student newspaper, and housing publications. The location should be central and convenient; the time should be one where relatively few students are involved in class or other work.

It is important to involve campus and community groups in the sponsorship and planning of culture coffee hours. This cooperative effort can be achieved by asking campus or community civic, social, or religious organizations to sponsor a coffee hour by providing beverages and food. Members of the organization can also act as hosts.

Role-Playing

Role-playing is an approach borrowed from traditional human relation training. This approach involves asking international students to act out different parts in a critical incident, sometimes modifying their typical

behavior when asked to role-play someone from a different cultural background. Using this approach to present international student orientation programs may consist the following three phases (Gamboa, 1988; Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1977):

1. Perspective training. In this phase, lecture about the different aspects of American culture and social custom to international students.

2. Interaction training. In this phase, let international students actually interact with hosts in structured situations so that they can apply their inter-cultural perspective acquired in the first phase and also practice inter-cultural communication.

3. Discussion and analysis. In this phase, lead international students discuss and analyze their role play.

This approach combines lecture and active learning together, providing participants with the opportunity to test themselves and to receive immediate feedback during the orientation. It is expected, therefore, that international students would develop an understanding about the new environment and learn new behaviors. The key of this approach is collecting critical incidents and designing structured situations.

American and International Documentary Film

This approach involves using documentary films or videos as a culture-presenting tool to introduce American and other countries' cultures, social and family lives, natures, and educational systems to international students. This approach can be used regularly through (a) showing various cultural videos in the dining hall and lounge weekly, and (b) offering international movie festivals.

The International Student Association members or an individual international student can be responsible for selecting and introducing the films or videos about their culture. The international student advisor or other appropriate staff, however, should preview each film or video to ensure it is appropriate. For example, political propaganda films or religious films that are intolerant of others' backgrounds and views should not be shown.

International Speaker

Merely bringing together students of different nationalities and cultures does not guarantee inter-cultural exchange or understanding. Substantive interchange does not occur without some type of intervention or

programming for international understanding. The approach of using international speakers provides international student volunteers who would like to share knowledge about their country or culture and are interested in a fulfilling experience with the U.S. educational system, with an opportunity to present foreign cultures to young Americans in elementary and secondary schools, as well as students in colleges and universities. Topics can include, but are not limited to cultural tradition, arts, social and family life, history, and the role of women and men in their countries.

This approach encourages and provides opportunities for international students to actively go beyond campus to involve themselves and participate in American life and education; to introduce themselves and their country to American society; to help international students maintain their cultural identity; and to feel they are welcomed. It also enhances both domestic and international students' understanding, awareness, open communication, and cultural sensitivity.

The planner of the program, should have a well prepared team of international speaker volunteers, and should publish the program to local schools, colleges and universities.

Academic and Social Workshop

Comprehensive international students orientation programs also can be completed through some well-planned, cooperative, and purposeful workshops. The topics of workshops should be specific, focused, and needed as well as interesting to international students. Potential workshops include:

1. Computer Lab Workshop. Get to know the rules of the campus computer lab; sign up for campus online accounts; teach basic computer applications.
2. Library Workshop. Get to know the rules of the campus library. Learn how to use the library facility and how to locate a reference.
3. Health Care and Counseling Services Workshop. Introduce the American health care system and campus counseling services.
4. Immigration and International Employment Workshop. Explain the United States' immigration regulations for F-1 and J-1 students; information on eligibility for on and off campus employment.
5. Cross-cultural Training Workshop. Analyze the symptoms of culture and educational shock, develop strategies to deal with them, and to be socially and academically successful.
6. Income Tax Workshop. Learn how to do taxes correctly.

Although a broad range of approaches and programs is desirable, it does not mean that effective comprehensive international student orientation programs need to employ all of the above approaches. The planner of comprehensive international student orientation programs should choose as many as possible the appropriate approaches based on the following relevant factors: (a) the objective of the program; (b) the components of the program; (c) the characteristics of participants; (d) the availability of time; (e) the availability of campus facilities; (f) the availability of personnel; and (g) the availability of budget.

In summary, in this conceptual framework, needs provide the base upon which a comprehensive international student orientation program is built. Principles, which arise out of an analysis and synthesis of the needs of international students, the experience of international student education professionals, and the general theories of human development, provide a guiding ideology regarding how to design and conduct effective programs. Components, which are determined by the needs and principles, include the structure and contents comprehensive international students orientation programs should have. Approaches, which are determined by needs, principles, and components, suggest specific ways to present different programs to meet international students' needs. This conceptual framework starts from the needs of international students and in the end meets those needs, because the outcomes of the comprehensive international student orientation programs are aimed at meeting the needs of international students.

Using the Conceptual Framework in Specific Contexts

This conceptual framework is a general guideline. It does not address specific college or university contexts, specific groups of international students, and specific orientation programs. Therefore, when applying this framework in different institutions, variations will occur based on the characteristics of the institutions and their enrolled international students. The specific content and approaches of comprehensive international student orientation programs especially may differ among different institutions. For example, the content of the orientation program related to housing will differ among residential, non-residential, or mixed colleges and universities. In non-residential colleges and universities the orientation programs may not need content about living on campus. In primarily residential colleges, the orientation program may need only limited content about issues related to living off-campus. The content of orientation programs related to academic issues may also differ among some colleges and universities, such as private and public, liberal arts and professional, research and teaching, because these colleges

and universities have different missions and different academic requirements. In colleges and universities that enroll a large number of international students, and have more available staff and financial resources, the orientation programs may be longer and the number and variety of approaches greater than in institutions enrolling a smaller number of international students and with less available staff and financial resources.

However, the principles of this conceptual framework, regardless of the type of institution and the number of international students, should always be followed when designing and conducting comprehensive international student programs. The structure, ideally, should include pre-departure, arrival, ongoing, and returning orientations regardless of the types of institutions and the number of enrolled international students. However, if international student orientation programs are new to the institution or the staff and financial resources are limited, then the structure may be limited to pre-departure, arrival, and ongoing orientation. In all cases, the emphasis should be on the arrival and ongoing orientation.

In general, each institution may use this conceptual framework as a guideline, in which is placed the characteristics of its international students, the mission of the institution, and the availability of time, budget, and staff, develop its unique comprehensive international student orientation programs. Built upon knowledge acquired from a literature review, and limited by the researcher's ability of analysis and synthesis, now this conceptual framework needs to be tested in actual practice.

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