Chapter 5
Aiding International Students to Thrive in US Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is a review of the literature concerning the individual factors that help international students thrive in their ‘host’ countries. Convergent findings indicate that being independent, participating in extra-curricular activities, having self-efficacy, cultural empathy, maintaining relations, and being open-minded are the most significant individual factors related to the adjustment of international students. However, in this study on Asian Indian international students, four unexplored factors, namely, being polite, professionalism, showing gratitude, and thinking positively, were also found crucial in cross-cultural adjustment. Such a finding warrants identification of hypothetical connections that are informative, but empirically unexplored. Based on a synthesis of current literature, the author presents the novel hypothesis that being polite, professional, showing gratitude, and thinking positively all facilitate the general international student population to thrive in the host countries. The objective of this review is to provide relevant resource material to international student counselors and university administrators to help international students succeed during their time abroad.

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INTRODUCTION

Measures must be taken to help international students thrive in the US because they are deemed to play an essential role in US HE. International students contribute to the globalization (Open Doors, 2018) and internationalization of universities, through an exchange of knowledge and culture (Burbules, 2002; Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson 1999). They help in building knowledge-based economies related to scientific progress and industrial innovation. They also substantially contribute to the host country’s economy (Adnett, 2010; NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2018; Wildavsky, 2010). For instance, in 2017, they were found to add over 42.4 billion dollars to the US economy (Anderson, 2017; Open Doors, 2018).

Additionally, NAFSA findings reported international students to support over 455,000 jobs in the research and business organizations of the US. However, a reason for concern is a slow but continuous decline in the enrollment of new international students. These institutions documented several aspects as a cause for the decrease in enrollment, including visa problems, the social and political conditions of US, global competition for talent, and the expenses of US HE (Open Doors, 2018). Therefore, institutions across the US are focused on preventing further decline in student enrollment by employing rigorous recruitment and outreach strategies. Specifically, the enrollment strategies used are assisting students with visa delays (59%), counseling advice (53%), and academic assistance (49%). Another approach used is providing financial support in the form of tuition waivers and scholarships (43%), application fee waivers (33%), and facilitation of work-study options (31%) (Open Doors, 2018).

An additional strategy that could maximize international student recruitment efforts is to obtain an in-depth understanding of individual factors that aid students to thrive in the host country (e.g., Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). Individual factors include, but are not limited to, the students’ personality traits, abilities, and perceptions regarding host nationals and their culture (Poulakis, Dike & Massa, 2017; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2005; Mori, 2000). Specifically, personality traits include factors such as open-mindedness and high levels of self-efficacy; abilities include, efficiency in local language and an ability to interact socially; and perceptions include sense of belonging, and feeling accepted (Chavoshi, Wintre, Dentakos & Wright, 2017; Hirai, Frazier, & Syed, 2015; Martinez & Colaner, 2017; Zhou & Cole, 2017).

Understanding the individual factors that impact international students’ adjustment in the US is essential because students encounter various difficulties when they transit to a foreign country with an alien culture (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). The various adjustment difficulties include linguistic abilities, forming friendships, feelings of isolation, and loneliness, along with the need to
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