Co-op Challenges

Helping International Students Succeed

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Overview

• Work experience and industry connections key motivators for the more than one million international students who come to the US (Chao, 2016; Hegarty, 2014)

• International students can struggle to land and succeed in co-op positions because of language barriers, cultural differences, etc.

• Few international students who graduate without experiential learning opportunities secure full-time employment after graduation (Nunes and Arthur, 2012)
Significance

• International students and the professionals who work with them
• Administrators at institutions with large international student populations – implications for recruitment, reputation
• Co-op programs and employer partners – increased opportunities for companies and students
Identifying Challenges

• Support must be tailored to particular needs
• Acknowledge that obstacles exist
• Focus on strategizing ways to overcome challenges
What are some of the challenges international students face?

• Cultural expectations and differences
  • Stress of acculturation, separation from family/friends/familiar surroundings can lead to lack of confidence and motivation
• Pressure to succeed
• Financial difficulties
• Communication

• Interviewing (eye contact, handshakes, self-promotion, competition)

• Being in the workplace: punctuality, gender roles, hygiene

• Discrimination: assumptions about sponsorship, fear of communication difficulties
• Language barriers
  • Technically and psychologically challenging
  • Can impact academic performance
• Gap between required TOEFL/IELTS scores and ability to communicate in practice
• Impact of accents
• Coping mechanism of self-segregation (Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood, 2013)
Overcoming Challenges

• Focus on empowerment and practice
  • Ongoing language support (opportunities to practice, writing centers)
  • Workshops specifically targeting professional communication, LinkedIn, career fairs, networking, navigating cultural differences in the workplace, etc.
• Peer mentorship
• Create environment in which international students feel fully supported but know that they must take responsibility for their own success and use the resources available to them (Akanwa, 2015)

• Globalization of higher education

• Individualization of support: avoid generalizations
Theoretical Foundation

• Pascarella’s General Model for Assessing Change (1985): student characteristics and institutional factors together influence the student experience

  • Five primary elements: structural/organizational characteristics of institutions, student background/pre-college traits, interactions with agents of socialization, institutional environment, and quality of student effort (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004)

• Critical Mass Theory

• Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1999)
Leveraging Co-op Experiences

• Job search process can help students transition from feeling like outsiders to developing awareness of their own strengths and capabilities (Sangganjanavanich, Lenz, & Cavazos, 2011)

• Refine career plan and decisions
• Increased engagement in academics (Esters & Retallick, 2013)
• Ask about individual career goals – stay in US, return home, etc.
• Sponsorship: language proficiency, connections, high level skills and experience


