# **OIRAE Briefing**June 2015

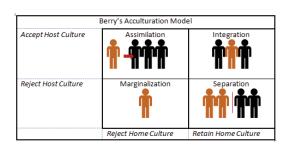


# **Belongingness & Acculturation During the First-Year at Purdue University**

This assessment was inspired by recent research at US¹ and Australian² universities which compares the experiences of domestic and overseas students, and tries to better understand the potential for positive cross-cultural interactions. It revisits and expands the findings of the 2013 focus-group study on the international student experience at Purdue, viewing the first-year college experience as an acculturation "journey" for any student, regardless of nationality.

Thus the purpose of this study was to explore how new domestic and international students adapt to Purdue and to each other, whether there were differences in the way(s) that they 'settle in' during their First-Year Experience, and what Purdue can do to help cordial cross-cultural relationships become the norm.

In the US context, research on adaptation to college life has found that students who look or dress or worship differently than the domestic norm (such as those from Asia, Africa or the Middle East) are at higher risk for non-integration than European students<sup>3</sup>. If a similar phenomenon holds true in West Lafayette, this has profound implications for retention and life success of Purdue's predominantly non-European international student body, as well as for the global career preparation of its domestic students. The primary methodology for this study consisted of a series of focus group meetings with first-year students (n=37) of varying demographic profiles and fields of study<sup>4</sup>, conducted near the end of their inaugural fall semester in late 2014. This report also draws upon baseline assessments of incoming Purdue students' intercultural effectiveness, using the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale<sup>5</sup> (M-GUDS), for further insights.



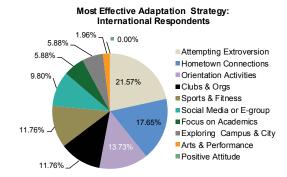
#### What attracts students to Purdue?

- The combination of high academic rankings (particularly in applied and technical disciplines) and relatively low tuition is a powerful attractant to all.
- From India to Indiana, students often initially consider Purdue because they know someone from their home area or high school who has attended and enjoyed career success; equally, the presence of a significant cohort of students from one's hometown (whether Hong Kong or Crawfordsville) induces students to commit to Purdue.
- Regardless of nationality, students frequently cited the caring warmth of professors and administrators (particularly during the period between admittance and enrollment) as a factor in their decision to attend Purdue.

# First-Year Opinions: On Becoming a Boilermaker

First-years agree that Purdue does a lot to "acculturate" students & that students work hard to reach out to one another; yet they also remain eager for [more] low-stress ways to meet potential friends outside their nationality group. When asked to list the three most effective activities which each had found that enabled him or her to adapt to Purdue in the first semester, domestic and international students cite the same activities but in a different order of priority, as illustrated below. Both groups saw a need to attempt to be extroverted but while domestic students relied on clubs and student organizations and a focus on academics, international students relied on orientation activities and connections to their hometowns, clustering with their peers.





On the other hand, international students (from multiple regions) also told us that they were, as the end of the first semester approached, starting to realize that remaining within a "safety net" of co-nationals could soon become an impediment to building friendships with domestic students.

It is also worth noting that the internationals we talked to expressed far less concern about academic adaption to Purdue than US students; there was a widespread feeling that 'surviving' a rigorous high school curriculum in their home country was serving them well at Purdue.

#### One Size Doesn't Fit All

Despite the generally good news above, there are students from a wide variety of demographic groups and national origins who feel that there are tangible "belongingness barriers" at Purdue that could be addressed through more personalized orientation groupings and/or break-out activities.



- Transfer students
- Urban Domestic Students
- · Lafayette-Area Students
- Spring-entry Internationals
- · Undergrads who have been in workforce prior to College entry
- Internationals who attended High School in the US or have family members resident in the US

# **Belongingness & Acculturation During the First-Year at Purdue University**

# First-Year Voices: What Else Can Purdue Do to Normalize Cordial Cross-Cultural Relationships?

- "Infect people with outgoingness—if you approach me, it's one thing, but I'm not all that extroverted."
- "I wish there was a class or video that we could watch so we know how Americans interact with each other."
- "I know at IU where they do "Speed Friending" events it's cool—a
  way to learn about other people's interests and if they're the same or
  different."
- "Professors should force us into international teams in classes to work together on projects—and the project should last more than one semester!"
- "Since study abroad can't happen for me yet--maybe in recognition of a national holiday of another country--let all classes out & do an intercultural festival or something."

#### First-Year Voices: Barriers to Connecting Across Cultures

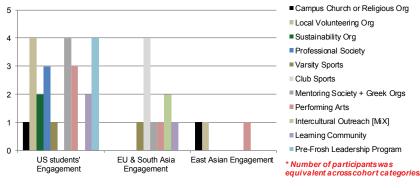
- "It was great at first to find people from [my nation], but I feel like I'm stuck in that group now, I'm too comfortable and I already "chose" my friends."
- · "Physics is a really non-diverse major, all male and all white."
- "[In] classes in my [Engineering] major, they let us pick our own teams & avoid diversity."
- "There is strong solidarity of some [national] groups... which is a barrier; but who can blame them, we American students don't live up to their expectations of how to make friends."
- "I don't have any friends doing such things; [my sport] takes a lot of time so basically my life is [training & competing], eating, and studying."
- "About [making friends in] class, we recognize each other but don't talk unless we have group work. I wish there was more social time in class so we could be more comfortable in teams."

### **Resilience and Student Engagement: Nationality Matters**

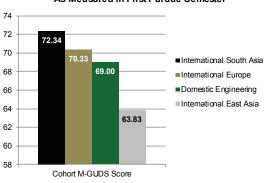
Resilience research<sup>6</sup> indicates that co-curricular engagement activities such as leadership programs, arts and performance groups and community service can increase an international student's sense of belongingness, thereby buffering the effects of inter-group discrimination and leading not only to better academic performance and higher retention, but also to higher rates of cross-cultural interaction, and Purdue offers a wide range of student success, student organizations and cultural programs to help students integrate to campus.

However, our study suggests that Purdue's domestic students were more than twice as likely as students from Europe and about eight times as likely as an East Asian student to participate in co-curricular activities. It seems clear that US students have embraced the relationship between college engagement and academic success in ways which our internationals, particularly those from East Asia, have yet to do.

#### Number of Responses Referencing an Engagement Activity as "An Effective Way to Adapt to Purdue\*"



#### Comparative Intercultural Effectiveness As Measured in First Purdue Semester



Correlating to the above, a quantitative assessment (conducted in September) revealed a significant difference in the baseline intercultural effectiveness score of Purdue students. For the incoming class of 2014, the average new student from East Asia, as compared to peers from South Asia, the USA or Europe, self-identified as having less comfort with difference and less interest in seeking out diverse contacts. (We note however, that this is not surprising given the greater cultural differences they are experiencing as compared to their home society).

#### Comparative Intercultural Effectiveness As Measured in First Purdue Semester or Fall of Junior Year 76 75 74 ■ Global Engineering Juniors 73 ■ Peru Abroad 1st-Yrs 73.06 72.96 72 Costa Rica Abroad 1st-Yrs ■ Aggregate Intl 1st Yrs 71 Domestic Engineering 1st-yrs 70 69 69.00 68 67 66 Cohort M-GUDS Score

# Pre-Freshman Study Abroad: Multiple Benefits to Purdue

An unexpected finding of the study was the impact of Purdue's two Global Leadership Study Abroad programs for incoming [domestic] Freshmen, which take place over a two week period in either Peru or Costa Rica during the summer prior to students' matriculation. M-GUDS data indicate that these programs attract first-years with much higher intercultural effectiveness skills than the norm for either domestic or international entering students (as per chart below). It is difficult to overstate the importance of having a domestic peer-group who can model the daily practice of intercultural effectiveness for US students coming from non-diverse environments. since having a friend who has positive interactions across racial or national boundaries leads to a measurable increase in one's own openness and curiosity<sup>7</sup>. Purdue's two Global Leadership Study Abroad for domestic students also do the following, according to focus group input:

- Make high-achieving domestic students pick Purdue over highly-ranked rival universities (both public & private).
- Instill a strong sense of belongingness, even for students who are members of under-represented minority groups.
- Increase participants' empathy for the adaptation woes of new international students.

'Glass, C. & Westmont, C. (2014); Comparative Effects of Belongingness on the Academic Success and Cross-Cultural Interactions of Domestic and International Students; International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Vol. 38, pp. 106-119. 2Smith, R.A. & Khawaja, N. (2011); A Review of the Acculturation Experiences of International Students; International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Vol. 35, pp. 699-713

<sup>a</sup>Glass, C., Buus, S. & Braskamp, L. (2013); Uneven Experiences: What's Missing and What Matters for Today's International Students; Global Perspectives Institute Report. Downloaded in December 2014 from <a href="https://gpi.central.edu/index.cfm?myAction=ISreport">https://gpi.central.edu/index.cfm?myAction=ISreport</a>.

"Students' backgrounds included urban, small-town & agrarian upbringings; students in Exploratory Studies were represented, as were those in the Colleges of Agriculture, Education, Engineering, Health & Human Services, and Technology. "Miville, M. et al (1999); Appreciating Similarities and Valuing Differences: The Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale. Journal of Counseling Psychology, Vol. 46, pp.291-307.

\*Glass, C. R., & Westmont-Campbell, C. (2013). Comparantive effects of belonging on the academic success and cross-cultural interactions of domestic and internantional students. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Vol. 37, pp. 1-15.
\*Williams. C. and Johnson. R. (2011): Why can't we be friends? Multicultural attitudes and friendships with international students: International Journal of Intercultural Relations. Vol. 35, p. 41-48.