
FELLESKAP: Supporting International Student Adjustment and Academic Success through a Program of Mentoring and Fellowship

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- 8 students chosen from the full-time international undergraduate and graduate student body, balanced in as much as possible for gender and cultural background.

Abstract: (150 words or less)
International students develop the confidence and skills necessary for successful adjustment when they associate with those who share common interests, backgrounds, and problems. While pre-arrival correspondence and orientation sessions are critical in preparing international students to enter into our learning community, these support services are offered at a time when students are beset by the demands of new physical, linguistic, pedagogical and social environments. Regular infusions of critical information and follow-up orientation sessions facilitated by OISS staff members provide ongoing support, but as many who work with international students have learned, they often seek information from their peers, and indeed, professionals rely upon these peer networks to both gauge and respond to student needs throughout adjustment.

This structured peer mentoring program seeks to:
1) Help mentees identify the challenges that inhibit adjustment.
2) Train mentors to assist mentees in responding effectively to these challenges.
3) Strengthen the bonds of community through collaborative learning, problem-solving, and support.
4) Develop resources that support international student integration and lay the foundation for academic success.

Narrative (less than 2000 words) including:
What are your goals? What impact do you expect on student success as defined by relationships to retention, persistence, and/or timely graduation? Based on current research literature, give an estimate of the impact. (e.g. reduce the number of late enrollments in W131 by 10%)?

Many international students arrive to IU South Bend immediately on the heels of a long and disorienting flight or from language schools where the pedagogy and its accompanying lifestyle may not have prepared the student for the linguistic and academic rigor of a four-year degree program. But whether by land or by air, international students entering into the first weeks of orientation, testing, advising, and course work may experience a sense of disjuncture, isolation, and confusion.

Administrative staff trained to support international students are usually able to provide guidance in
meeting some of the needs—albeit in a new context—which psychologist Abraham Maslow identifies in his expanded 1970's model for achieving self-actualization as foundational: food and shelter; law and order in the form of immigration regulations and school conduct codes; and information basic to a broad range of student issues. But it is in developing meaningful relationships and establishing autonomy that students might experience the kind of growth that leads to academic success and holistic well-being.

As Dr. George Kuh and his colleagues remind us in discussing the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement, students “perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus”. According to the results of this survey, a supportive campus environment is one which fosters good relations between students and their peers, and provides resources and frameworks for students to cope with nonacademic responsibilities and thrive socially.

International students who have participated in peer mentoring programs report a variety of hurdles in negotiating their transitions from one environment to another, but it appears that peer mentors can offer the kind of social support, friendship, and specific information that gives these students the confidence and wherewithal to overcome the difficulties associated with adjustment (Ragavan, 2014). Moreover, it would appear that those who provide the kind of peer mentorship that “inducts the aspiring protégé into a particular...way of life” experience academic and interpersonal growth (Good et al., 2000).

Although this particular program is conceived to support international student adjustment in the first-year of study, mentors will be encouraged to share information about academic resources, classroom culture, and related matters. They will not, however, be expected to serve as tutors. And while we believe that peer mentoring will set the stage for academic success and lead to greater retention, our expectation is that both mentors and mentees will report a broad range of benefits which they directly attribute to the mentoring relationships facilitated by the program.

**How will you assess whether you reach your goals?**
*Description of methods for assessing the impact of the project on students. Multiple methods, including both quantitative and qualitative, are encouraged.*

Based on the findings of international student adjustment researchers, Baba and Hosoda (2014), it would appear that actively helping international students adjust to a new environment through a variety of social support mechanisms reduces the kinds of stress that can inhibit relationship building, general well-being, and academic success. In addition to reviewing academic progress and persistence for both mentees and mentors using institutional data, we will also investigate several areas of adjustment through qualitative instruments, such as journal entries, surveys, focus groups and individual interviews.

We will ask mentees to compare themselves in several areas of adjustment from the time of arrival to IU South Bend to mid-year and then at the close of the yearlong program. The areas of this self-assessment will include social connectedness; academic success; causes of stress and its management; comfort in communicating with peers, faculty, staff, and community members; sense of belonging; knowledge of American culture and knowledge of resources available to meet needs; and perceived benefits of program participation.
Since the mentors will be drawn from the ranks of international students, we will ask them to reflect on many of these same areas, beginning from the start of the program to its conclusion. In addition, we will use existing assessment models to learn more about the program’s impact on building leadership skills and all that attends growth in this area.

**What will you do to reach those goals?**

*Detailed description of the project activities. Citations to relevant literature are expected. To whom? Estimate of how many students will be affected each year, and a description of those students (e.g. class, major, GPA, gender). If fully implemented, how many students could participate each year? (e.g. all female freshmen, about 800 students)*

**International Peer Program Effectiveness**

Peer mentoring programs have long been recognized as an effective means to engaging students who may feel marginalized or isolated from the rest of the student population (Cropper, 2009; Good et al., 2000). Most post-secondary institutions understand that international students experience a sense of separation as they work to surmount the barriers of language and cultural shifts, with some cultural groups experiencing the effects more acutely than others (Leong, 2015). In addition to providing a number of international student services, many institutions have developed international student peer mentorship programs to assist incoming students in their adjustment to campus life. Mentees report feeling less lonely, more involved and better informed about opportunities to learn more about life in the U.S. generally and on-campus, in particular after participation in such programs (University of California, Berkeley, International Student Peer Mentor Program).

**The Participants**

With 8 mentors and up to 3 mentees per mentor, we hope to serve between 24 and 32 international students in the first year, with an eye to expanding the program after a successful pilot year. The mentors will be chosen from among full-time international students in F status who have studied at IU South Bend for at least two semesters, are in good academic standing (at least 3.0), and who represent a range of genders and cultural backgrounds.

The program will be introduced as a pilot program during OISS-facilitated orientation sessions with a limited number of participant slots. Mentees will be drawn from students entering IU South Bend for the first time in the Summer Session II or Fall Semester and will be able to self-enroll. If more than 24 mentees seek to participate, we will select a cohort based in part upon time in country.

Should the pilot year program be deemed effective, we would look to expand the program such that we might accommodate all new students seeking to participate as mentees.

**Resources and Activities**

We intend to include many of the activities that other schools appear to have found effective in their international student peer mentorship programs. These activities will include:

- Resources for both mentors and mentees to use in exploring university and community life, cultural frameworks, and issues that impact student development and academic success
- A flexible schedule for mentors and mentees to meet regularly
- At least one group activity each month
- One to two workshops each semester on topics of most interest to new students

**Budget:**
Peer Mentor Stipends
Although we have called upon volunteer orientation assistants in the past, those students who have been best trained and most consistent in delivering ongoing support have been employed as student professionals in the Offices of Admissions and International Student Services. We believe a stipend would incentivize mentors to participate in the program and form the basis for accountability. In addition, international students pay tuition and fees at a higher rate than their in-state classmates and would benefit from additional financial support since they are limited by law as to where they can seek employment. Finally we recognize that students who work on-campus perform better academically and socially (citation here).

500.00 per year (two semesters) for 8 peer mentors

Refreshments
Light refreshments/treats for group activities

300.00

Program Identity Items
This may be t-shirts, or branded journals and flashdrives, etc. We would like to have a modest budget to purchase items with the program title/logo. Fellesskap means Fellowship in Norwegian, and it is the working program title, but this may change once we have assessed needs and selected mentors.

300.00

Total Project Request: 4600.00

Address the project’s fiscal sustainability, including any current and future funding sources:

International students pay non-resident tuition rates, as well as an international student service fee. Although the fee was originally set by IU Bloomington to support the admissions process, students should benefit from this fee in other ways.

Timeline for AY1:

April-July 2016
1) Needs and Expectations Assessment
   a. Conduct a survey among current international students as for which areas of adjustment a mentor’s support might prove most effective, and assess the means by which mentors might make the greatest impact
   b. Conduct a survey among domestic students to identify elements of American collegiate life with which they believe international students must be conversant in order to adjust and thrive
2) Determine program goals and create assessment instruments and materials
3) Determine selection criteria for effective peer mentors
4) Establish mentor and mentee matching criteria
5) Design training materials for peer mentors
6) Design mentee materials
7) Set calendar of activities
8) Select peer mentors and begin training

August 2016
1) Promote program during International Student Orientation with the understanding that each mentor can support one to two students.
2) Select mentees and facilitate goal-setting

September 2016-April 2017
1) Implement program

April-May 2017
1) Assess program and retool for following year based upon assessment findings

Bibliography

Journal Articles


Books


Web Sites

• Depaul University. *International Student Experience Exchange Peer Mentor Program*
• University of North Dakota. *International Peer Mentor Program*
  [https://und.edu/academics/international-programs/international-student-services/mentor.cfm](https://und.edu/academics/international-programs/international-student-services/mentor.cfm) (Accessed March 31, 2016)
• Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis. *International Peer Mentoring Program*
  [http://international.iupui.edu/events-programs/mentoring/index.html](http://international.iupui.edu/events-programs/mentoring/index.html) (Accessed March 31, 2016)