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# An Introduction to Life at a U.S. University: A Pre-departure orientation for Thai students going to the U.S. to Study

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# **AN ORIENTATION TO LIFE AT A U.S. UNIVERSITY:**

A PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION FOR THAI STUDENTS GOING TO THE US TO STUDY

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PIM 70

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of  
International Education at the SIT Graduate Institute, Brattleboro, Vermont

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Linda Gobbo, Advisor

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## **ABSTRACT**

*An Orientation to Life at a US University* is a six-week pre-departure orientation designed for Thai students at The Human Development Foundation (HDF). The youth are preparing to study abroad in the United States at four-year accredited institutions. HDF is an international non-profit, founded in 1973, with its headquarters based in Bangkok, Thailand. The organization's headquarters, settled in Bangkok's largest slum area of Klong Toey, is known as The Mercy Centre, often affectionately shortened to Mercy. The organization grew from a one-baht-per-day preschool for children of all religions in the slums, to a Foundation with over 25 slum preschools, having educated over 50,000 slum children. HDF has continued to grow and expand to encompass four major programs: providing resources for children in need, education, HIV/AIDS programs and community services. The Mercy Centre is home to all administrative offices for HDF, but also houses over 180 abandoned, orphaned and trafficked children, as well as children with HIV, in one of Mercy's six children's homes. All the homes and offices in Bangkok are a part of the Mercy Centre. Some of the youth whom have grown up at Mercy and other youth from the community who excel academically have been given the opportunity to study internationally on scholarship. The orientation's curriculum was developed based on the data collected from a needs assessment in the form of typed questionnaires. HDF's Executive Director, Senior Advisor and six of Mercy's students participated in the assessment. The program includes sections on logistics, health and safety, academic norms, culture, time management and US/World news, tailored specifically for Mercy's Thai students. The orientation is ready for delivery with a step-by-step implementation guide for the facilitator, along with all necessary handouts and worksheets.

# INTRODUCTION

Traveling abroad to a new country for the first time is an exciting experience for many. As the world becomes more interconnected and the boundaries to travel continue to fade we see more students traveling abroad to study in the United States. In the 2010/11 academic school year the United States saw a 5.7% increase from the previous year in new international students enrolling for the first time at a US institution. (IIE, Open Doors, 2011). This upward trend of educating undergraduates in the United States has been recognized by non-profits like the Human Development Foundation (HDF), which has a strong focus on education and youth. Since 2005 HDF has been able to provide full scholarships for nine Thai students to study at accredited institutions<sup>1</sup> in the United States.

The Human Development Foundation (HDF) is an international non-profit, founded in 1973, with its headquarters based in Bangkok, Thailand. The organization's headquarters, settled in Bangkok's largest slum area of Klong Toey, is known as The Mercy Centre, often affectionately shortened to Mercy. The organization grew from a one-baht-per-day slum preschool for children of all religions, to a Foundation with over 25 slum preschools, having educated over 50,000 children from the slums. HDF has continued to grow and expand to encompass four major programs: providing resources for children in need, education, HIV/AIDS programs and community services. The Mercy Centre is home to all administrative offices for HDF, but also houses over 180

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this capstone I will be using the term "university" for consistency, albeit some of the students are studying at colleges. While understanding the distinction between the two, the term is simply to mean, a four-year accredited institution in which students are working towards a Bachelors degree.

abandoned, orphaned and trafficked children, as well as children with HIV, in one of Mercy's six children's homes. All the homes and offices in Bangkok are a part of the Mercy Centre. Some of the youth whom have grown up at Mercy and others from the community, who excel academically, have been given the opportunity to study internationally on scholarship. Father Joseph Maier, President and Co-Founder of HDF, is known for his mantra, "GO TO SCHOOL!"

In 2005 the Mercy Centre began an experimental program, sending youth from low-income families and the slums of Bangkok abroad to the United States to study at four-year universities. Youth begin their international studies, prior to traveling to the United States, at a United World College for a two-year international baccalaureate; there are 13 UWCs across the globe. Every student that has studied or is studying at a four-year university in the United States attended a UWC first. Currently, all Mercy students go to the Red Cross Nordic United World College (RCN-UWC) in Norway, where there is an established scholarship program. Since 2005, four Mercy students have graduated with their Bachelor degrees from universities in the US and there are five students currently enrolled in universities across the country. Since funds and scholarships have been limited, there have only been nine students who have gone on to the United States to study at a university in the past seven years.

Due to the small number of youth that have gone abroad there has never been a formal orientation program to prepare the students for their time at a US University. Logistical concerns have been the responsibility of the students, with support from a staff member, and their cultural orientation has consisted of talking to their peers at Mercy who have gone abroad before them. As the Foundation continues to grow and hopefully

send more students abroad, a pre-departure orientation for the Thai youth going to the United States was needed. For the purpose of this course-linked capstone I am designing *An Orientation to Life at a US University*, a six-week pre-departure course aimed to better prepare Mercy's youth for their time abroad based on their needs and concerns.

## **COURSE OVERVIEW**

The orientation's curriculum, consisting of six main topics, reflects the data gathered from the needs assessment. It will be held on six consecutive Saturdays and is designed to address the needs, questions and concerns of the students, while giving them a foundation of cultural and practical information and resources to be successful at a US university. There will be one volunteer or Mercy alumni assigned to implement the program and run the weekly sessions under the supervision of the staff point person. If it is an outside volunteer, they will have the support of Mercy alumni who have already graduated from schools in the US and are currently working at Mercy.

While there are many needs that must be addressed, for the purpose of this proposal the orientation will focus on current events in the world and the US, logistical concerns, US college campus norms (addressing their new freedom), health and safety concerns and resources, culture shock and specific Thai/US cultural and academic norms. Academic norms will include issues such as plagiarism, citing references, classroom culture, student/teacher relationships and learning support services. The curriculum's topics were drafted based on literature regarding the development of pre-departure orientation programs for international students, pre-departure orientations I have attended in the past, suggestions given from colleagues in the field of international education and



the information collected in the needs assessment. Multiple sources were used to inform the design of the program due to the low number of participants in the needs assessment.

## **PROGRAM RATIONALE**

Many changes are currently underway at the Mercy Centre, affecting all of the Human Development Foundation, which will in turn be bringing in a significant amount of funding. A new business plan is being put in place to insure the sustainability of the Foundation. As the organization continues to grow, the hope is that more children will be able to pursue their dreams of studying in the United States, through Mercy provided scholarships. Looking towards the future, it has become clear that Mercy wants to send their most talented youth on scholarship to get their Bachelors degree in the US. With that goal, it is important to recognize that Mercy wants their students to be as well prepared as possible to get the most out of their four years at a US institution of higher education.

While life at a United World College has equipped these youth with academic English skills, as well as the experience of living abroad, it has not prepared them for some of the challenges of living in a US academic setting in an individualistic culture. Staff members who know UWC Norway well, as well as past students, have noted that what really sets UWC and US Universities apart is that at UWC there is no majority culture- the student population (around 200) represents over 80 countries. Additionally, it is a very nurturing environment, where students are given a lot of guidance and support, in which their academic advisors are more like parents and mentors than school staff. UWC is a place where all the students are adapting to each other's cultures together and there is a large focus on intercultural understanding (UWC, 2008). This differs from life

at universities in the US, as Mercy alumni have said, because they have to adjust to a majority culture (US) and have a much less structured environment.

## **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

In order to provide the most useful orientation program, the perspectives of alumni and administrators needed to be included. Data was gathered by means of typed questionnaires through “Google Forms” with the potential for follow up questions via Skype or email. Responses to the questionnaires can be found with the corresponding questions in the appendices. Three different questionnaires were created: one specifically for Executive Mercy Staff, including the Executive Director and the Senior Mercy Advisor (Appendix A), a second was designed for Mercy students who have either graduated or are currently enrolled in four-year universities in the US (Appendix B), and the third questionnaire was formed for a current perspective student, finishing their last term at UWC (Appendix C).

Of the six youth completing the needs assessment questionnaires, three are graduates with their Bachelor degrees from four-year universities in the US, two youth are currently enrolled in universities in the US (one is a freshman and the other is a junior) and one student is finishing their last term at UWC Norway and is planning on attending a school in the US in the fall of 2012. There is one male and five females. Youth were asked what was the most difficult adjustment for them to make, what they wish they had known before leaving and what they would like to see in an orientation program.

<b>Students</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>School Status</b>	<b>US School (State)</b>
1	Male	Graduated 2010	Westminster (MO)
2	Female	Graduated 2011	Westminster (MO)
3	Female	Graduated 2011	Methodist (NC)
4	Female	Junior	Clark (MA)
5	Female	Freshman	Westminster (MO)
6	Female	Perspective	UWC

<b>Mercy Staff</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Position at Mercy</b>
1	Female	Executive Director
2	Male	Senior Mercy Advisor

## **FINDINGS**

### *Alumni and current undergraduate needs assessment findings*

Five of the six students who answered the needs assessment questionnaire are either alumni of four-year universities in the United States or are currently enrolled in a four-year university; they will be referred to as Mercy alumni. All five Mercy alumni responded that they are the first in their families to go to a four-year university, four out of five are the first in their families to go to the United States and only one of the students had been to the U.S. before going to school there.

When asked if they received any formal preparation for life and school in the United States, four responded either “no” or “not really.” One student said Mercy prepared her to go into the world to help others and to not hurt others, but not in terms of

concrete cultural and logistical preparation. While three students said they were nervous about going to the United States for the first time, one said they were confident due to their time at UWC and one said they were excited. All the students were aware of the rich resource they have in their Mercy family, everyone referencing that they talked to an “older sibling” at Mercy, a Mercy student who had already gone to school in the United States or was currently enrolled.

In order to know what the students needed to be prepared for school in the United States, it was necessary to know more about their preparation and experiences at UWC. One student noted that the students at UWC were nicer than students in the United States because UWC students would share their cultures with each other and help each other.

*In Norway we used to help and share out idea and whatever we do we really respect each other. In US, everyone seems to be busy and do not time to help or to care other people. (Student #5)*

Another student added that at UWC everyone was learning English together, but in the United States everyone was ambitious and competitive. At UWC all of the students are coming from different countries, but in the US youth found they were a minority, surrounded by Americans. Having to adjust to a majority culture seemed like a new challenge for most of the students. One described life at UWC as a type of utopia, a simple, peaceful place, where schoolwork was easier and people respected each other:

*UWC, you can make everything so much fun as you want, you can play all day, do not have to worry about anything. You do not have to worry what people will think about you, what you have to ware, all what you have to do. Life in UWC is like you can enjoy your life. (Student #4)*

At UWC students said they learned how to work with people from other cultures and how to live in a new place, in a new country far from home. It was at UWC students felt like they were prepared for the advanced education of a US university, they were able to

advance their English skills, they learned to ask questions and engage in the classroom, and they gained confidence in general.

Before going to school in the United States, students said their major concerns were their English skills being good enough to write academic papers and making sure all their paperwork was done and done correctly. Students sought out advice from Mercy alumni, their “older siblings” who have gone to school in the United States, Mercy staff and their families. Advice they received was to enjoy their time and work hard, use their school advisors, balance their academic and social life, and information on college life, schooling systems and scholarships. One student said she was also told to be aware of how Thai girls can be perceived. Practical advice like, don’t buy your books at the school’s bookstore, buy them online because it is cheaper, was also passed down. One of the most recent students to go abroad was fortunate enough to have preparation time with a volunteer, who told her a little bit about US culture.

Once in the United States, one student said they were surprised to see how American students were able to party and study hard. Another noted that people have more freedom, independence and more opportunities to explore in the States. One of the girls said she was surprised to see how other females dressed and the differences in US family dynamics:

*All girls wear SUPER shorts to classes. It is just unbelievable to me. If there were in Thailand, teachers here would smack them down, lol. I feel like people in the US did not seem to be family oriented, example, grandparents usually lived by themselves in the house which would never happen in Thailand. (Student #3)*

Having to adjust to the US majority culture was difficult for most of the Thai students.

Another student felt she was not prepared for this majority culture focus:

*(At UWC) everything comes to middle, then I don't have to adjust anything much, and also learned other culture at the same time. However in US, my culture becomes minority, Everyone starts to adjust to American culture. (Student #4)*

Some of the more challenging adjustments students cited were to the new food, university campus culture and the academic expectations. One student said she learned that she had to stand up for herself and to not let others take advantage of her while she was in the US. A new dating culture, “hook-up” culture, fraternity and sorority life, the social life of partying and being the only Asian in class were other adjustments students made.

*I have one of my classes, which I am the only one who is Asian and all of them are American. It seems they do not like me that much and sometimes I have problem with transportation because for this class we need to do interview outside but no one helps me with that. Therefore, I talk to my professor and she helps me with that, so I think sometimes it is hard to live in this society but I do not give up and I focus on my aim. (Student #5)*

One student addressed her fears of being viewed as “weird” because she didn’t want to party:

*I don't like party, I can do once every two months or a semester. I feel bad to refuse my friends invitation, but I don't wanna go. I don't enjoy I feel going to party is so tired. I'm also afraid they will see me as a weird girl, just wanna stay in a room. But I'm really happy and enjoy being my room, better than going out for party. (Student #4)*

Students were surprised at how American students could party and study almost simultaneously. Learning a new schooling system and how to be more responsible were new challenges as well.

However, the students didn’t work through these challenges and adjustments alone. When asked whom they went to with questions, concerns and challenges the

students produced an impressive list of resources, which will be distributed to new students in the orientation. Student's found answers and comfort in (their):

- School advisors
- Resident advisors
- Friends/fellow students (other international students and other Mercy students in the US)
- International counselors
- International student clubs/organizations
- Roommates
- Professors
- Family or friends still in Thailand

Communication has been key. Students are or were in close contact with a support group of friends and other students in similar situations, as well those back at Mercy. Students used email, Facebook, Skype and international calling plans to keep in touch with their support groups around the globe.

As US university veterans, these students have been asked questions like, "Will it be like in many American movies?" regarding their time studying abroad. Rising Mercy students asked Mercy alumni other questions surrounding academics, US youth culture/lifestyle, food, scholarships, majors and what schools they should apply to. When asked what advice they gave, Mercy alumni created a list for those following in their footsteps:

- Be brave, it isn't hard if you know what to do
- Study hard and learn as much as you can
- Do things, get out of the library
- Do an internship
- Prepare for the best and the worst
- Find scholarships that include airfare

- Explore the world
- Plan ahead and be organized
- Be confident and proud to be Thai
- Read and research all scholarship possibilities
- CC all your emails to all the Mercy executive staff so that everyone is in the loop!

The hope for this orientation is that it accurately reflects the needs of the target population, which is why its curriculum is based on information gathered from Mercy's undergraduate alumni, current Mercy students in the United States and the Mercy staff that support them.

***Executive Staff needs assessment findings***

When speaking with the Executive Director and the Mercy's Senior Advisor, both agreed that UWC is a good academic preparation for the Mercy students. With English as the primary language of instruction, the school helps improve student's English skills, even though the curriculum differs from a US university's curriculum. Before students leave for the United States they are tutored at Mercy to continue their English language skills. In the past, students have looked to a specific Mercy staff member for assistance with paperwork, but recently she left Mercy and a replacement is yet to be named. Her position at Mercy was multidimensional, but her focus was on managing volunteers and the international students.

Other staff members, who often speak to the students before they leave for the States, are the Executive Director, Mercy's President, other Mercy students and occasionally "house parents," if the youth live at one of Mercy's homes. Once in the United States, students keep in touch via phone calls and emails, with the international student coordinator and the Executive Director, and the President's senior assistant is often CC'ed on all emails as well. Both the Executive Director and Senior Advisor agree



that the student's best adjustment tool is their support group; students are in constant contact with each other, past alumni, Mercy staff, UWC friends and friends at home using Facebook, Skype and the phone. This support is strengthened by their holiday gatherings. In the past the Executive Director and senior assistant to the President used to fly to the States to join all of Mercy's students studying in the US, at the President's sister's house in Portland, OR. The tradition continues with all of the students coming together over school breaks and holidays.

In the needs assessment, the Executive Director noted UWC provides an orientation for students, however from conversations with multiple UWC alumni I have found that while some students were provided a mini-orientation, others were not. It appears that it was up to their UWC professors. It seems that all Mercy students were given help by UWC staff when applying to school in the United States, but most did not have a formal orientation to US culture.

Concerns Mercy staff have had in the past with students, once they were already abroad, were issues surrounding funding (supporting students while they're abroad) and their grades (being too low). Through monitoring of Facebook pages, questions have arisen about inappropriate social situations, dating and dress/attire. The senior advisor noted:

*(Mercy) girls (were) getting involved in social situations (boyfriends) in much more aggressive ways than would be allowed if they were here in Thailand.*

Staff's perceived concerns (what they believe students are most nervous about) are the new food, their English level, leaving their friends, venturing into the unknown, being alone, being in a new society, succeeding and making people proud. They found that some of the most difficult adjustments the students had to make were with the foreign

(bland) food, the directness and style of communication (in the United States) which often left students feeling insulted, various cultural differences, living without their family and integrating with the new students and community.

Mercy's Senior Advisor suggested that past alumni should design the orientation; and the Executive Director and Senior Advisor generated a list of what the students should know before they leave:

- English!
- The dangers of Facebook (be aware of what you post!)
- Finances (how to manage a checkbook and their banking)
- Expectations (what is expected of them)
- Who their contacts and support networks are (Mercy staff, alumni, family, friends at home and other friends abroad)
- US culture, history, weather and currency

This list, in conjunction with alumni's past suggestions is what formed the basis of *An Orientation to Life at a US University's* curriculum.

### ***Perspective student needs assessment findings***

This perspective student is completing her final term at UWC Norway and is the first in her family to go to the United States and to attend a four-year university. She has been helped by her teachers at UWC in applying to schools and is currently deciding which school will be the best choice for her. She is looking forward to the atmosphere and academics in the United States. Many questions on the needs assessment were left blank, either due to language barriers or time constraints, however from the data provided it is understood that once students return to Bangkok for the summer they have already

been accepted to schools in the United States and have had the support of UWC professors in their application paperwork.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

While conducting the needs assessment, the various stakeholders identified what they believed were the needs of Mercy's new students preparing to study in the United States. Literature in the field suggests best practices for pre-departure orientations as well as the considerations that should be taken when designing a orientation program for international students going to the U.S. to study at a university. Due to the nature of the literature available, it is important to recognize that many of the best practices come from a Western perspective, so cultural dynamics must be considered in the design. Literature on Thai and US cultural differences were reviewed to make this pre-departure orientation best suited for Thai students, and more specifically Mercy students.

### ***Why are pre-departure orientations important?***

In *NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisors and Administrators*, the chapter "Pre-departure Orientation and Reentry Programming" highlights the importance of pre-departure orientations for students about to embark on a study abroad trip. "Well designed pre-departure and reentry programs assist students in the development of adjustment skills and intercultural competencies and therefore may make the difference between the success and failure of a sojourner's education abroad experience" (Thebodo, 293). Pre-departure orientations need to be included in any study abroad experience.

La Brack, as quoted in Hoff and Kappler's chapter in *NAFSA's Guide*, notes, "it has been proven that properly designed and conducted orientation programs do assist

participants to achieve positive intercultural adjustments” (194). Hoff and Kappler go on to say:

A major report on the study abroad field states that in determining necessary program characteristics, an important feature of study abroad programming should be the ‘careful preparation and orientation of students for study abroad so that cross-cultural differences, dissimilar approaches to teaching and to students at the host institution and inadequate foreign language skills do not impede the American’s international learning’ (194).

While this study and quote address preparing Americans for their time abroad, the same can be said for preparing any students who are about to study and live in a country where they are immersed in a new culture with new teaching methods, in a second language. This highlights the importance of “careful preparation and orientation” for all student sojourners.

***What should a pre-departure orientation look like?***

*NAFSA’s Guide to Education Abroad for Advisors and Administrators* goes on to list some major goals of a well-constructed pre-departure orientation, noting that the activities in the orientation “should safely and ethically allow the students to become more aware of themselves as cultural individuals, and to learn how the study abroad experience may affect them” (Thebodo, 294).

Major goals listed in *NAFSA’s Guide* include:

- Provide essential, practical information;
- Motivate student sojourners to learn more about the host culture and about themselves and their home culture, prior to departure
- Familiarize the student sojourners with the process of cross-cultural adjustment and the concept of culture, cross-cultural adaptability skills and developing intercultural understanding
- Help student sojourners gain a better comprehension of world issues and their role and global citizens

- Assist in reviewing each student's overall objectives and how the overseas experience fits into his or her long-term personal, professional and academic goals (Thebodo, 294)

For the purpose of *An Orientation to Life at a US University*, all of these goals have been adapted to the specific needs of Thai Mercy students.

Other important pieces to a pre-departure orientation, that *NAFSA's Guide* recommends, are including former education abroad students in panel discussions and having the sessions be mandatory (294).

### ***Crisis and Culture Shock***

In Hermans and Pusch's book *Culture Matters: An International Educational Perspective*, chapter five focuses on "Crisis and International Students." The chapter underscores the importance of understanding crisis situations in the context of international students and how to identify and deal with crises and culture shock. Culture shock is defined as "the physical, psychological and behavioral reactions that often occur when individuals are attempting to live, work, or study in unfamiliar cultural contexts" (LaBrack, 1). Hermans gives a specific example: "International students, who have been socialized in an educational system that favours rote learning and memorization as effective learning strategies, will find themselves at a loss in an educational system where critical analysis and applying knowledge to new problem situations are essential skills for obtaining grades" (49). In these types of situations "the student uses their own culture as the context or frame of reference for the process of appraisal" (Hermans, 50).

International students tend to be more vulnerable to crises since "they go through a number of transition processes and various phases of adjustment while they are studying in the host university" and they are forced to "suddenly learn a variety of

competing and sometimes contradictory roles, which are rooted in an unfamiliar cultural context” (Hermans 50-51). Thus, it is important for students to recognize when they are facing a crisis and to give students the resources (like advisors) to go to in a crisis.

Ideally, a pre-departure orientation should reduce anxieties and uncertainties, which are the cause of major crises. This highlights the importance of addressing ways to deal with anxieties (by talking about them) and to lessen uncertainties by discussing topics like academic norms, study skills, time management and academic expectations. It is also important to establish trust networks, so that students feel like they have people they can go to in a crisis.

### ***Logistics and paperwork***

Thebodo, in NAFSA’s Guide, notes, “advisers (should) incorporate all of the practical pre-departure details into handouts” (298). Such practical details include logistics like “passports and student visas, international and local travel arrangements, packing and luggage issues, International Student Identity Cards, housing, communications, finances and campus-specific issues” (299). Lists of what students will need prior to their departure can be found in EducationUSA’s pre-departure orientation handbook for international students traveling to the US.

### ***Health and Safety***

*NAFSA’s Guide to Education Abroad’s* chapter on “Health Issues and Advising Responsibilities” lists topics and printed materials that should be made available to students traveling abroad. The list includes:

- Cautions about alcohol and drug use. (The laws surrounding drug and alcohol use and its prevalence on a US college campus.)

- Descriptions about persistent and epidemic diseases with information on their transmission, prevention, symptoms and treatment. (This can range from STDS, to the Flu, to lice and meningitis.)
- Information about the physiological and psychological consequences of changes in routine that a traveler might encounter: jet lag, culture shock, homesickness, change of diet and lack of exercise.
- Emergency services: CALL 911. Also where to find information on the school's health services and phone numbers for the campus health center.
- Information on nutrition and exercise.
- Gender related information, including personal safety issues, how dating behaviors differ from the host culture and date-rape risks.
- Health and accident insurance policy information (Gore, 263-264)

Medical exams and paperwork should be organized pre-departure and students need to be aware of all of the immunizations needed before going abroad, since this may vary by institution.

Substance abuse concerns need to be addressed clearly and concisely during an orientation. Gore writes “alcohol abuse occurs for a variety of reasons and the orientation should emphasize that the abuse of alcohol in any cultural setting can result in disruptive and offensive behavior and can bring on or exacerbate serious academic, psychological, or health problems” (270-271).

Another important aspect of student's health is nutrition. “Living in another culture necessarily entails a change in diet, eating routines and assumptions about food... advisors should discuss cultural assumptions about body image and eating habits with students before their departure” (Gore, 271). Unfamiliar food choices may lead to unhealthy decisions surrounding eating habits. Students should be aware of what will be

available to them in their new settings and prepare ahead of time if they want to bring some of their local favorites with them from home.

The last topic NAFSA suggests is having students be alerted to natural phenomena and weather conditions in their new region of study. Students need to be aware of the potential for snow, blizzards, hurricanes, tornados and other extreme weather that is likely in their region (276).

In *NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad's* chapter on “Advising Students on Safety and Security Issues” Patricia Martin outlines *good practices* regarding how students should be prepared for their study abroad experience in terms of “safety and security concerns...and (how to) instill in them the importance of personal responsibility for their own well being” (Martin, 279).

Relevant good practices include:

- Students are advised to assume responsibility for all elements necessary for their personal preparation and participate fully in orientations
- Students should read and carefully consider all materials...that relate to study, health, legal, environmental, political, cultural and religious conditions of the host country
- Students should also do their own research (regarding topics listed above)
- Students must consider their physical and mental health... (before departure)
- Students must accept responsibilities for their own decisions and actions
- Students must obey host-country laws
- Students are expected to avoid illegal drugs and excessive or irresponsible consumption of alcohol
- Students must become familiar with the procedures for obtaining emergency health and legal system services in the host country



These advising practices are important when designing the orientation and must be shared with students so they know what is expected of them.

### ***Thai and US Culture***

In John Paul Fieg's book *A Common Core: Thais and Americans*, the author examines some of the commonalities and differences between the two cultures. In the final chapter titled "Learning from One Another" the author summarizes the two core and key cultural differences, which he believes, once understood "will contribute more than anything else to furthering the cause of mutual understanding between Thais and Americans" (109). These two "broad and basic differences" are "different attitudes toward time and the natural environment and different social structures and concepts of authority" (109).

This is where the American values of "linear concept of time, control of natural environment, egalitarian social order and distrust of power and authority" come into contrast with Thai cultural values of "cyclical time sense, accommodation to nature, hierarchy and deference to authority" (110). More specifically, "Thai children are taught to be obedient, polite and subdued" in contrast to American children who are taught to be assertive, self-expressive individuals (Fieg, 36). These differences play out in a classroom setting where challenging a professor may seem inappropriate for a Thai student, but common place for US American students and professors. Challenging theories and instigating debate are important aspects of a traditional, liberal US education, but questioning authority is not accepted in Thai culture and without it being addressed, could cause issues of confusion and discomfort for Thai youth in a US classroom. One American teacher of Thai students noted that Thai students "tend to respect whatever the

teacher says... My big challenge is to try to stimulate a response or a debate” (Fieg 33-34). Another American professor of Thai students “lamented the tendency of Thai students to look over one another’s shoulders during tests and to plagiarize papers” (Fieg 33-34). It has become a system of helping another out, which is not acceptable in a US University.

Singholka’s SIT capstone “Adjustment Challenges In Thai Students’ Lives While Doing Graduate Study in the United States of America” was an important resource in identifying some of the challenges Thai students face when coming to the US. While the students in Singholka’s capstone are graduate students, somewhat older, more traveled and from different socioeconomic backgrounds, than the students represented in this proposal, many of their adjustment concerns are similar. Singholka found that the Thai graduate students, which participated in his research “were not very well prepared for life in the USA, either as a student or practically. Most participants had adjustment difficulties in physical adjustments/adjusting to living ... and studying and communication” (Abstract). “Other challenges include(d) homesickness, difficulty with the diet, study problems accruing from a lack of familiarity with the educational system and cultural anomalies” (2). It is recognized that Mercy students may not have had the same experiences as these Thai graduate students, but it is important to acknowledge the challenges faced by other Thai students coming to study in the US, as they could be concerns that arise in the future for other Mercy students traveling to the US.

Another important cultural aspect to address is that the majority of the students that have been sent to the US to study from Mercy have been young women in their late teens to early twenties. Roles for young women in Thai society vary greatly from the role

many young American women play on college campuses across the US. One student wrote:

*I wish I knew more about the American dating culture, such as girls should say no when they do not like something. For example, Thai girls are usually never say no and try to be polite which causes some trouble. It might lead to the misunderstanding that a girl is interested in a guy. (Student #2)*

This disposition to be polite and avoid conflict is a core part of Thai culture. While American's tend to be more aggressive and assertive, Thais conversely are "not taught to bring up contrasting views" and can be seen as "nonassertive" (Fieg, 33 – 35).

Other cultural differences to address are ways in which Thais and Americans communicate. While American's tend to be direct, Thai's are more likely to describe a problem 20% to another person and leave 80% to be guessed or assumed (Fieg, 46). That being said, "Thai emotional expression – whether it be positive or negative – is rarely extreme ... (this is) consistent with the Buddhist ideal that ultimate happiness results from the total detachment of the self from feelings or desires" (Fieg, 41).

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Information gathered from the literature review and needs assessment provide a solid base for the orientation's curriculum and design. What should be included in a pre-departure orientation, why it is important, what the student's needs are, what the staff's concerns are and what the important cultural differences are between Thais and Americans are known and addressed. In order to best attend to the needs and concerns of this group of students, who will all be freshman in college, in a new culture, it is important to understand the issues and concerns facing college students, recognize how they make meaning of their experiences and come to conclusions about how to approach

them (Torres, 2011, 202). While these theories on identity, moral and cognitive development are western-based notions, it is recognized that this orientation is designed for Thai students. Thai cultural norms will be included in the discussion of these theories to find how they apply to Mercy students going abroad.

Torres (2011) notes that an international study conducted in 2006, “looking at issues of acculturation (cultural change or absorption of culture) and identity found that among adolescents aged thirteen to eighteen, those with an integration profile (bicultural) had the best psychological and sociocultural adaptation outcomes” (193). An integration profile means that the adolescents are bicultural, loosely meaning the youth have been exposed to multiple cultures.

The students participating in this orientation will have just returned from two years of study at the United World College in Norway. For these students going to the U.S. it will not be their first time living away from home, studying abroad or being in a multicultural environment. Mercy students, having attended UWC, will be much more capable of adaptation when in the United States than other international students who have not had such exposure. However, many past Mercy students have noted that going to school in the United States was different from their time in Norway because they were given much more freedom.

## **Identity Development**

### *Chickering and Reisser*

Arthur Chickering was “the first theorist to explicitly examine the psychosocial development of college students” (Evans, 171). His theories suggest “the establishment of identity is the central developmental issue during the college years” (171). Chickering

and Reisser “argued that educational environments exert a powerful influence that helps students move through the seven vectors of development” (171). The following seven vectors of development “contribute to the formation of identity: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose and developing integrity” (172).

The first two vectors are generally the focus for most first year college students; Evans writes that knowing student’s developmental stages is helpful in programming choices, noting that “programming in the first-year residence hall, might have focused on social skills (vector 1) and managing the stresses of college (vector 2)” (175). The third vector “moving through autonomy toward interdependence” is an important stage to address as well. “At this stage, students develop increased emotional independence, self-direction, problem-solving ability, persistence, and mobility, as well as recognition and acceptance of the importance of interdependence” (172). Most importantly, this theory draws attention to the importance of “attending to the emotional, intellectual, social and other needs and stages of the students” (Anderson, 179). Knowing where the students are in the development of their identities informs how the orientation should address their needs.

Identity development, particularly in college, is a central development issue for Thai students because they are trying to understand their identity as a Thai person within a US majority culture. Understanding that Mercy’s students may still be developing “confidence in their abilities” intellectually, physically, manually and interpersonally, as well as recognizing, accepting, expressing and controlling their emotions (vector 2) the

orientation needs to address time and stress management, social skills and differences in communication styles between Thais and US Americans. Mercy students who looked back on their time at a US university said one of their biggest challenges was self-control, their new freedom, balancing school life and a social life, being more independent and planning ahead of time, which directly relates to Chickering and Reisser's third vector dealing with their independence and self-direction. An entire section of the orientation will be directed at the student's new-found freedom and independence, including a panel discussion with Mercy alumni.

*Josselson*

Since eight out of the nine students that have gone from Mercy to the United States on scholarship to study have been women, it is important to know what sort of challenges undergraduate women face during identity development. Josselson, an identity development theorist, found that "social, sexual and religious values, more than occupational and political values, were found to be significant areas of crisis and commitment for (the) women in young adulthood" (Evans, 170-171).

College is a time in which youth are coming to terms with their core values and are exposed to a variety of students with different values. Josselson writes, "crisis in relationships, more than in any other area led to growth and change for the women. The degree to which the women deviated from or remained connected to the value system of their parents –especially their mothers – largely determined their identities" (Evans, 171).

One Mercy student noted that she wished she had known more about US colleges' "hook-up" culture, relating to casual sexual relationships on campus. She added that because "Thai girls usually never say no and try to be polite" in relationships, it led to

complications and confusions. These are issues that could arise for the perspective students once on campus. Understanding these are areas of exploration and commitment for young women, suggests a part of the orientation must focus on individual reflection and cultural values.

### **Cognitive Development**

#### *Perry*

William Perry's nine-stage theory of cognitive development "assumes that development occurs through interaction with others and is sequential, hierarchical and irreversible" (Anderson, 176). The first stage is *dualism*, which is categorized as: "knowledge is absolute, authority (ie: the professor) is the source of knowledge, it is Authority's responsibility to provide true knowledge and facts and right answers are desired" (176). Incoming college freshman tend to be in the dualism stage. This means that the students have a "need for authority figures and concrete information" which should be provided in the form of handouts and checklists (177).

Mercy's students are very much in the *dualism* stage because of the nature of their education system in Thailand and what has been culturally ingrained in them from an early age – do not question authority. Thus, the need for handouts and checklists is paramount. Additionally, there will be a need to address the differences in Thai and US academic norms surrounding copying, rote learning, debate in the classroom and questioning authority to prepare students for a new education system and to help move them past this *dualism* stage.

### **Moral Development**

#### *Kohlberg*

“Moral development is the process by which individuals go about making decisions that affect themselves and others” (Evans, 179). Kohlberg developed a “six-stage model of moral development centered around the concept of justice... and he grouped his stages into *preconventional*; *conventional* and *postconventional* levels based on the individual’s relationship with the rules of society” (179). Stage Three and Stage Four, making up the “Conventional Level” or Kohlberg’s model, are defined as:

*Stage 3: Interpersonally Normative Morality*

Good behavior is defined as that which pleases those to whom one is close and gains their approval. Individuals adhere to stereotypes images of “right” behavior.

*Stage 4: Social System Morality*

Actions are based on upholding the system and obeying the rules of society. Showing respect for authority and maintaining the social order for its own sake are seen as important. (Evans, 180)

Kohlberg writes that in the *conventional level* “the opinions of others take precedence in decision making” (180).

Kohlberg’s six-stage model of moral reasoning is important because it relates closely to Thai student’s views of morality, based on their cultural upbringing. In Thailand there is a “hierarchical system of status and respect” with an emphasis placed on respect for authority (Cooper, 76). Understanding that Mercy’s students are likely in Kohlberg’s stages three and four of moral reasoning is important in addressing student’s independence and decisions making strategies. In the orientation it is important to be aware of the role Mercy plays in the student’s lives, particularly the role the authority figures at Mercy have in the student’s lives, since many Thais are taught they must follow the advice of elders (Fieg, 33). In the United States youth are taught independence at an early age and are encouraged to make their own decisions, if the facilitator is from the



United States, it will be important for them to recognize the impact Mercy staff have on youth's decisions.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

In keeping with Mercy's mantra and mandate "GO TO SCHOOL", the goal of this orientation is to take it one step further: go to school, stay in school and be successful while abroad. To be clear, success in this sense is to mean students are emotionally stable, learning as much as they can and exploring all the opportunities offered to them while at school in the United States.

### **Goal of the orientation:**

In six consecutive two-hour sessions, this orientation will have students prepared to leave for the United States and to live at a US university. The orientation will reduce the likeliness of crisis and culture shock; it will meet the student's developmental needs and will increase their confidence in their readiness to depart for the US.

Specific goals of the orientation include:

- To ease the transition and adaptation to US culture
- To have students logistically prepared for their departure
- To provide the resources for students to find the answers to their school specific questions
- To have students leaving for the US aware of the resources available to them

### **Objectives of the orientation:**

- All students' questions will be written at the beginning of the orientation and addressed by the end of the orientation

- Mercy alumni of US universities will come to at least one session to speak with students
- Students will receive an orientation packet regarding relevant logistics, a checklist of paperwork, school resources, culture shock symptoms and the curve/worm

### **Goals of participants:**

Students will be prepared mentally and logistically for their move to a US university.

Youth will feel they are ready to live at a US university and will have less questions and concerns about their upcoming departure than they did before the orientation.

### **Objectives of participants:**

- Be able to articulate major similarities and differences of US and Thai culture
- Have all paperwork organized and prepared for their departure by the last session
- Better understand the rules and norms surrounding academic expectations in a US university
- Be aware of major world/US current events and be able to discuss them with peers
- Be able to identify culture shock and have the resources to go to/use if they are experiencing any signs
- Be knowledgeable of resources available to them on campus to cope with academic and health concerns
- Have answers to the list of questions they brainstormed at the beginning of the orientation

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In late May, when students return from the United World College, they will have already heard about their acceptance to a US university. This will be a time when other Mercy alumni, who have since graduated from US universities will be home, as well as

youth who are currently enrolled at schools in the US. It will be the perfect opportunity for youth to discuss what they are learning about in this orientation with their peers and to get them prepared for the next four years.

Each session will be focused on a different theme. There will be flexibility in the order, given circumstances and feedback from the assessment after the first pilot program. Every session will begin with a 15 minute “check-in”, where students and the volunteer will be able to talk about their past week, where they are now and how they are generally feeling, to build trust and foster a open environment. Each session will end with a small, manageable homework assignment, for them to prepare for the next session. Youth will have time, while at Mercy during the week, to complete the assignments. These tasks will be to prepare them for the next week’s session and to get them thinking about the topic they will be covering in the upcoming session. The sessions and topics will be as follows:

Week One: Intros and Logistics: visas, passport, travel info, medical papers.

Week Two: Addressing their new freedom: what to do with all that flexibility

Week Three: C-U-L-T-U-R-E: US and Thai cultural differences and culture shock

Week Four: Health and Safety: sex, drugs and crisis

Week Five: Academic norms: what’s to be expected of you

Week Six: Current world and US news and questions.

A more in-depth breakdown of the full curriculum can be found in the following section.

## **COURSE COMPONENTS**

Week One: Intros and Logistics: visas, passport, travel info, medical papers.

The first session will be introductions; icebreakers, reviewing the agenda of the orientation and setting goals for what students want to get out of these sessions. After discussing what will be covered over the course of the next 6 weeks, students will be encouraged to write down their concerns and questions that they want to have answered.

The second half of this session will be primarily to discuss all the paperwork students will need before departing for school in the US. Some of this paperwork will already be completed since students have already been studying internationally at UWC. Since students have already been accepted to a school, they will hopefully be in touch with the international student advisors at their school, whom will be helping them with their I-20s. This will be an open forum for students to ask questions and complete a checklist of logistics. Time will be given to discuss scholarships the schools offer, work study options, medical forms, etc. Most importantly students will be given time (they will meet in the computer lab) to go on to their schools websites and figure out where to go to and who to email if they have questions or concerns regarding their paperwork.

#### Week Two: Addressing their new freedom: what to do with all that flexibility

In this section time management will be addressed, in terms of preparation pre-departure and students balancing their free time and academics once on campus. This will be a good opportunity for Mercy alumni to come and talk to the perspective students. They will discuss the challenges they faced and how they dealt with them. Topics will include, and were taken from the needs assessments: academic v. social life, school clubs and interest groups, work study, self-responsibility/control, the 411 on Greek Life, managing academic challenges and addressing their new freedom and independence.

#### Week Three: C-U-L-T-U-R-E: US and Thai cultural differences and culture shock

In this session students will start by writing out what they expect to encounter in the US, how they believe Thai culture differs from US culture and what they believe will be most challenging for them. Cultural skits will be acted out and this will start as a talking point to go more in-depth about general cultural differences between Thais and US Americans. Topics will include, but are not limited to: authority and status, communication styles, time and punctuality, values and expressions of emotion. Issues like speaking up in class, challenging others opinions and circumstances of “losing face” or abrasiveness will be addressed. Students will be encouraged to discuss how they think they will be perceived as Thai students on a US campus (alumni have brought up the stereotype of Thai girls being “easy”) and their concerns, fears and excitement involving being immersed in American culture.

#### Week Four: Health and Safety: sex, drugs and crisis

After the previous session surrounding cultural norms and differences, mental health, culture shock and crisis situations will be discussed. In this session students will be given a list of culture shock “signs” and a handout with the culture shock worm. Students will be given a health “scavenger hunt” where they have to find their school’s health center, important phone numbers, resources for their school’s psychiatrists, as well as locating the community’s nearest hospital. Mercy students will also brainstorm stress-releasing activities, like running, writing or calling a friend. A handout on coping behaviors for times of crises will be distributed, as well as resources to find information on sexual health (STDs, condoms and date rape) and drugs and alcohol usage. Students will have an open forum to discuss concerns regarding food and diet since this can be a

difficult adjustment for many and be encouraged to ask questions about any health concerns they may have.

#### Week Five: Academic norms: what's to be expected of you

Many students have addressed their apprehensions surrounding a new schooling system. It is during this session that concerns regarding plagiarism, citing, references, classroom culture, student/teacher relationships and learning support services are addressed. While schools and even professors may vary on the ways in which they want their papers cited and referenced, it needs to be known that most universities in the United States have very strict plagiarism policies.

In Fieg's book *A Common Core* he noted the tendency of Thai students to copy on tests and homework and plagiarize papers. It has become a system of helping another out. However, that behavior will get students kicked out of school or at the very least on academic probation. Since a major concern of many of Mercy's alumni was (and still is) their ability to write papers well in English, students need to know that there are resources like writing centers on their campuses where they can get help. This session will also readdress some topics that were brought up in the session on culture, regarding speaking up in class, asking questions and challenging theories. Past students have said that they learned about this classroom culture while at UWC, so this will be a chance for them to openly discuss their challenges and successes with this new type of classroom environment.

#### Week Six: Current world and US news and questions.

At this point students should have a better idea of what is expected of them, should be logistically prepared for their departure, and should have less unknowns and

lowered anxiety. It is during this session that the group of students will talk more about current world events and US news. Students need to be aware of what is going on in the world and what is happening in the United States. One alumni said it was helpful for her to read at least one news article a week over the summer before her departure. It made her feel confident in discussing current events and world news in her new academic setting.

This will also be a point where students may ask any last questions. If possible, it will be arranged that alumni students come to the last session to field questions. This will also be a time when students can reflect on the goals they set at the beginning of the orientation and whether or not they have been met, as well as set goals for their time in the US.

There will be a final closure activity in which students will reflect on where they are now and where they would like to be in one year's time. They will be given time at the end of the session to write themselves a letter, which will be sealed in an envelope. These will be given to the current staff point person and the students will receive their letters when they return to Mercy the following summer. This will not only be something nice for them to have, as well as a way to begin processing their first year at university, but it will also get them in the mindset of where they were a year ago, so that they can relate to the new group of students who will be beginning their pre-departure orientation.

## **STAFFING**

Due to the fact that Mercy is consistently inundated with volunteers, a volunteer will staff the orientation and there will be no staffing costs for Mercy. The hope is that the volunteer will either be American or someone who has gone to University in the United States and spent a significant amount of time there. If there is no volunteer

deemed appropriate for this task, at the staff point person's discretion, it will be the job of the returned Mercy students, who are currently working at Mercy, to run the orientation. Mercy is currently looking for a replacement for a staff point person, but there will be an administrator overseeing the orientation's facilitator.

It is also important, for trust building and consistency, that it be the same person to run every session or at least be present at every session. If an outside volunteer runs the orientation, there will be points when US university graduates back at Mercy will be able to come in and talk to the students preparing to leave. If there is a need to prepare certain materials, graduates working at Mercy will be able to help, since their jobs require them to assist Mercy in any odd tasks necessary. Since the program will already be designed and organized, the volunteer will simply have to implement it. To maintain consistency in the orientation's delivery suggestions have been made in the following section.

## **COURSE DELIVERY AND LOGISTICS**

As a stipulation of Mercy's scholarship program, all Mercy sponsored students are to return to Bangkok in the summers to work for Mercy, volunteering their skills and reconnecting with their families. Since all of the students will be back in Bangkok, the orientation will be over the course of 6 weeks in the summer. The orientation will be mandatory, but if a student cannot make a session, it will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Lack of attendance is not anticipated, as an important aspect of Thai culture is respecting and following the instruction of your elders. Additionally, it appears from the needs assessment that students are excited about going to the United States and want to know more about what to expect before they leave.



Worksheets and handouts will be made for all participants, so if a student has to miss a session, they will have the papers and a peer can catch them up. Furthermore, all students will receive the latest version of EducationUSA's *If You Want to Study in the United States: Getting Ready to Go* packet, which has a lot of important and relevant information they will need to know. All students will receive an orientation packet in addition to EducationUSA's packet, which will consist of all of the orientation's handouts and worksheets (Appendix E).

In the Curriculum Breakdown (Appendix D) the facilitator will have a schedule to follow for each session. This will help with the consistency of the orientation's delivery. All handouts and worksheets for the orientation will be lettered, (handout A, handout B, etc) and in the curriculum breakdown there will be notes as to when each handout/worksheet should be distributed. Sections will be given general time lines and have specific material to cover.

## **BUDGET**

Due to the nature of the program, being run by volunteers, there are no costs to Mercy. One of the many offices or the computer lab at The Mercy Centre will be used as the meeting space. Most of Mercy's programs are run by already paid staff, which will be supporting the program, and a volunteer either living at Mercy or coming in from the community on the weekend will run the sessions. Volunteers are given free access to all printing and copying needs, so all the materials needed to run this program will be covered. Past Mercy graduates of US universities, who have returned to Bangkok to work at Mercy, will be able to assist the volunteer when available.

## **EVALUATION PLAN**

The first group of students to go through the pre-departure orientation *An Introduction to Life at a US University* will be the best to assess what worked and didn't work, what was extraneous and what was missing, in terms of the orientation's curriculum and design. A preliminary assessment will be done at the closing of the final session of the orientation. Students will be given time to write their suggestions and general comments. A second evaluation will be during the student's spring semester at school in the US (Appendix F). At this point they will have settled into life at school and the orientation will still be fresh enough for them to recall what helped them acclimate and where the holes were; it will also give whomever is running the orientation enough time to rework and adapt it before running it again in the summer. The staff point person will administer this evaluation electronically, via email. Included with the evaluation forms for students and staff will be the goals and objectives of the orientation and the participants; staff and students will be asked to rank if these goals/objectives were met.

While the needs of one group of Mercy students will be similar to those the following year due to their comparable backgrounds, new people, constantly evolving technologies and unforeseen world events that alter the dynamics of international travel will invariably shift the focus of the orientation. It is important to identify the needs and concerns of the new group of students, while considering the impact of new technologies and current events when re-evaluating the program. Since the first session of the orientation allows time for students to write out their questions and concerns, they will have time to voice their personal needs for the program.

It is also important to keep all stakeholders in mind. Mercy staff should be included in evaluating the effectiveness of this program. Staff that work closely with the

international students will be asked what situations/issues arose following this orientation and what situations/issues didn't arise, that had in years past. Since they communicate directly with the students while abroad, they know what should be added or changed. Additionally, suggestions should be taken from the volunteer who ran the program. They will be able to recognize what the students seemed interested in, what questions were asked during the orientation and what they would suggest throwing out, adding or adapting.

With feedback in the form of questionnaires, involving all the relevant stakeholders, the orientation can be re-evaluated and adapted for the upcoming summer session. After the pilot program a spring term assessment will be conducted online and the staff point person will be able to communicate, via email and Skype, with the person who ran the first orientation. Together changes will be made to the original curriculum. The hope is to have the new staff member, who takes over the position of overseeing the international students and scholarship students, take ownership of the orientation and to eventually be able to oversee it entirely.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

*An Orientation to Life at a US University* will be the first formal pre-departure orientation that the Mercy Centre has run for its students preparing to go to the United States to study abroad at a four-year university. With a fully developed curriculum and handouts, the pilot orientation will be run in the summer of 2012. As it stands now, there have been one to two students each academic year, since 2005, that have gone to the US to study at a university. The hope is that these numbers continue to grow. In the academic year of 2011-2012 there are two Mercy youth at UWC and nine Mercy students at

Redeemer International School in Bangkok, a private high school that prepares Mercy kids for UWC. The one Mercy student graduating from UWC this spring will be the first perspective student to go through the orientation (summer 2012) before going to the United States in the fall.

The orientation's design was based upon the needs assessment, in which three US university alumni, two current students, one perspective student and two Mercy staff members took part in. The hope was this program would be created by Mercy students, for Mercy students. Gathering their data and presenting it, based on theories of identity, moral and cognitive development in college age students, the six-week, six-session course was born. The program was created to meet the needs of the students, but as times change and student's needs change, evaluation forms will be collected to assess and adapt the orientation.

Since there are so few students who have already gone through this process of study abroad there were limitations to the research. Limitations included the specific population of students, language barriers and the nature of the research being a questionnaire and not face-to-face interviews.

Personal relationships with all of the people participating in the needs assessment were developed over my six-month practicum at the organization. While this was useful because most participants were willing to participate in the research, it is possible that data could have been skewed, either to appease me or make the organization appear in a particular light.

The purpose of this orientation is to aid students in their transition from Mercy, Bangkok and UWC to a new life in the United States at a four-year university. Students

should be proud of their hard work and feel confident about their success. Mercy students have proven to be passionate, bright youth with endless possibilities in front of them. Had they not been given this opportunity to study abroad, at UWC and in the United States, their lives would have been very different. The aim of this orientation is to have them be prepared and confident about their time studying in the United States.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A** – Interview Questions and Answers from Mercy Executive Staff (Executive Director and Senior Advisor)

**Appendix B** – Interview Questions and Answers from Alumni and Current Mercy Students

**Appendix C** – Interview Questions and Answers from Perspective Student

**Appendix D** – Curriculum Breakdown and Handout List

**Appendix E** – Handouts A – P

**Appendix F** – Evaluation and Assessment Form

**Appendix A – Interview questions and answers from Mercy Executive Staff  
(Executive Director and Senior Advisor)**

**What is currently done to prepare Mercy students for living and studying abroad at universities in the United States?**

- The Mercy students receive extensive in house English language tutoring, usually from foreign volunteers. They are also sent for at least one year, two if possible to a local international school which teaches in English and has an international curriculum somewhat similar to the international high school they will be going to overseas.
- We prepare them with intensive English language lessons with volunteers. We teach about the culture and history. General knowledge. Some are graduates from the international school here in Bangkok.

**Who, at Mercy, helps arrange visas, transportation to and within the US and with all the student's medical paperwork?**

- Khun Nitaya who has been in charge of volunteers has been the person dealing with the international students. Unfortunately Khun Nitaya is finishing her work at Mercy effective the end of March. No replacement has been named.
- Students are supported by Miss Nitaya with all their arrangements

**In your opinion, what have been some concerns of the students before they leave Mercy? (Their hesitations.)**

- The girls are concerned about leaving boyfriends, about leaving friends, about not having Thai food, about inadequate English language skills.
- It is going into the unknown, being alone in a new society, will I survive, will I succeed, will I be able to learn and will I make people proud of me.

**What are the most difficult adjustments, in your opinion, that the children must make once they are living abroad?**

- Adapting to bland foreign food is often cited as a problem, the other is the direct manner of speech and action of foreigners which leaves them feeling a bit insulted at times.
- Probably the cultural differences. Also the language although we try to prepare them we cannot prepare them for all the nuances of local dialects. Also being alone without their family, also Integration with their fellow students, host family and the community as a whole.

**Who speaks to them, how often and about what regarding their departure, before they leave for university in the United States? (Mercy staff, UWC alum, other volunteers?)**

- Khun Nitaya speaks with them, previously we had no UWC alum but we have two now who will talk with the girls, Khun Usanee makes a point of counseling the girls prior to their departure and Fr. Joe adds his wisdom (and great pressure forcing the girls to go).
- Normally would be Usanee, house parents, staff at Mercy and Father Joe.

**How does attending UWC differ from and how is it similar to going to Universities in the U.S.? Do you think UWC prepares students for college in the US? If yes, how?**

- UWC functions as any AP high school in the US does. It is good preparation for university in the US but our students are for the most part the proud possessors of mediocre grades and are destined for small, often religious based colleges in the U.S.
- The curriculum is different. It is the last two years of high school and therefore the level of knowledge of subjects is at a different level. It is in the main a preparation for attending university.

**After youth have gone to the United States to study what sort of questions or issues arose?**

- Face book monitoring has shown some of the girls getting involved in social situations (boyfriends) in much more aggressive ways then would be allowed if they were here in Thailand. The dress code and public behavior also come to be a problem on occasion. The grades in general are mediocre.
- Funding is an issue, even though they receive scholarships there are other expenses, i.e. books, travelling, subsistence etc.

**Who (in terms of Mercy staff) is in closest contact with the children before they leave and once they arrive at their destination in the States? If it is two different people, please list and explain the roles of both. You may also include networks within the US.**

- NA
- Normally Usanee, Nitaya or Ratana – in the US it is the Board of Mercy US – True Rowan.

**Is there any formal curriculum developed to prepare the students for living in a new culture far from home?**

- No
- Before the students leave for the US they have special lessons, i.e. culture, geography, English and maths.

**What has been the most successful tool Mercy uses in helping the children adjust and acclimate to their new environments?**

- Nitaya and Usanee phone them often, the girls are in contact with each other by phone and facebook and form a support group of sorts. They all get together on big holidays (Christmas and New Years) usually staying with Fr. Joe's sister.
- Experience of other pupils and close communications.

**Do you think a formal orientation would assist in the student's transition period? Why or why not? If yes, what would you like to see included in this orientation?**

- Should be designed by past alumni.
- UWC do provide one month of orientation and this does help our students.

**Who would be able to implement and run this orientation? Past alumni working at Mercy, UWC alum volunteering, other volunteers?**

- Past Alumni under supervision of Mercy staff.
- This is already provided by UWC

**What do you think the children should know before moving and living abroad?**

- Good English language skills, the dangers of facebook as they all committ some foolish actions before they get it under control, Financial matters, how to handle a check book and banking issue.
- They should know about the culture, history, weather, monetary systems. What is expected of them. Who they can contact what is their support regime.

**What do you think is the best tool students have to acclimate to their new life in the States?**

- Networking with each other.
- Support from Mercy and the experience from other students, support from UWC, the US Board and Host family.

### **Appendix B – Interview Questions and Responses for Mercy's Alumni and Current US Undergraduate students**

**Age?**

- 25
- 28
- 24
- 23
- 20

**What is your current location?**

- Bangkok
- Atlanta, Georgia, USA
- Bangkok
- China
- Missouri, USA

**Year of graduation (or perspective year) from a 4-year US college or university?**

- 2011
- 2010
- 2011
- 2013
- 2015

**What school did you attend or are you attending in the US?**

- Westminster College
- Westminster College, Fulton, MO
- Methodist University, Fayetteville, North Carolina
- Clark University, MA
- Westminster College

**When you left for school in the US was it your first time going to the US?**

- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- No
- Yes

**Has anyone in your family been to the US before?**

- Yes
- No
- No
- No
- No

**Are you the first person in your family to attend a four-year university?**

- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes

**Did you read any books/articles about the US before you left?**

- Yes, about the school system and the college information.
- Yes, Geography at High school
- I read many articles online about US geography, traditional, food, culture, etc. The volunteer who helped me with classes preparation also brought lots of books as well. It was also a must for me to read at least 1 piece of news about the US every day.
- No
- I read some information from website and the email from my college.

**How did you feel before leaving for university in the US? Confident/nervous? Why?**

- Confident because I know that the U.S is an open country, the biggest democracy, people all are equal and free to express their opinions and it's the melting pot for all cultures.
- Nervous, since it was my first time in State but I was ready and looking forward into it.

- I was kind of excited. The nervousness did not occur to me because I was in Canada for two years. So, I was pretty confident and excited about the new experiences in the US.
- Nervous, because I'm not good at writing academic paper, and reading as well.
- I felt nervous because it was my first time to stay in US and difference culture, which was a bit hard for me but after I get here then I felt more confident.

**Who did you talk to about attending University before leaving Thailand?**

- the older sister/brother who has attended the college and have some experiences
- Mercy Centre...
- First, I talked to my family. Then, I talked to P' Dtai and K. Usanee who always had good advices for me. They had given me advices about life aboard which might be different from UWC.
- I talked with my friends, sister- she's Mercy staff. My sister gave a lot of information. I also talked with some of Mercy seniors about choosing university.
- I talked to one of students who graduated from this school last year and this school that I am going to. She gave me a lot of advice, which is very useful. Therefore, I was really like this school after I listened to this student.

**What advice were you given? What did you find most helpful?**

- college life, school system yes they were helpful.
- Preparation for school enjoy learn as much as you can balance school work and activities life
- To be aware of who I really am!
- For academically, my family let me decide by myself. The only thing that my sister suggested was to find the school with full-scholarship.
- I heard that the school will help student a lot because the school is very small that they can help every student in the college. Therefore, the advisor here are really care about student and help as much as they could.

**In what ways did UWC prepare you to attend a university in the United States?**

- courses, the IB program from UWC has prepared me well for taking courses. the culture of UWC which was international, people respect each other opinions and fully engage themselves through class participation just like American students.
- Language multi-cultures some expectation
- Of course, it would be basic English. I would had been struggle so much in term of language if I did not go to UWC. The English classes prepared me for speaking, listening, and writing skills which is very useful in the US. In Thailand, students usually afraid to ask but studying aboard, you always have to ASK whenever you do not understand otherwise you screwed.
- UWC really help me to adjust to overseas atmosphere, although it was not American style environment. I learned lots of experiences, I got over culture shock. In term of academic, I also practiced to improve my English skills. Teachers all guided me an introduction about US schools.
- First, they prepared the language because I remember when I first got there, I couldn't speak English at all and after that they also taught us how to be self-

confidence. The advisor help us to find out which college that I should go and it is possible for me.

**Did your experience at UWC give you an idea of what to expect of the US and did that change once you lived in the US?**

- Yes, some what different, my previous school has a very big body of international students. UWC has given me more confident of how to react with other students who comes from other countries but not students in the States so it took me a while to get to know American friends and their pop cultures.
- Yes, I was expecting to encounter with different cultures, advance education, and language.
- Yes, I thought things would be similar in the US when I first went there. But to be honest, it quite different. UWC was just like a little school with all nice people who would like to make the world a better place. It was not as nice in the US because everybody was very competitive. US university was like a little version of real life for me. Yes, I did changed a little. Maybe, I had grown up. I had learned to stand up for myself and do not let others take advantage of me.
- UWC gave me very high expectation toward my life in US. I thought that everything will be very beautifully as life in UWC, Norway.
- I had a lot of experiences from UWC in Norway, especially I have learned culture sharing with my friends because we come from different part around the world and that makes me learn more and more how to live in different country like US.

**Did you receive any formal preparation for life at a US university at Mercy?**

- Not really
- Not really, because I was early generation so it was not enough feedback for Mercy to prepared
- No, I did not. Many stuffs told me what I should expect e.g. how others see Thai girl etc. But, there is not really a formal preparation.
- No.
- Before I go to US, I have learned how to prepare from Mercy that whatever we do is to help others people and do not hurt other people. I try my best to study as much as I can think about what is my aim, my family and Mercy

**If yes, what information were you given, by whom and to what extent? If no, do you think it would have been helpful?**

- maybe yes. but since the US. is a very big country and each states are different what they will advise may not apply to the other states but at least they will able to know general information such as, do not buy their books form book store, rather than to buy it online coz it's cheaper and etc.
- NA
- P'Dtai and K.Usanee told me to just take care of myself. I do not think any information would have been helpful. In fact, I do not think it is necessary anyway. I guess, one learns about life by experiencing and adapting it.
- I think if there's some formal preparation it would be great, then we will understand the conditions that Mercy expect us to do. In my case, I heard the

rumor that they will not allow students who finished UWC continue to study in US. At that time I was so nervous, that I have to drop my great opportunity there. I think if Mercy really talked with us, that what kind of school that's they want us to go. How much they can supports us? and Which school should not go, I think it would so great..

- Yes, Mercy has volunteer who prepares us before we go to US because it is very helpful for us to know more about American culture and prepare ourself before going there.

**While in the US, who did you speak to when you had questions regarding US culture, questions about paper work, travel? What sort of questions did you have once you were already in the US?**

- International student clubs, advisers, resident advisers, and friends.
- school had student international consulsors... sometime asking the friends and mostly did some research
- I had never speak with people back at Mercy Centre. I found it easier to just talk to my roommates, frineds, and professors in the US. They were very nice and kind to me. I mostly lean on my friends over in the US. I sometimes talked with my family and friends in Thailand when I feel like I needed to express my feeling in Thai.
- I got full-scholarship, traveling and everything are covered, so I have to contact to school by myself. About paper work, I need to find someone to help to make sure that everything is correct, but they are not Mercy staff. I will end up with asking friends, peers at school. About the US culture, I have Thai-American friend in US, I often ask her if I found something curious me. I often ask her something like, why do they do like that? or Do they usually do like this?
- Every student in my college, we will have advisor who can help us with everything.

**What was the most challenging adjustment once at University in the US?**

- school system (child's center), "hooking up" culture, and the culture of fraternity/sorority,
- cultrally- more diversities than expected, academic- higher expectation needed more self responsibility
- The most challenging adjustment would be food. I hardly ate in the cafeteria. I could not stand burgers, fried, and junk foods.
- Academically is my big challenge, and after that probably the party life-style. I don't like party, I can do once every two months or a semester. I feel bad to refuse my friends invitation, but I don't wanna go. I don't enjoy I feel going to party is so tired. I'm also afraid they will see me as a weird girl, just wanna stay in a room. But I'm really happy and enjoy being my room, better than going out for party.
- The most challenging that I have is I have one of my classes, which I am the only one who is Asian and all of them are American. It seems they do not like me that much and sometimes I have problem with transportation because for this class we need to do interview outside but no one helps me with that. Therefore, I talk to my professor and she helps me with that, so I think sometimes it is hard to live in this



society but I do not give up and I focus on my aim, even this small problem cannot stop my dream.

### **How did life at a US University differ from life at UWC, in terms of adjusting to a new culture and environment?**

- UWC is more diverse in term of cultures, and what determine the certain behavior such as religion, cultures and life style, they learn other cultures but still keep on following their own cultures but America is more American, more open minded for example Muslim students in America are fully express themselves like never have done before such as they go crazy in the party, consume alcohol, and etc. because nobody going to judge them.
- - more independent - more responsibilities - more mature - concern more about future - more self control (needed though)
- In UWC, everybody was attempting to learn just like me. There were many of us whom were unable to speak good English. So, I did not feel awkward or too scared because I realized that there were many of us. In the US, everyone seemed to be ambitious and competitive.
- In UWC, we come for share because the concept of the school itself. Everything comes to middle, then I don't have to adjust anything much, and also learned other culture at the same time. However in US, my culture becomes minority, Everyone starts to adjust to American culture.
- To talk about the environment, it seems like UWC student are nicer than American because they help each other and share their culture.

### **How did life in Norway differ from life in the US?**

- life in Norway is more international no a certain culture to judges ours.
- more simple life - easier education - more peacefully
- I did not go to Norway.
- From my experiences, I do not want say life in UWC life is representing life in Norway. Because UWC is a conceptual place, but Norway is a realistic place. When I say realistic place I mean the place where people live; they could be problem, everyday is not perfect. But UWC, you can make everything so much fun as you want, you can play all day, do not have to worry about anything. You do not have to worry what people will think about you, what you have to ware, all what you have to do. Life in UWC is like you can enjoy your life. Then if I have to distinguish between this two place, I choose the part that out of school's fence. And again live in rural area, people characteristic probably not as strong as the city people. My impression about the place was not really bad, and there is not much different with the life in US. The only thing that have very huge difference should the safety, I never fear to go anywhere by myself in the night in Norway, but in US When I have to walk from one building to another I always feel insecure because our university is an opened campus, and there is often robbery taken place.
- It is very different, especially the society and culture. In Norway, we used to help and share our idea and whatever we do we really respect each other. In US, everyone seems to be busy and do not time to help or to care other people.

**What was most surprising about life in the US?**

- about the capacity of students, they are fully responsible for themselves, study hard and party hard while other cultures such as in Thailand, they can't do well in both.
- society itself quite different here in US, more freedom, and more independence and the way people live their life here is very interesting. Broad mixture in the society, more opportunities to explore.
- All girls wear SUPER shorts to classes. It is just unbelievable to me. If there were in Thailand, teachers here would smack them down, lol. I feel like people in the US did not seem to be family oriented, example, grandparents usually lived by themselves in the house which would never happen in Thailand.
- Every place are not beautiful. When I haven't been aboard I think US will be super developed, you will not see slums scene. But the place where my school located I sometime feel liked the people around here they still need some development, their house, garbage, and infrastructure etc.
- The US is very clean country and at I could see every where are organizing and tidy.

**Have you been asked questions by students who were/are preparing to go to the US to study? What type of questions have you been asked? What advice were you able to give?**

- college school system, youth cultures, life style, food, and scholarship type. I were able to give all but only in the Missouri states and to some college which has similar grading system.
- mostly about school, society, friends and general... --- one of the best advice I always give to them is study hard ...4 years will go very fast, try to learn as much as you can... don't lock yourself in library, go out and do things... do some internship when you can..keep you grade above 3.00.... no time like College time.. you cannot recall... and most of all...enjoy yourself....
- Yes. They mostly asked me "how is it going to be like?" and "Will it be like in many American movies?" I usually told them to prepare for the best and the worst because everybody has his/her own limits and expectations. I did not want to ruin their thoughts.
- I have been asked, normally they would ask about which schools should they go. Under the Mercy scholar circumstance, so I can just give them that which one give you an air-ticket annually, just choose that one. I think the air ticket is very important, because Mercy can just stop you going abroad because of transportation insufficiency.
- I asked about the academic thing and the subject that I want to take for my major. Moreover, it will be about hat work that I could work in the college because I want to learn and have new experience

**What do you wish you had known before you had left Mercy to go to the US?**

- about the youth cultures, i wish i knew more about the American dating culture such as girls should say no when they do not like something for example Thai

girls are usually never say no and try to be polite which causes some trouble, it might lead to the misunderstanding that a girl is interested in a guy. Also about the tax system of the US. to be prepare about the paper work, and college employment.

- self control I guess...from strict environment into the totally freedom you must learn when to stop and limit -- prepare better, both physically and psychology
- NONE
- I don't have a particular thing wish to know before I had left Mercy. But I do have a wish that we can have some person help us correcting grammar and paper works. I don't wish anything probably, my sister shared me lots of her experiences in US, and also oversea experience in UWC do not make me feel that very nervous.
- I wish I could know more about how to live in the American society and being more confident in front of people that I haven't known before.

**What advice would you give future students attending school in the US from Mercy?**

- be ready to explore the world yourself—
- organize things a little bit would make your life easier -- plan things ahead of time -- learn as much as you can -- go out and do things
- Be confident and be yourself! Prove to others that not all Thai women are easier to get:~) Proud to be Thai!
- Choose the school that give you very full-scholarship, read the condition of scholarship carefully, and asked the school right away which kind of payment is your responsibility, in other word, what do I have to pay? Then compare every choices of schools that you have, choose the most reasonable one. And when send to email to P' dtai please CC to Kru Jae (Usanee) and Pa' Rat (Ratana), then everyone will know what you need to consult.
- I would say it all about whatever you do you need to be confident and be breave because to be here it is not easy and it is not hard if you know what to do.

**How often did/do you talk to people at home, while in the US? What forms of communication did you use? (Skype, Facebook, Other?)**

- once in 3 months or a letter once a month by phone call, and a letter
- once a week (phone call)
- I skypeed with my parents once a week. I facebooked others when I get chances.
- In US I often make a phone call because my parents have no idea about technology, I used Callmuangthai credit, the fee is reasonable and signal is great. I do Facebook a lot and skype sometimes to contact my friends.
- I skype with my family every weekend and email to people in Mercy sometimes like one a month and talk to students who study in US by using Facebook.

**Appendix C – Interview questions and responses from perspective student going to the US**

**Who is currently aiding you in your application process?**

- Teachers

**What support are you receiving from Mercy in terms of preparing for your departure to the US?**

- NA

**What are your concerns/fears and why?**

- NA

**What are you most looking forward to, once in the US?**

- The atmosphere and academic

**What information would you like to have pertaining to life at a US university?**

- NA

**What, in terms of preparation for life and school in the US, is UWC helping you with? (Are there any sessions/classes on US culture? What logistics/paperwork is UWC helping you with?)**

- NA

**If you have questions about life and college in the US, who have you been asking or talking to?**

- NA

**What did you need before you left for UWC? (Paperwork?)**

- Visas and Injunctions required

**What preparation did you receive before you left for UWC?**

- NA

## **Appendix D : Curriculum Breakdown and Handout List for Facilitator**

### ***Session One: Introductions and Logistics (Handouts A – E)***

- Introductions and Icebreakers (15 min)
  - Go around in a circle: where are you going to school? What are you excited about/ nervous about (students will already know each other)
- Review the orientation’s goals and agenda (10 min)
  - Have students read through the goals/agenda – ask questions (Distribute Handouts A&B, EducationUSA’s *If You Want to Study in the United States: Getting Ready to Go*)
  - Print: EducationUSA handout:  
[http://www.educationusa.info/5\\_steps\\_to\\_study/Bk4\\_English.pdf](http://www.educationusa.info/5_steps_to_study/Bk4_English.pdf)
- Goal setting for the six-week orientation (10 minutes)
  - Students write out goals for themselves and for the session; what they hope to get out of this orientation (on handout A)
- Brainstorm questions (10 minutes)
  - Make a list of any questions you have pertaining to life at a US university and moving to and studying in the United States
- “What you will Need” checklist (5 minutes)
  - Distribute handout C
  - Have students read through the list
  - Cross out what they have already done
- “Helpful Hints” (5 minutes)
  - Distribute handout D
  - Read through and ask questions
- “Resources and Contacts” handout (5 minutes)
  - Distribute handout E
  - Go through and add any one you will need to know or get in touch with regarding the paperwork, scholarship info, work study, etc
- Computer Lab research (1 hour)

- Look up all the names and emails of necessary contacts and resources for the particular school (International Student Office staff)
- Tell students to familiarize themselves with their school's website
- Research insurance coverage, immunization requirements, average weather for their school's region/state.
- Develop a CONTACT list - one for travel, one as a list of resources
- Homework: Create a list (minimum of 10) of your university's clubs, organizations, seminar sessions, events.

### ***Session Two: Freedom and Flexibility (Handouts F - I)***

- Check - in (15 minutes)
- "What clubs and events does your school have?" (10 minutes)
  - Review homework, students discuss clubs, events and organizations on campus
- Time management and creating a schedule (30 minutes)
  - Distribute handouts F, G and H
  - Calendars given to students for planning ahead (print blank summer calendars, like examples in handout G)
  - Read through and if time make a weeks plan for the following week
- Distribute list of topics developed from needs assessment responses to provoke more questions (handout I) and brainstorm topics to ask alumni (5 minutes)
- Alumni panel discussion on relevant topics (1 hour)
- Homework: Write a paragraph on "what is culture and why does it matter?"

### ***Session Three: US and Thai Culture (Handouts J and K)***

- Check - in (15 minutes)
- "What is culture and why does it matter?" (10 minutes)
  - Homework review
- Skits - (1 hour)

- Distribute handout J
- Have students read them out loud, “act” them out
- Follow discussion topics after the skits
- Worksheet for brainstorm on cultural differences (20 minutes)
  - Distribute handout K
  - Fill in the brainstorm sheet, discuss stereotypes
- Group discussion: How will these differences create challenges and how can you best deal/cope/understand the new culture? (15 minutes)
- Homework: Create a list of ways you manage stress and people you talk to when you feel stressed.

#### ***Session Four: Health and Safety (Handouts L – N)***

- Check – in (15 minutes)
- Homework review (15 minutes)
  - Group brainstorm, create list of ways to manage stress and develop a support network list
- What is culture shock? Review, discuss handouts: (45 minutes)
  - Distribute handouts L and M
  - Provide definitions of culture shock, stress, crisis
  - Warning signs of Culture Shock
  - The culture shock U curve
  - Coping mechanisms
- Health scavenger hunt – online (45 minutes)
  - Distribute handout N
- Homework: What are your academic concerns about going to school in the United States?

#### ***Session Five: Academics (Handout O)***

- Check – in (15 minutes)
- Homework review (30 minutes)

- What are your academic concerns?
- Discuss references like the writing center, study groups, suggest talking to your professors and advisor, asking questions and find the school's learning support center
- Challenges and successes at UWC, open group discussion (15 minutes)
  - Learning to: speak up, ask questions, challenge theories
- School academics – expectations and rules of (most) US universities (1 hour)
  - Distribute handout O
  - Review plagiarism/ cheating and its consequences, classroom culture – being on time and attendance policies and citing and references
- Homework: Read one article on US news and one surrounding International news and be ready to share and discuss

***Session Six: World and US news, wrap-up (Handout P)***

- Check – in (15 minutes)
- Homework review, “What’s going on in the world?” (30 minutes)
  - Share and discuss articles
- Return to questions written in session one (10 minutes)
  - What has been answered/ what hasn’t been
  - More questions?
- Revisit goals for the orientation and personal goals (15 minutes)
  - Have we met our goals?
- Advice from the Experts: handout (5 minutes)
  - Distribute handout P and read as a group
- Suggestions for the next orientation (15 minutes)
  - Each student takes time to write out what they would add, take out, change and submits them anonymously
- Closing piece (30 minutes)
  - Write a letter to yourself, to be opened next year after student’s first year of university when they return to Bangkok
  - Write about: hopes, goals and expectations for the year ahead.



## **List of Handouts**

### **Week One:**

- **A - Introduction: goals of orientation/ personal goals and questions**
- **B - Orientation's Agenda (student version)**
- **C - Logistics checklist**
- **D - Helpful Hints**
- **E - Resources: Who to talk to**

### **Week Two:**

- **F - Time Management and Study Skills**
- **G - Time Scheduling: Creating a Master Schedule**
- **H - Making a Personal Schedule**
- **I - Freedom and Free time - list of topics to discuss**

### **Week Three:**

- **J - US & Thai Culture SKITS**
- **K - US & Thai cultural differences**

### **Week Four:**

- **L - Health: Mental/ Physical/ Emotional (and U-Curve model)**
- **M - Crisis Coping Skills**
- **N - Health and Safety Scavenger Hunt**

### **Week Five**

- **O - Academic Norms and Expectations**

### **Week Six**

- **P - Advice from the Experts**

## **Appendix E – Worksheets and Handouts**

### **INTRODUCTION TO LIFE AT A US UNIVERSITY** (handout A)

*This is a six-week pre-departure orientation program, consisting of six sessions. Each session will be two-hours for six consecutive Saturdays over the summer.*

#### **Goals of the pre-departure orientation:**

- To ease the transition and adaptation to US culture
- To have students logistically prepared for their departure
- To have provide the correct resources for students to find the answers to their school specific questions
- To have students leaving for the US aware of the resources available to them
- Youth will have less questions and concerns while at school, than Mercy students had in the past.

**What are your goals for this orientation? What do you hope to learn?**

**What are some questions you have about life at a US University, that you would like answered?**

**Orientation Agenda: A list of session topics and homework.** (handout B)

*Session One: Introductions and Logistics (5 handouts)*

- Orientation's goals and agenda
- "What you will Need" checklist / EducationUSA packet
- "Resources and Contacts" handout
- "Helpful Hints" handout
- Homework: Create a list (minimum of 10) of your university's clubs, organizations, seminar sessions, events.

*Session Two: Freedom and Flexibility (3 handouts)*

- Study skills/ time management handout
- Calendars for planning ahead
- Alumni panel / handout on topics to cover
- Homework: Write a paragraph on "what is culture and why does it matter?"

*Session Three: US and Thai Culture (2 handouts)*

- Worksheet for brainstorm on cultural differences
- Handout on major cultural differences
- Homework: Create a list of ways you manage stress and people you talk to when you feel stressed.

*Session Four: Health and Safety (3 handouts)*

- Warning signs of Culture Shock
- The culture shock U Curve
- Coping mechanisms
- Health scavenger hunt
- Homework: What are your academic concerns about going to school in the United States?

*Session Five: Academics (1 handout)*

- "School academics" – expectations and rules
- Homework: Read one article on US news and one surrounding International news and be ready to share and discuss.

*Session Six: World and US news, wrap-up (1 handout)*

- "Advice from the Experts": Mercy alumni and staff

## LOGISTICS: A PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST (handout C)

- √ Valid passport issued in Thailand
- √ Nonimmigrant visa: stamped inside your passport by a consular officer of a US embassy or consulate
- √ Certificate of Eligibility (I-20 or DS-2019 Form: once you receive these forms, contact the US Embassy in Bangkok for your VISA)
- √ Arrival – Departure Record (I-94): you will receive this form on the airplane. Make sure to fill it out, as you will have to give it to the immigration officer once you land.
- √ Familiarize yourself with your school's website
- √ Immunizations – check your specific school's immunization requirements
- √ Health insurance – ask your school's international advisor about school plans and other options
- √ Know the average weather for your school's region/state and what conditions to expect while you are there over the course of the year
- √ A contact list: names, phone numbers and address of the people picking you up in the US, your international advisor at school, your school's address, the address and phone number of the nearest Thai Embassy or Consulate, True Rowan's email address and number in the US and Mercy contacts.
- √ Airline ticket information: arrange with Mercy staff (know who is picking you up in the United States – how you will get to campus)
- √ Official copy of your birth certificate
- √ Medical / Dental Records
- √ Prescriptions written in English
- √ Official high school and UWC Transcripts

## MORE HELPFUL INFORMATION (Handout D)

- You may need to obtain notarized translations of certificates (birth, medical, dental, transcripts) if they are not in English
- If you have any questions regarding paperwork or visa status, email the IIE Bangkok office, home of EducationUSA, and your International Student Advisor at your university in the United States
- You will want to contact the International Student Office to arrange the details of your arrival at school. Try to arrive a few days before orientation and registration.
- Finalize your housing arrangements at school and when you should move in.
- Consider getting a US bank account, contact True Rowan (on Mercy's US Board of Trustees) for financial questions – keep her updated on where you will be each semester
- Carefully read and assess all terms of your scholarships, be in close contact with your International Student Advisor (ISA) for questions concerning your VISA, I-20, tax information and work-study forms
- Don't make travel arrangements until your US visa has been issued
- You cannot enter the United States more than 30 days prior to the start date on your immigration document (I-20)
- Carry all essential paperwork and documents with you on the plane and not in a checked bag

Information taken from EducationUSA's

*If You Want to Study in the United States: Getting Ready to Go (2010)*

## RESOURCES – WHO TO TALK TO (handout E)

### **Thai Embassy in Washington, DC**

(be sure to locate the Embassy/Consulate closest to your University prior to departure, with contact information)

1024 Wisconsin Avenue NW #101

Washington, DC

Phone: (202) 944-3600

### **IIE Bangkok – for questions while you're still in Bangkok**

EducationUSA center in Bangkok

Open: M-F 8:30-16:30.

Advisor's name: Ms Pasawee Kariwat (Penny)

Email: [pasawee@bkk.iie.org](mailto:pasawee@bkk.iie.org)

Phone: 66 2 6520653 Ext. 122

Address: 6<sup>th</sup> floor, Maneeya Center North

518/3 Ploenchit Road

Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330

Website: [www.iithai.org](http://www.iithai.org)

### **ISA (International Student Advisor)**

- You will all have one at your University; their name will be with your acceptance letter.
- They will be the main source of assistance, advice and other personal support.
- You can find them in the International Student Office
- They will help with your visas and tax questions and concerns

### **Know/join/talk to your (school's)...**

- International student clubs and organizations
- Resident advisor (R.A.)
- International Student Office and counselors
- Learning support centers (like Writing Centers)
- Roommates
- Professors
- Other International Students

### **Create your own contact list.**

Include names, phone numbers and email addresses of people you may need to contact in case of emergencies.

### **Create an additional list of who to contact when you have questions regarding:**

Scholarship information, visa information, taxes, work-study, insurance and health care – as well as people you may need to contact back in Bangkok.

## TIME MANAGEMENT AND STUDY SKILLS (handout F)

### **Time Tip's** from Dartmouth College:

- Count all your time as time to be used and make every attempt to get satisfaction out of every moment.
- Find something to enjoy in whatever you do.
- Try to be an optimist and seek out the good in your life.
- Find ways to build on your successes.
- Stop regretting your failures and start learning from your mistakes.
- Remind yourself, "There is always enough time for the important things." If it is important, you should be able to make time to do it.
- Continually look at ways of freeing up your time.
- Examine your old habits and search for ways to change or eliminate them.
- Try to use waiting time-review notes or do practice problems.
- Keep paper or a calendar with you to jot down the things you have to do or notes to yourself.
- Examine and revise your lifetime goals on a monthly basis and be sure to include progress towards those goals on a daily basis.
- Put up reminders in your home or office about your goals.
- Always keep those long-term goals in mind.
- Plan your day each morning or the night before and set priorities for yourself.
- Maintain and develop a list of specific things to be done each day, set your priorities and the get the most important ones done as soon in the day as you can. Evaluate your progress at the end of the day briefly.
- Look ahead in your month and try and anticipate what is going to happen so you can better schedule your time.
- Try rewarding yourself when you get things done as you had planned, especially the important ones.
- Do first things first.
- Have confidence in yourself and in your judgment of priorities and stick to them no matter what.
- When you catch yourself procrastinating-ask yourself, "What am I avoiding?"
- Start with the most difficult parts of projects, then either the worst is done or you may find you don't have to do all the other small tasks.

- Catch yourself when you are involved in unproductive projects and stop as soon as you can.
- Find time to concentrate on high priority items or activities.
- Concentrate on one thing at a time.
- Put your efforts in areas that provide long term benefits.
- Push yourself and be persistent, especially when you know you are doing well.
- Think on paper when possible-it makes it easier to review and revise.
- Be sure and set deadlines for yourself whenever possible.
- Delegate responsibilities whenever possible.
- Ask for advice when needed.

Adapted from A. Lakein. *How to Get Control of Your Time And Your Life*  
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TIME SCHEDULING TECHNIQUES FROM DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

**CREATING A MASTER SCHEDULE** (handout G)

Any plan to schedule time and activities must have at its center a MASTER SCHEDULE, that is, a schedule of activities that is **fixed**.

A master schedule needs to be drawn up only once a semester: unless, of course, changes occur in the basic program.

- First, fill in all the required activities, such as classes, drills, and laboratory periods.
- Second, add other regular activities, such as part-time jobs, commuting time, sports, and regular meetings.
- Third, include sleeping and eating.

With the fixed activities accounted for, the remaining blank spaces on the uncluttered chart are free for use on a weekly or day-by-day basis. This schedule, taped over your desk, or carried in your notebook, unclutters your mind, and more importantly, enables you to visualize the blank boxes as actual blocks of time into which you may fit necessary activities.

With the MASTER SCHEDULE as your source, you may create any type of schedule that fits the uniqueness of your courses, your part-time or full-time job, or your personality. What matters most is that the schedule **works** for you.

Print landscape full-page month planners and weekly planners, like these two below (from iCal):

2013	Sunday, Jun 9	Monday, Jun 10	Tuesday, Jun 11	Wednesday, Jun 12	Thursday, Jun 13	Friday, Jun 14	Saturday, Jun 15
all-day							
8 AM							
9 AM							
10 AM							
11 AM							
NOON							
1 PM							
2 PM							
3 PM							
4 PM							
5 PM							
6 PM							
7 PM							

June 2013						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Why Time Scheduling?

Students who deliberately make an effort to schedule their time are not ones who have decided to spend all their time studying and doing nothing else.

A workable time schedule can make decisions for you, so you know when you have study time and free time. This way, an hour of study in one course is not disturbed by wondering when you will study for another course, or when you'll be able to get out and have some fun. An adequate schedule includes those for you.

### How Much Time Scheduling?

Usually a **minimum** time schedule is best. In other words, plan what you know is necessary, and add to it later only if necessary. But plan as your first schedule one you know you can keep, and one that it is important to you to keep.

**First:** What courses are you taking? (*list them on a sheet of paper*)

**Second:** How many hours do you estimate you should study for each course each week to do a minimum job?

**Third:** What's the total minimum hours per week for all courses? (How many hours a week do you spend in class?)

**Fourth:** List your present time schedule for the week, including all fixed times, such as classes, laboratories, club meetings, outside work, travel, eating, and times you go out for recreation (usually leave at least Friday and Saturday evenings open for recreation).

**Fifth:** Now fill in the remaining hours each week with the number of hours you need to assign to study according to your decision in step two, either by:

- i. Setting up certain hours in which to study subjects, **or**
- ii. Setting aside certain hours that you will study, but not deciding in advance which courses will be studied in which hours.

**Sixth:** Keep your schedule where you can see it. It should be out in the open, so put it on top of your desk, or pinned on the wall.

**Remember:**

- Keeping to a schedule is not a matter of "will power," but of the development of a habit of referring to the schedule and following its outline, and this habit development may take weeks of practice.
- Don't let the extra study that you may find necessary interfere with your recreation hours take time from unscheduled hours.
- Exceptions will occur, but afterwards return to the schedule's pattern.

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## **MAKING A PERSONAL SCHEDULE** (handout H)

**DIRECTIONS:** Read all of these directions before you make up your weekly schedule. Check off each direction as you complete it.

- Record class and lab times in appropriate day/hour blocks on a time schedule sheet.
- Record meal times.
- Record all regularly scheduled personal activities such as meetings, employment and athletics.
- Record any special activities you need to do or want to do on a regular basis.
- Schedule a preview time (5-30 minutes) immediately before each class whenever possible. During the preview, review all or some of your notes in preparation for the upcoming class. If you have two or three classes in a row, preview from last to first class.
- Schedule a review time immediately after your classes (5-30 minutes) whenever possible. Use this time to edit and summarize your notes. You could also look over any assignments that were given and begin to plan when and how you will do them.
- Schedule your intensive study/ review time for each class. Try to schedule some study time each day for each class. Learning is more effectively and efficiently accomplished in shorter regular sessions than in longer irregular sessions. Also, use more of the day (i.e. morning, afternoon) for studying. Evening is often an ineffective time to study. When you schedule study time, be task-oriented rather than time-oriented. Think in terms of "blocks of time" and what specifically needs to be accomplished, not hours of study time.
- Start your study period with the courses you like least or that you're not doing well in. Try to study the same subjects at the same time each study day. Although this seems to be a mechanical way of scheduling, you will find that such a routine can help you develop a pattern for efficient and effective learning.
- Schedule a weekly review (WR) for each course. Do it at the end of the week if possible. This weekly review gives you an opportunity to spread out all of the past week's notes along with the reading assignments to see what you have been learning in the past week during class and study time for each course. You can

also look ahead to plan the next week and determine how much reading you need to do, what projects are due, and if any tests are scheduled.

- Keep open some day or evening time for daily physical activity. Remember, research indicates that regular exercise will not only give you a general sense of well-being, but can reduce stress and help you accomplish a tough class, study, and work schedule.
- Label some empty blocks of time as OPEN for academic or personal needs.
- Schedule some time during Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for you to play, relax, or do whatever you want to do. This is your reward for sticking to your schedule. In addition, you'll enjoy your free time more.

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### **Helpful websites:**

<http://dus.psu.edu/academicsuccess/studyskills.html> (study skills)

<http://www.clemson.edu/collegeskills/sec1pg1.htm> (college survival skills, including time management and study skills tips)

<http://www.princeton.edu/mcgraw/library/for-students/transition-to-college/>  
(making the transition to college)

<http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/studentlife/counselingcenter/infosheets/adjusting.html> (adjusting to college and changes to expect)

\*It is important to find your school's counseling center and resource center for sessions and information on study skills, what's expected of you and adjustment skills.

## FREEDOM, FREE TIME AND ALL THAT FLEXIBILITY (handout I)

### **Topics to consider and discuss with Mercy alumni:**

- Facebook: Beware of what you post and how much time you spend on it!
- Balancing your academic and social time
- US universities and the “party scene”
- What else can I do? (On campus) School clubs, organizations, interest groups, workshops, campus speakers, study groups, sports, cultural events, etc.
- How does work-study work? Taxes? Who do I ask?
- Self control and a more responsibility
- Greek Life: What are fraternities and sororities?
- Managing academic challenges: who to talk to?
- What else can I do? (Off campus) Go on day trips with friends, safely explore your new community, volunteer.

### **Space for more questions / thoughts / ideas:**

## SKITS: US AND THAI CULTURE : HOW THEY CAN DIFFER

(handout J)

### **No Time to Waste Skit\***

Here we find two friends who are making plans to socialize over the weekend. One is a U.S. student, the other is a foreign student. It is taking a lot of planning for them to set a date. Then, something happens when they are to meet. See if you think they have the same understanding of the function of time.

**U.S.:** Okay, \_\_\_\_\_, so let's figure out a good time to meet. I'm eager to try the new coffee place in Soho. What works for you?

**Foreign:** Well, I'm going to the movies with my roommate Friday. Otherwise, I have no plans – besides study. When do you want to meet?

**U.S.:** (s/he pulls out his palm pilot) Let's see, Friday night is no good. Saturday morning I'm planning to work out at Coles, just started pumping iron, so I have to stay on schedule for that. And then my Mom wants to meet for lunch, but Saturday afternoon looks good – oh wait, no, I have to go watch my brother's baseball game. Hold on here, hold on. (In the meantime, \_\_\_\_\_ is starting to look a bit – amused? Impatient?)

**Foreign:** Maybe we should schedule the coffee for one month from now!

**U.S.:** No, no, I'm sure we can do it this weekend. Let's see, Saturday night I have a date, Sunday morning is church, here, why don't we meet Sunday? I get out of church at 11:00 a.m., so I can meet you at 11:30 in Soho. How's that?

**Foreign:** Fine with me, see you on Sunday!

It is Sunday and \_\_\_\_\_ (U.S.) is in the coffee shop at 11:25. He looks around.

**U.S.:** Gee, it's almost 11:30. I wonder where \_\_\_\_\_ (foreign) is. I hope she gets here soon.

He waits some more, looking impatient. Finally, it is 11:30.

**U.S.:** Okay, now it's 11:30. I'm sure she's on the way, but let me call her, just in case. (He pulls out his cell phone and calls, getting her machine.) Oh – answering machine – \_\_\_\_\_, it's \_\_\_\_\_. It's 11:30. I hope you are here soon. I'm waiting. Okay, bye.

Time passes and now it's 11:35.

**U.S.:** I can't believe this. She's going to stand me up. How could \_\_\_\_\_ do that? She's my friend and she knows how busy I am. I'll give her two more minutes.

**U.S.:** Well, it's 11:40. I'm supposed to go to a study group this afternoon, plus I have a tennis class. I hope \_\_\_\_ (foreign) is okay, but I just can't wait any longer. (S/he gets up and leaves.)

A minute later \_\_\_\_ (Foreign) walks in and sits down.

**Foreign:** Wow, I can't believe I'm here first. Won't \_\_\_\_ be surprised when he gets here. I guess I'll go ahead and order a cappuccino while I wait.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Do you think this is typical behavior for a U.S. student to act towards his/her friends?
- Is punctuality important in your home country?
- What does being "on time" mean at home?
- Is the U.S. student's behavior typical?

### **Discussion Point:**

What U.S. value is being examined here?

In the U.S., time is valuable and something to be used, measured, and controlled. U.S. Americans are action oriented and like to be well organized...even in their leisure time! They value being efficient and even though \_\_\_\_ might have been a little impatient, people in the U.S. expect promptness, especially in formal or business settings.

### **Individualism Skit\***

*Do students generally share grades in your country?*

*Do you believe students in home country are competitive with each other?*

*Do you expect it to be more or less competitive in the U.S.?*

In this skit, two classmates are talking after receiving their graded exam. \_\_\_\_ is a U.S. student, \_\_\_\_ is a foreign student. It seems the American student is very interested in comparing grades, while the foreign student is less so. The foreign student, on the other hand, is interested in studying together and helping each other, which is not in the mind of the U.S. student. Let's see what happens.

**U.S.:** Hey \_\_\_\_, I'm glad we got our tests back, I can't believe it took him a week to grade them.

**Foreign:** Well, they were very complicated. It was a long and difficult test.

**U.S.:** You can say that again. My parents don't understand how much time I spend studying. They want me to come home every weekend and I tell them I have to stay at the library. But then, they didn't go to college – I'm the first in our family.



**Foreign:** I can understand why your parents would want you to come home to visit. But it's good that you are so serious about your studies.

**U.S.:** I sure am, I have an idea for a new dot com business and I plan to be a millionaire before I'm 25. But for now, study study study. Anyway, so how did you do on the test?

**Foreign:** Okay, I think. I could have done better.

**U.S.:** Well, I basically aced this test. I made a 95 out of 100! The professor said only two people scored in the 90s, I'm sure I must have been the top grade. I should do fine if the others are like this. I need to get an A in this class.

**Foreign:** We have another test next week, maybe we should study together to help each other.

**U.S.:** I don't know. I studied by myself for this test and did well. I don't think I really want to do a study group. By the way, what was your score?

**Foreign:** Oh, I don't think you want to know, really.

**U.S.:** Look, there's nothing to be ashamed of, just tell me.

**Foreign:** If you insist – I made a 98.

**U.S.:** Hey \_\_\_\_\_, let's make a study date for tonight!

**Discussion:**

- Are these two students friends?
- What do you think about the U.S. student's goals and ideas, is she modest?
- Is it common that students share information about their grades in your home country?
- How would you describe the classroom environment at home?

**Discussion Points:**

What U.S. values are touched on in this skit?

**Individualism** – The U.S. student distinguishes herself from her family, that she is pursuing a college education and they did not. U.S. Americans like the idea of someone “pulling him/herself up by his/her bootstraps”, doing better than their parents did, and as you can see, she indicates she is doing this without the support or at least, full understanding of her family. What may be seen as vain or bragging behavior in another culture can be a sign of self-confidence and self-promotion, again connected to individualism.

**Privacy** – The U.S. values privacy so much that it is embedded in the laws, for example,

there is a privacy act that protects student's records from anyone else viewing them...even their parents...without the student's permission.

**Directness** – The U.S. student clearly wanted to share her score with the foreign student. Grades (especially if they are good) are often an area where U.S. college students may share information.

**Competition** – You can see that at first, the U.S. student did not want to study with the foreign student, because she thought it would hurt her and help the foreign student, since she assumed she did better. In general, students in the U.S. may be **more competitive and less cooperative** in their approach to studies than some other countries. They may not engage in group study, unless it is required by the professors. Certain disciplines tend to be especially competitive, such as in the business area and science for undergraduates. For example, students have shared stories of not being able to borrow notes from a classmate if they missed a class.

\*Skit taken from NAFSA's Knowledge Community. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.nafsa.org/knowledge\\_community\\_network.sec/intercultural\\_activity\\_5/#act](http://www.nafsa.org/knowledge_community_network.sec/intercultural_activity_5/#act)  
(more cultural skits can be found at this website)

## US AND THAI CULTURE (handout K)

*Below is a list of cultural topics. Fold your paper in half. On the left side of the paper write how this topic relates or is relevant to Thai culture and on the right side of the paper write how you think it relates to US culture. This is just a brainstorming activity, so don't be afraid to guess!*

<i>Thai</i>	<b>Authority and Status</b> <i>Superiors and inferiors, respect</i>	<i>US American</i>
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### **Communication Styles**

*Direct versus indirect*

### **Time and being on time**

*What is on time? 15 minutes late? An hour?*

### **Expressing Emotions**

*How emotive are you?*

### **Women in society**

*Clothing, appearance, interactions with men*

## HEALTH: MENTAL / PHYSICAL / EMOTIONAL (handout L)

What is *stress*?

What is *crisis*?

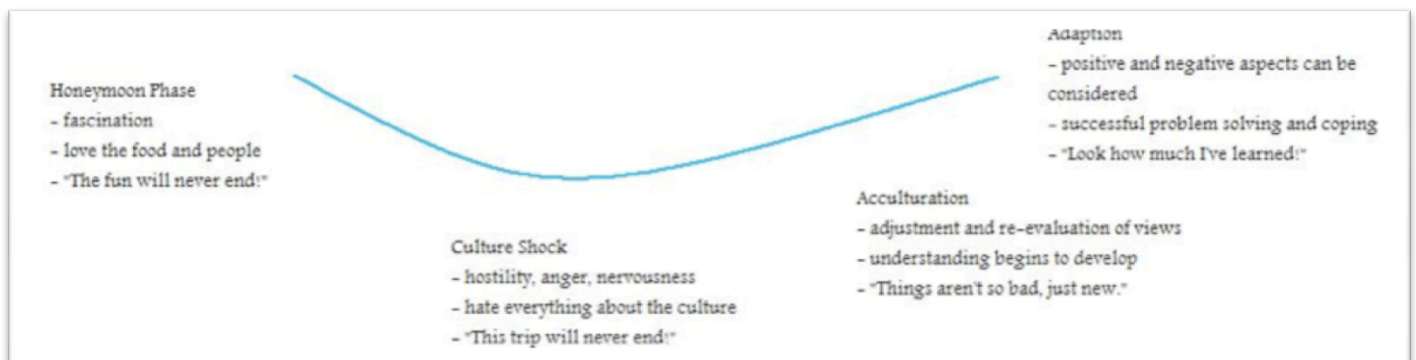
What is *culture shock*?

### **Signs and symptoms of culture shock<sup>2</sup>:**

- Sadness
- Loneliness
- Aches and pains/ health problems
- Insomnia or sleeping too much
- Depression
- Anger or irritability
- Resentment of cultural differences
- Feeling inadequate
- Feeling overwhelmed by minor tasks
- Extreme linguistic difficulties

**The culture shock “U curve” retrieved from:**

[http://www.btrtesol.com/images/units/unit1d/U-curve\\_culture\\_shock.gif](http://www.btrtesol.com/images/units/unit1d/U-curve_culture_shock.gif)



<sup>2</sup> Thebodo S.W., & Marx, L.E. (2005). Predeparture Orientation and Reentry Programming. In J. Brockington, W. Hoffa & P. Martin (3<sup>rd</sup> Eds.), *NAFSA'S Guide to Education Abroad for Advisers and Administrators* (302-303). Washington, DC: NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

## CRISIS COPING SKILLS (handout M)

*Although it is often stated that a crisis can happen to anybody, at an individual level international students tend to be more vulnerable than others.<sup>3</sup>*

One of the best ways to deal with stress is to talk to an established trust network. This could be roommates, friends and family from home, other Mercy students studying in the United States or advisors at school. Using programs like Skype, Facebook, email and international calling cards makes it easier than ever to talk to those closest to you.

Here are some coping behaviors for when you feel stressed<sup>4</sup>

- Establish simple goals
- Be patient
- Maintain confidence
- Look for help, establish a support system
- Do not be negative
- The problem isn't with the host culture, but with oneself
- Keep an open mind
- Stay involved with the culture, don't isolate yourself
- Practice a familiar sport/hobby or develop a new interest
- Maintain a sense of humor

Other stress management techniques:

- Go for a walk
- Talk to a friend
- Write in a journal
- Do something you love
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>3</sup> Hermans, J. and Pusch, M. (2004). Crisis and international students. *Culture Matters: An International Educational Perspective, Occasional Paper 16* (pp. 50). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: European Association for International Education.

<sup>4</sup>Thebodo S.W., & Marx, L.E. (2005). Predeparture Orientation and Reentry Programming. In J. Brockington, W. Hoffa & P. Martin (3<sup>rd</sup> Eds.), *NAFSA'S Guide to Education Abroad for Advisers and Administrators* (303). Washington, DC: NAFSA: Association of International Educators

## HEALTH AND SAFETY SCAVENGER HUNT (handout M)

*This will be your time to search for important information about your school and its surroundings, regarding your mental and physical health!*

1. Where is your school's health center? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the phone number of your health center? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the name and address of the nearest hospital to your school?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What 3-digit number should you call in an emergency? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What services (psychiatric, health checks, prescriptions) does your school's health center provide?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What is the legal drinking age in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your school's policy on drinking alcohol?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What centers are available at your school, if you have questions regarding gender, race, etc? (Example: Westminster College in MO has Remley Women's Center, which educates the campus on gender and race issues.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Create a realistic health and exercise plan for yourself. Try to incorporate at least 30 minutes of exercise daily, even if it is just a walk. Where is your school's fitness center/ gym? What are the hours? Are there classes available for students to take?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Create a list of favorite home recipes. What would you be able to make in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

## HEALTH AND SAFETY SCAVENGER HUNT CONTINUED...

11. What are some symptoms or signs of the flu?

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12. What should you do if you get the flu or feel sick?

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13. It's ok to say "no". At times you may feel pressured by other students to do something you may not want to do. What are some ways to "say no" to alcohol or unwanted attention? (Ex: No thanks, I have a test tomorrow.)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

14. Check out websites like: <http://www.girlshealth.gov/substance/> to learn more about ways to say no, what a healthy relationship looks like and to find out more information about nutrition, fitness, bullying and general safety.

15. Try this quiz to see how much you know about alcohol:

<http://www.girlshealth.gov/substance/quizzes/quiz.alcohol.cfm>

### **Just remember...**

- Never be embarrassed to ask questions.
- If you feel sick, always go to the health center.
- Try to maintain a regular exercise schedule.
- If you are thinking about having sex, always use a condom.
- It's ok to say NO.
- Violence and hitting is never ok.
- Never be afraid to ask for help.

## ACADEMIC NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS (handout 0)

While every school is going to have different rules, regulations and consequences surrounding plagiarism, cheating, attendance policies and punctuality, citing and references, California State Fullerton has a general list of Academic Norms to consider.

Students should also spend some time on their school's website learning more about their school's writing centers and learning support groups. Students are encouraged to form study groups and to talk to their professors and ask questions.

### Cal State Fullerton's List of Academic Expectations<sup>5</sup>

- **In class behavior:** In an academic setting, some behaviors are not appropriate, such as: eating, drinking, sleeping, talking to your neighbor, arriving late or leaving early, being on your cell phone. (Unless stated otherwise by your professor.
- **Attendance policy:** While it is important to attend all your classes, be sure to note that some professors will factor attendance when deciding on grades.
- **Know your syllabus:** You must read your syllabus, which will be given to you during your first class session by your professor. It will have the teachers goals and expectations for the class, as well as information on assignments and projects. Know what is expected of you for each class.
- **Be prepared for class and ready to participate:** Do your homework! Read your assignments and have all your class materials with you for class, like textbooks, paper and pencils/pens. Pay attention, ask questions, participate.
- **Don't be disruptive in class:** This means don't have side conversations, sleep or be on your phone in class.
- **Attend office hours:** Each professor will have certain hours during the week that they will be in their office and available to answer questions you may have.

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<sup>5</sup> retrieved at:

<http://www.fullerton.edu/deanofstudents/judicial/New%20Content/Student%20Resources/pdf/Academic%20Expectations%20%20at%20CSUF.pdf>



- **Understand the university's structure:** Learn your university's structure, there are professors, different "Head of Departments", Deans and a Provost. Know who to talk to when a situation arises, but generally start with talking to your professor.
- **Know university dead-lines:** Know when you can add classes, when you can drop classes, when tuition is due or when financial aid forms must be submitted.
- **Know policies and procedures of the university concerning dishonesty and misconduct:** Understand what plagiarism is and how it is defined on your campus. Do not let other students copy your work and do not copy other student's work. When using quotes (or words that are not your own) you must give credit to the author. If you have any questions regarding what constitutes academic dishonesty ask your advisor or professor.
- **Understand consequences of academic dishonesty:** Punishments can range from an "F" on a paper, to an "F" in the class, to suspension or expulsion from school.
- **Seek academic and career advice:** Meet with your advisor to discuss classes. Review the course catalogue and talk to your advisor about core requirements (classes everyone must take), electives and classes for your major and minor.
- **Keep accurate records:** Have a folder or an organized space to keep all your academic paperwork, ranging from financial aid, work-study to visas.
- **Utilize the Writing Center:** Find your school's writing center or student services center and go to them for help with your writing and schoolwork. Most schools have seminars and sessions on good study skills and time management techniques as well.

## ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS: ALUMNI & MERCY STAFF (handout P)

- Be brave! It isn't hard, if you know what to do!
- DO THINGS! Get out of the library and do something!
- Study hard and learn as much as you can.
- Do an internship if you can.
- Prepare for your best and the worst, everyone has different limits.
- Be ready to explore the world!
- Organize and plan ahead
- Be confident and be yourself!
- Be proud to be Thai!
- CC your travel plans and all important emails to P'Ratana, Khun Usanee and who even will be replacing P'Dtai.
- Choose your school and scholarships carefully, be sure you know what costs are your responsibility.
- Compare and assess all your options before choosing.
- Enjoy yourself.
- Use your advisors and be sure to ask them your questions.
- Be aware of how Thai girls can be perceived.
- Take care of yourself
- Don't buy books from the bookstore, buy them online – it's cheaper!
- Ask questions and engage in the classroom
- Be aware of your finances and learn how to use a checkbook
- Practice your English
- Use the writing center at your school to help you with papers
- Be aware of what you post on your Facebook pages
- Know who your support system is and use them!
- Be prepared for the weather of your new city
- Be aware of the exchange rate and US currency
- Have realistic expectations

**Appendix F – Assessment and Evaluation Questionnaire**

Rate each question on a scale of 1 -5. (1 = not at all, 5 = extremely/yes)

Circle one.

- How confident did you feel about going to the United States *before* the orientation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

- How confident did you feel about going to the United States *after* the orientation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

- Were your questions about school answered in the orientation?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

- Do you think the orientation helped prepare you for your first semester at school?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

- Would you recommend Mercy students go through this orientation before they go to school in the United States?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

- How helpful do you think the orientation was?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Short answer questions:

- What questions came up once you were at school that were not addressed in the orientation?
- Are there any topics you wish you had learned more about in the orientation?
- Are there any topics you think could have been left out?
- What was the best advice you got from the orientation?

### **Goals and objectives of the orientation:**

Please rate on a scale of 1 -5 if the goals were met. (1 = not met at all, 5 = met well)

Please write the corresponding number to the left of the bullet point.

### **Goals of the orientation:**

The orientation will:

- Reduce the likeliness of crisis and culture shock
- Meet the student's developmental needs
- Increase their confidence in their readiness to depart for the US
- Ease the transition and adaptation to US culture
- Have students logistically prepared for their departure
- Provide the resources for students to find the answers to their school specific questions
- Have students leaving for the US aware of the resources available to them
- Lessen the number of questions and concerns Mercy students had in the past

### **Objectives of the orientation:**

- All students questions will be written at the beginning of the orientation and addressed by the end of the orientation
- Mercy alumni of US universities will come to at least one session to speak with students
- Students will receive an orientation packet regarding relevant logistics, a checklist of paperwork, school resources, culture shock symptoms and the curve/worm

### **Goals of participants:**

- Students will be prepared mentally and logistically for their move to a US university.
- Youth will feel they are ready to live at a US university and
- Youth will have less questions and concerns about their upcoming departure than they did before the orientation.

**Objectives of participants:**

- Youth will be able to articulate major similarities and differences of US and Thai culture
- Youth will have all paperwork organized and prepared for their departure by the last session
- Youth will better understand the rules and norms surrounding academic expectations in a US university
- Youth will be aware of major world/US current events and be able to discuss them with peers
- Youth will be able to identify culture shock and have the resources to go to/use if they are experiencing any signs
- Youth will be knowledgeable of resources available to them on campus to cope with academic and health concerns
- Youth will have answers to the list of questions they brainstormed at the beginning of the orientation

## **Staff Evaluation Form:**

### **Short answer questions:**

What questions did students have once they arrived in the United States, that were not addressed by the Orientation?

From an outside perspective, did it appear students enjoyed the orientation?

What were the strengths of the orientation?

What were the weaknesses of the orientation?

What would you change about the orientation?

### **Goals and objectives of the orientation:**

Please rate on a scale of 1 -5 if the goals were met. (1 = not met at all, 5 = met well)

Please write the corresponding number to the left of the bullet point.

The orientation will:

- Reduce the likeliness of crisis and culture shock
- Meet the student's developmental needs
- Increase their confidence in their readiness to depart for the US
- Ease the transition and adaptation to US culture
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