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From Theory to Curriculum: A Best Practices Model for a New International Student Cultural Acclimation Course

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FROM THEORY TO CURRICULUM: A BEST PRACTICES MODEL FOR A NEW
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CULTURAL ACCLIMATION COURSE

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A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a Master of Arts in
International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

August 14, 2018

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FROM THEORY TO CURRICULUM: A BEST PRACTICES MODEL

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Date: August 14, 2018

FROM THEORY TO CURRICULUM: A BEST PRACTICES MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This course-linked capstone (CLC) is inspired by the current international student cultural acclimation course at State University of New York (SUNY) at Oneonta. Surprisingly, there are few cultural acclimation courses offered in the United States and there is lack of academic research evaluating the effectiveness of such courses. This course model will incorporate the successful aspects of the few current cultural acclimation courses offered, including the Oneonta course, and integrate learning, cultural adjustment, and student development theories into the curriculum to provide a basis for the content and structure of the course. Qualitative research through surveys and interviews with international students and international education professionals also inform the course content.

This course provides a safe space for international students to inquire, learn, and grow throughout their first semester at a U.S. university and after attending the course, students will be able to navigate more comfortably and successfully through life in the U.S. and in their campus community. The intention of this research is to provide a resource for international education professionals to implement similar programs in higher education institutions, as well as to provide international students with the tools and ongoing structured support to form meaningful relationships, to reflect upon and discuss their own experience of cultural adjustment, and to recognize and explore the characteristics, norms, and values of U.S. culture.

From Theory to Curriculum: A Best Practices Model for a New International Student Cultural
Acclimation Course

Introduction

U.S. higher education institutions collectively host approximately one million international students per year (IIE, 2017b). These international students are a large part of internationalization efforts on many campuses, which is broadly defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Vavrus and Pekol, 2015). However, besides an initial orientation, students do not always receive the full support they need when adjusting to the new culture. Cultural adjustment or “culture shock,” as many international educators refer to it, can last anywhere from a few months to multiple years for students studying abroad. Some suggest that cultural adjustment is a process that continues for the entirety of one’s stay in any new environment or culture (Tange, 2005). This capstone focuses on undergraduate international degree-seeking and exchange students in the United States, of which there are currently over 400,000 (IIE, 2017a). To further support international student success during their study abroad experience, higher education institutions need to offer more meaningful resources to help them thrive in their new environment. One way to accomplish this is through a “new international student cultural acclimation course.” Though almost every university provides an initial international student orientation, a course goes beyond what can be covered in a few days or weeks and allows students the space and time to dive deeper into cultural learning and understanding.

I was introduced to the idea of an international student acclimation course focusing on U.S. culture through my practicum as the Graduate Assistant in the Office of International

Education (OIE) at SUNY Oneonta, in Oneonta, New York. They employed a previous SIT intern before I began working in the office, whose capstone focused on overall international student perception of support at SUNY Oneonta (Busche, 2017). She assisted the International Student Advisor in teaching the international student acclimation course and I continued to provide academic support in the class during my practicum. I became passionate about the idea of cultural acclimation courses and their potential benefits after I experienced many in-depth conversations between students about cultural differences and saw the confusion students encountered in their everyday lives in the United States. I also observed the uncertainty students experienced within the classroom and the reluctance they had in the beginning to open up and have meaningful discussions, proving the need to facilitate an atmosphere of trust, sincerity, and fun throughout the course.

I have collected the ideas and practices from the current international student acclimation course for which I provide support, other international education professionals whom I have spoken to, current international student input, along with academic research on student development, experiential education, and cultural adjustment or acculturation to ground this course proposal in a sound theoretical foundation. The two goals of this capstone are to first, gather student feedback and outside research to build upon the existing international student acclimation course at SUNY Oneonta, and second, to fill a gap in research regarding a credit-bearing international student acclimation course and provide a model for international educators interested in creating a course focusing on cultural and academic adjustment, as well as U.S. and local culture, to help students feel supported in their host university and provide them with opportunities to interact with local students and the community. There is still a large disconnect between international students, U.S. students, and campus communities. An acclimation course

would provide enough time to guide new international students in forming relationships with professors and mentors, learning more about U.S. culture and their own culture in the process, getting involved with university events, and forming friendships with other students, both domestic and international.

Background and Rationale

There are some U.S. universities which offer an international student acclimation course, though having credit-bearing courses on cultural acclimation is not the norm. Many of the current classes are actually Freshman Experience courses with an international student section, which are tailored to some international student needs, but exclude time for reflection and cross-cultural exchange. These additional activities and increased support benefit international students and higher education institutions, as students are then able to analyze and compare the information they receive from staff and faculty with their experiences at the host campus and in the host community, to more deeply understand the culture in which they are living and gain valuable insight into their own culture and personal growth. It benefits higher education institutions by creating a more supportive and welcoming environment for their international students, which increases the comfort level of students as well as their involvement in the university and local community. Through my graduate assistantship at SUNY Oneonta, I helped tailor its international student acclimation course to better meet its students' needs. Those needs include learning U.S. university culture, learning how to form friendships and recognize and better understand cultural norms, actually going out and becoming more involved in the campus community, learning more about the local area, and learning about resources available to students on and off campus.

The SUNY Oneonta international student acclimation course is currently a three-credit course evolved from an initial one-credit course, which focuses on teaching students about topics such as U.S. university culture, culture shock, local culture, U.S. politics and government, geography, health and wellness, and environmental issues, to name a few. The course offers opportunities to have conversations with guest speakers (e.g. students, professors, and administrators) and includes cultural excursions around the area, such as Albany, Boston, and Washington, D.C., to provide the opportunity to experience different places and cultures in the Northeast U.S. region. Students reflect upon their experiences in the U.S. through short papers, in-class activities, and collaborative dialogue through pair and group conversations.

While SUNY Oneonta's acclimation course covers important topics for international students, it is still growing and changing, as we take into consideration the feedback from students of the past semesters. Since the Fall 2017 semester, the course expanded from two to three credits and began to include additional assessment of students in the form of group projects and short essays and reflection papers. In previous evaluations, student feedback indicated that they would like the class to be more interactive and activity-based. Thus, I have incorporated the experiential education model into this "best practices" program design, and the International Student Advisor and I have been adapting the course lessons and activities to address these needs, including a variety of learning opportunities and activities such as icebreakers and games to open up discussion about various topics and get students to move around and have meaningful conversations, local field trips, events on-campus, a variety of guest speakers in a relaxed, informal setting, and inviting U.S. students into the classroom as well. Because there is currently a dearth of acclimation courses being taught in the U.S., and minimal academic literature on the subject, promoting such a course by including a theoretical framework upon which to base it is

beneficial to new international students and higher education institutions looking to further support international students. It is also easier to promote the course and its potential benefits to university administration if one includes examples of successful courses elsewhere in the U.S., including student feedback from current and previous semesters. A best practices model for an international student cultural and academic acclimation course would then be useful to other international educators in creating structured support and an opportunity to form a connection with their international students early on.

While cultural and academic acclimation courses do exist in higher education institutions around the U.S., it surprised me that they weren't more common. Another gap I found is the lack of longer-term studies conducted on the outcomes of these courses, the effects on participants, and the retention of students. This aspect is not evaluated in this particular course model; however, data in this area is something that could benefit the creation of more courses in the future. International educators need to more frequently share their experiences and observations of benefits and challenges that come with offering such courses to ensure that they continue to be developed and offered to international students during the beginning of their time at any U.S. university. Through my program proposal of an acclimation course encompassing aspects of a variety of orientation and cultural acclimation courses, I have incorporated a solid theoretical foundation, including J.J. Arnett's Emerging Adulthood Theory (2007) and Ward, Furnham, and Bochner's Acculturation Model, including the culture learning and stress and coping framework (2005). I also applied Kolb's experiential learning-based, student-focused model for the curriculum, to ensure it is engaging for students of different backgrounds and learning styles (2014). I found that some of the courses that do exist have the purpose of helping international students adjust, but do not take into full consideration the amount of support and cultural

sensitivity needed, as well as a clear focus on the personal and cultural identities of undergraduate international students. The courses tend to focus on academic adjustment and adjustment to campus life, which is important; however, cultural and emotional adjustment are equally significant and should be explored. Such a course should provide this safe space for students to ask the questions they don't feel comfortable asking otherwise and the students should have time to reflect upon their experiences abroad. For this course model, I also conducted a needs assessment through past student feedback and evaluations of SUNY Oneonta's acclimation course, and an evaluation strategy, which includes formative assessment through reflection papers and summary papers throughout the course, and summative assessment through a final personal reflection paper, end-of-semester student course evaluation interviews, and an anonymous survey of the current course offered to SUNY Oneonta international students. With this course model, I hope to promote the implementation of similar courses in other higher education institutions and to apply my findings to my work with international students in the future.

SUNY Oneonta Course Background

To understand the SUNY Oneonta course – the current running course from which I am basing this course proposal – it is useful to examine the creation of the course within its institution. SUNY Oneonta's mission is to unite "...excellence in teaching, scholarship, civic engagement, and stewardship to create a student-centered learning community" (Strategic Plan 2015). Its strategic plan includes international recruitment as an area of their strategic enrollment plan, which will ideally increase internationalization and global education on its campus. In the plan, SUNY Oneonta promises to "ensure a quality and affordable education emphasizing ethical, critical, and creative thinking for our graduates to succeed in a diverse and changing

world” (2015). An international acclimation course fits well with these goals. The university’s Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) also states that its core values are: “...excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship, student engagement, a liberal arts foundation, an inclusive community, *global connectedness*; and stewardship” (2017). SUNY Oneonta’s priorities are to raise overall enrollment, increase the percentage of minority students, improve retention of first-time, full-time students, increase graduation rates at four and six years, ensure students’ financial literacy; and advance scholarship, discovery and innovation.

Under the label of diversity, SUNY Oneonta’s PIP states that in 2014, “the college began working with the Racial Equity Institute (REI) to create meaningful dialogues designed to continue the development of an inclusive and equitable campus and community and support ongoing affinity groups” (2017). Goals of the 2017 REI programming included: preliminary development of multicultural learning outcomes for graduation requirements, improvement in the campus and community climate related to race/ethnicity, and changes in search and screen hiring processes resulting in increased recruitment and retention of equity-minded faculty and staff. The multicultural learning outcomes for graduation requirements are included in the general education course requirements categories of foreign language and world civilizations. However, students must only choose 7 out of 10 categories, and could therefore skip these two globally focused categories. There is a need for a program that helps to integrate the institution’s international students with its domestic students, as it is beneficial for both student groups and for the diversity and internationalization of the university.

The cultural acclimation course offered to new international students at SUNY Oneonta is relatively new. It was proposed by a faculty member of the Education Department together with the International Student Advisor. With the support of the OIE Director, it began in Spring

2015 as a one-credit course housed under the Interdisciplinary Studies Program (INTD 194) as an “International Student Acclimation Seminar.” The original program description under the initial program proposal states that it is:

A one-credit mini seminar-style course specifically designed to assist and support new international students with their acclimation to SUNY Oneonta. Discussion topics will include overviews of Oneonta, US, and higher education history. Additionally, the course will explore issues of acculturation, US traditions, institutional expectations, and transitional challenges. The class will be open to International students only. (Larson, Bao, & Lehman, 2015)

The establishment of a support group, introduction to campus resources, and focus on retention of students were and continue to be additional objectives of this acclimation course.

From this beginning, the course grew into a two-credit seminar course, and eventually in Fall 2017 when I began my practicum, into a three-credit course housed under the Geography Department. The acclimation course’s current objectives stated on the syllabus are to:

...provide a structured exploration of American Life, U.S. higher education and American cultural practices, as well as opportunities to visit both local and national sites. This course will provide a cultural orientation to the Oneonta area, the region, and the United States. Students successfully completing the course will be able to function more effectively and comfortably in both the classroom and within the community. (LaRosa, 2017)

The Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 evaluation interview and survey results show that the course is meeting most of the above objectives and students finish the course with a better understanding of U.S culture and life as well as more confidence in a U.S. classroom setting. However, there

has been feedback from past students asserting that they would like the course to be more dynamic and experiential (rather than lecture-based and just listening to speakers). This is the reason I am researching and introducing various activities related to each of class topics, incorporating Kolb's experiential education model. The guest speaker portion of the class should be more engaging, with students influencing the session with their own questions which can be submitted ahead of time (according to the speaker's preference) and having more of a dialogue with the speaker than listening to a lecture. This format provides a more relaxed atmosphere for students and speakers to interact. Students in the Oneonta class have also stated that depending on what country the majority of students come from, there was a tendency to speak more about the majority culture and it was compared with the U.S. more often than the countries and cultures of the smaller number of students. Creating the right balance and an inclusive environment for an acclimation course is something that can be improved upon as well. The course has evolved greatly over the years and there continues to be room for development.

Theoretical Foundations

Creating the right balance of equal participation and depth of learning is difficult to achieve, especially if you do not have sufficient time to plan a course such as this one. Often, when International Education professionals are working with international students, the fast pace of the work, including advising students and keeping up with the day to day processes and meetings, can take precedence over the theories and goals upon which their programming is supposed to be based. Programming may be created out of realized student need but it does not fully take into consideration the theory and mission behind the efforts. This program proposal model looks into the theoretical foundations behind the need for an international student cultural acclimation course, as well as the theory behind the proposed structure of the course.

Experiential Learning

As I worked on SUNY Oneonta's acclimation course and researched case studies of similar courses, I realized the considerable and conscious effort it takes to make each class engaging to students from very different cultures and in different stages of their academic life, all in one classroom. Each class provides valuable content, but to be able to connect students with the content at a deeper level is something that is difficult to achieve. In speaking with staff who have been involved with various acclimation courses, as well as with SUNY Oneonta's own international students, one suggestion that a majority of students provided in their feedback was to make the course more interactive, with less of a lecture-based model. Another common suggestion was to incorporate more opportunities to speak with and interact with domestic students.

Using David Kolb's experiential education model creates a more dynamic classroom environment for international students. Experiential learning in this way is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience," which is exactly what an international student acclimation course is meant to facilitate (Kolb, 1983). Kolb focused on exploring the processes associated with making sense of concrete experiences while being aware of different styles of learning (Smith, 2010). Using the four elements of concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts, and testing in new situations, students will be able to use their past experiences as well as their present experiences in their new environment to make sense of the topics discussed in the course and to process what they've learned. Studying and living in a new culture can be stressful and confusing, which is why an acclimation course is the ideal environment to discuss these experiences students are

having and break them down, learn from them, and apply what they've learned in their host community.

International students are actually living the concrete experience phase, as they study abroad in a different culture than they are used to. In order to reflect on those experiences, an acclimation course is useful, providing strongly-needed guidance from a course instructor through intercultural activities and dialogue. These can include volunteer activities on-campus and off-campus, having conversations with experienced professionals in various fields (e.g. political science, women's studies, environmental studies...etc.) as speakers in the classroom, and activities designed to get students thinking in different ways about how they (and others) view and experience their own culture as well as their host culture. The observation and reflection and formation of abstract concepts takes place more in the classroom, through activities, discussions as a group and with partners, and through writing short essays reflecting upon and analyzing their experiences. Active experimentation occurs through extra-curricular events and activities connected to the course, such as field trips, volunteer opportunities, international student-led events, and by attending and engaging in activities and events in the campus community.

Self-Authorship & Emerging Adulthood

Another factor which creators and/or instructors of an acclimation course should be aware of is that the international student participants are undergraduate students who are still learning about themselves and the world around them. They are experiencing perhaps newfound independence as well as experiencing culture shock at varying levels. Some are coming to the U.S. for the first time and are also new to university culture. Others are transfer students but are getting to know a different part of the U.S. and a different campus. The combined factors of

being an international student while simultaneously developing into adulthood create unique needs in a multi-cultural classroom. There is a need to create a safe, informal environment for international students to ask questions and to engage with each other and others in the university community, so they may create meaning out of their experiences. This need to exercise one's own distinct agency while still possessing the need for belonging, connection, inclusion, relationship, and intimacy is a juxtaposition that Sharon Parks calls "two great yearnings" (Magolda, 2009). Self-Authorship is the idea of coming to terms with those yearnings. Magolda identifies three elements of self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, or an individual taking responsibility for choosing how to interpret reality, how to feel about it, and how to react to their interpretation, building an internal foundation, or no longer being intimidated by differences and being able to maintain their cultural values in different contexts, and securing internal commitments and values, which become second nature, leading to a sense of security and trust in themselves (2009).

As undergraduate college students, the potential course participants are in the process of becoming adults, a period of life Jeffrey Arnett calls "emerging adulthood." This period of development is defined by five features: it is the "age of identity explorations," the "age of instability," the "self-focused age," the age of "feeling in-between," and the "age of possibilities" (2007). He also speaks of the stress and frustration many emerging adults feel as they attempt to enter into the labor market. This is partly due to high expectations for a workplace to both pay well and be enjoyable and satisfying. It is also due to the fact that emerging adults today generally have a good deal of financial support from their parents, which delays the need to be self-sufficient until their late 20s or even into their early 30s. This course will help students build the tools they need to navigate life abroad more independently than they thought they could, as

well as give them practical experience in intercultural exchange which they will be able to implement in their everyday lives, education, and future careers.

Viewing the theory of emerging adulthood through an international lens, it is important to note that emerging adulthood varies depending on a student's background and culture. Arnett states that age of marriage is a factor that shortens or lengthens the stage of emerging adulthood, as well as other factors, usually focusing on when the typical age to start a family begins (2007). Nevertheless, even if a student is not experiencing "emerging adulthood" as it traditionally looks like in the U.S., an international acclimation course will provide a structured environment for international students to learn how they can interact with U.S. students and community members and vice-versa, as this course should encourage and include opportunities for interaction with domestic students. As international students experience changes within themselves and their views of the world, they will have the opportunity to engage and exchange ideas with U.S. students as well through the Office of International Education Peer Mentor program. The Peer Mentor team is made up of both domestic and international students, sophomores and older, who act as peer support during orientation, organize events for international students, and meet regularly with their mentees. Through these experiences, international students will be able to see the similarities and differences in their own developmental process as students and learn what U.S. students experience as well.

The international students' learning needs include support and guidance in a new place, the autonomy to explore a new culture and explore their own identities as well, and applicable academic and potential hands-on experience which they'll be able to use in their future careers. Thinking as a program designer, the course should be supplemented by guidance from mentors who understand the student experience (i.e. the OIE Peer Mentor Program), the space to gain

experience and independence through international student and university events, and course material and activities which allow students to connect and compare their lives and society in the U.S. to their life in their home country in order to expand their view of the world and themselves.

Only by examining the evolution of meaning making in international students can we truly understand what students need on their road to self-authorship. A well-structured international student acclimation course should be one which includes activities focused on self-reflection as well as exchanging ideas with peers. This reflection should be built in at various intervals, not just at the end of the course, and can involve different methods of learning, through journaling or blogging, dialogue groups, letters to self, and in academic work as well. A study abroad experience creates the right environment for human development; however, without support and guided reflection, it's very possible that some students might miss the meaning behind events or situations and might not be able to unpack and eventually understand their many unfamiliar, intercultural experiences.

Culture Learning Framework

Stress and confusion abroad caused by these unfamiliar experiences is often described as “culture shock.” Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, and Todman cite Ward, Furnham, and Bochner’s acculturation model, which reframes culture shock into psychological and sociocultural adaptation, under the “stress and coping framework” and the “culture learning” framework (2008). Furnham and Bochner state that instead of using the term “culture shock” and “symptoms,” which have clinical or medical connotations, culture learning emphasizes that the feelings sojourners feel when experiencing a new culture can be remedied by imparting appropriate knowledge and skills and by providing opportunities for students to interact with members of the host culture in a supportive environment (2008). International students inevitably

will experience some uncertainty and discomfort with cultural differences when studying at a U.S. university, especially younger undergraduate students who are still exploring their own identities. It is important that these institutions provide quality support to those students, which means guiding them through the process of cultural adjustment, teaching them about U.S. academic and social culture, providing them with the tools to succeed socially and academically, and providing a space for cross-cultural learning and personal growth.

Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

Similarly, Berry's acculturation model follows the psychological experience of an individual living in a foreign environment, as well as an individual's sociocultural experience. He defined acculturation as "the process of cultural and psychological change that involves learning to live in new social and cultural contexts after one has become socialized into an earlier one," an "earlier one" referring to their home/familiar culture and environment (Jackson, Ray, and Bybell, 2013). Berry postulated that there are four possible states an international student or migrant might experience in a new sociocultural environment: marginalization, separation, assimilation, and integration. The ideal state in this model is integration, where an individual manages to simultaneously maintain their original sense of cultural identity while also creating and maintaining relationships with the host community (Hawkes, 2014). Some scholars have criticized this model, stating that it is too simplistic and suggesting that it places the responsibility on the international student, when cultural integration requires support and resources from the host community as well. However, it serves as a base for the various ways an individual can react to and experience living in an unfamiliar culture.

Acculturative stress is part of the acculturation process that Berry wrote about. It is the psychological impact of adapting to a new culture (Jackson, Ray, and Bybell, 2013). Three main

factors contributing to acculturative stress in the U.S. include region of origin, fluency in English, and social support. Jackson, Ray, and Bybell cite various research that has shown the correlation between acculturative stress and both psychological and sociocultural adjustment, and therefore the success of international students in the U.S. These studies showed that higher levels of acculturative stress led to greater psychological distress. In another, it led to depressive symptoms and indicated that acculturative stress may have ongoing, long-term effects (2013). It is clear from these many studies that international students require structured support from their host communities, focused on language in a larger sense, including English learning, intercultural learning and understanding, and social norms and values of the host culture and the students' peers.

International Student Course Case Studies

To explore different ways of approaching a cultural acclimation course for students, I researched other examples of similar courses in higher education institutions. One way to approach such a course is to frame it as an on-going student orientation. Texas Tech University offers a one-semester, one-credit “freshman seminar” course for all freshman students, not just international students. This seminar introduces students to “philosophy, history, and applications of higher education and critical thinking” (Texas Tech, 2018). However, though some U.S. universities offer freshman seminar courses, it is not equivalent to a course tailored specifically for international students, who experience deeper cultural differences and more language and academic challenges than domestic freshman students. While a freshman seminar could in theory include an intercultural communication component focusing on educating both international and domestic students on cultural differences and how to navigate them, most do not. A focus on cultural differences and intercultural communication, culture shock, and acclimating to the

specific region of the U.S. are all topics that international students will experience at a higher level than a domestic student studying in a different region of the U.S. Thus, a course to explore these issues would be particularly beneficial for international students.

The Center for Global Education highlights higher education institutions with semester-long orientation courses specifically for international students, such as the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University in Minnesota. This 12-week, one-credit course focuses on the cultural adjustment cycle, academic life, and social life at a U.S. university. Recommended for all new and transfer international students, it covers topics such as immigration laws, plagiarism, on-campus academic and health services, sexual violence and harassment issues, racism, and xenophobia (Innovative International Student Support, 2014). Northern Arizona University has a similar course called, "International Student Success," an eight-week, one-credit course, covering academic resources and integrity, U.S. law and immigration, healthy relationships, and U.S. culture. It breaks students into smaller groups to speak about specific topics and hosts guest speakers from relevant departments.

The University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) also has a freshman seminar-style course, "University Studies 10: Critical Strategies to Achieve Undergraduate Excellence" and has specific sections of this course for domestic freshmen, transfer students, life sciences students, and international students. Each course is designed with the specific student population in mind and they are taught by professional academic counselors in the College of Letters and Science. This course seems to focus more on the university, its policies, culture, and academics, but it also includes the academic, social, and emotional aspects of transitioning to the university (University Studies, 2018). Similarly, Santa Barbara City College offers PD (Personal Development) 101B: Orientation to College for International Students, which is a one-credit

course that teaches about the U.S. higher education system, student support services, and cultural patterns and adjustment issues. It offers other Personal Development courses for domestic students, as well as a specific course for ESL students.

While I was researching other acclimation courses in the U.S., I also found that an SIT Graduate Institute alumnus had researched the same topic of a course for new international students. In an effort to address the lack of literature on international student cultural acclimation courses, they wrote a program proposal of such a course as their capstone paper, titled, “American Ways: A Course in Contemporary U.S. Culture for International Students (Fitch, 2012). Their course proposal breaks down the curriculum into four components: basic knowledge and skills, American doxa, or cultural aspects of which individuals who were born and raised in the U.S. have a subconscious understanding (i.e. sense of individuality and self-improvement), American diversity, and social programming. The course curriculum incorporates Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory, included guest speakers, and students were required to write journal entries for each topic covered in class, relating it to their experiences on their host campus and in their host community.

I also spoke to two IE professionals who were involved in creating acclimation courses more similar to SUNY Oneonta’s. At University of Connecticut (UConn), an SIT Alumni created a one-credit acclimation course for exchange students only which was held once a week. It included excursions, hosted speakers, and covered topics such as, culture shock, U.S. academic culture, and university Greek life. The instructor for this course also created a blog in which students would post about the topics they learned about in each class. That blog was also featured on UConn’s International Student Services page, allowing prospective students to read about students’ experiences there, and U.S. students to gain insight into international students’

perspectives. However, this course only lasted one semester, as she did not have time to teach it another semester and couldn't find anyone else willing to do so.

Another SIT alumni assisted in creating an acclimation course at SUNY Plattsburgh, which was offered from 2005 to 2008. This was a one-credit course to introduce international students to the university culture at SUNY Plattsburgh, immigration rules and regulations for F-1 students, and U.S. and local culture. It was modeled as a "freshman experience" course but was tailored to international students' needs. This course ended after International Student and Scholar Services staff conducted assessments and concluded that the course's intended outcomes were not being met. They also did not see enough student interest to continue the course after evaluations. The administrators of the ISSS office at the time also did not see any correlation between the course and international student retention. These examples show that the course design of international student acclimation courses depends on the particular institution and its international student body. A template of a course such as the one I am proposing is useful; however, the course is dependent on student needs, which can vary depending on what type of student they are (i.e. exchange, degree-seeking, transfer), their home country, and their academic programs.

Needs Assessment

To ensure that the course at SUNY Oneonta meets student needs, I conducted a needs assessment through previous international student course evaluation data at SUNY Oneonta, informal conversations with students, and a ten-question online survey created specifically regarding the acclimation course. There is also a large amount of literature regarding the experience of international students at higher education institutions; however, the literature does not study cultural acclimation courses specifically. Research on international student challenges

shows several common themes concerning the cultural and academic adjustment of international undergraduate students, including language and cultural barriers, academic and financial difficulties, interpersonal problems, racial discrimination, loss of social support, alienation, and homesickness (Sherry, Thomas, and Chui, 2009).

The first theme is that of social support. International students have noticed that U.S. students seem to have their own friend groups already and international students struggle to initiate conversation with them, as they are unsure of social norms of U.S. college students specifically. How to make friends and meet people is something that international students have cited as one of their top concerns. International students studying abroad are usually far away from the friends and family of which their usual support system consists. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui emphasize that a welcoming university and community environment is one of the key factors in their potential success or failure in their new educational context (2009). If higher education institutes focus only on the academic needs of international students, students lack the support in their personal and social lives that they require for their mental well-being, which then begins to affect their academic success as well.

Though social support is vital for international students, academics and English language abilities are still important concerns for international students. English proficiency affects both students' ability to engage socially and their success in a U.S. classroom. Students from European countries have also stated that they experienced a lot more reading and paper-writing at SUNY Oneonta than their home country university. Many students have cited that the classroom structure is very different as well, with students encouraged to ask questions and have a dialogue with each other and the professor. This clashes with what some student are used to in their home countries and causes difficulties for students in the U.S. classroom. Especially in

Asian countries, classrooms are traditionally more lecture-based, with students remaining silent and listening to a professor lecture. Many students find it difficult to stray from this model and to actively participate in classes in an informal, discussion-based manner. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui suggest that educators should be aware that pedagogical strategies which emphasize conversation/dialogue and classroom participation may disadvantage international students whose experiences in school have been more passive and less conversation-based and should provide a mix of both in an acclimation course (2009). Instead of every class concentrating on dialogue and conversation, writing and reading activities based on the relevant topics should also be incorporated, which is important to students with different learning styles.

Another factor contributing to difficulties in cultural adjustment (or acculturative stress as described earlier) is region of origin. However, region will not be completely addressed in this paper as interviews and surveys were anonymous, making it difficult to pinpoint which adjustment issues correlate to which nationalities. Jackson, Ray, and Bybell cite Yeh and Inose, stating that their research found that students from Europe had significantly less acculturative stress than those from non-European nations, but they also emphasized that greater English fluency and more social support contributed to this data as well (2013). From my specific previous experience in an acclimation course and working with international students, generally western European students do seem to have less acculturative stress than students from other areas of the world as their cultures have some similarities with U.S. culture, especially socially and academically. However, this also depends on students' personalities, their support system, and many other factors, and over-generalizing usually leads to assumptions that could be completely false, causing international educators to overlook a student who they might assume to be adjusting well.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the impact of larger external or environmental issues, such as ignorance and racism in the host community (or campus). Depending on nationalities or backgrounds, and untrue preconceived notions of different cultures held in the U.S., some students may experience discrimination more than others. One study by Lee and Rice illustrates this statement; white students from Europe, Canada and New Zealand did not report racism, while students from Asia, India, the Middle East and Latin America emphasized racism as an important component of their experiences (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009). Besides overt racism, misunderstandings can happen when faculty and students are not used to interacting with people of different cultures. These issues can be addressed sensitively in the classroom, as well as emphasizing that as much as students need to work to adjust or adapt to a new culture or environment, responsibility should also be placed on the higher education institutions to create a welcoming environment by educating and including domestic students as well as international students.

Student Feedback from SUNY Oneonta Acclimation Course

Direct student feedback is also incorporated into the needs assessment. From the results of the international student acclimation course online survey, one of the most common concerns that arose were that they wanted more lessons and discussions centered around current issues. One response to the survey question, “What topics were NOT discussed that you wished were covered in class?” was,

Probably drugs or sexual assaults, because I feel that Americans are already educated in high school or middle school and have knowledge about this kind of topics, compared to international students from more conservative countries. In college, students sometimes

face a situation where they have to deal with it, so it'd be nice to have a brief idea of what we should know and what we could do/should not do, in a realistic situation.

The other concern was that students wanted more guidance on U.S. student culture and how to make friends with U.S. students. Some students said that because of international student orientation and the international student acclimation course, they became really good friends with the other international students, and that international students tended to stay in their own group, perhaps making it less likely for U.S. students to approach them. One student stated,

...it really depends on each student too, but I know that overall, international students on this campus tend to spend most of the time with other international students regardless of where they are from. I believe that I have more American friends than other international students, but still I took some time for me to find chances and network.

The results from the most recent official acclimation course evaluation, conducted by the undergraduate Teaching Assistant, were positive overall. However, there were a few aspects of the course that would benefit from adjustment. Students stated that the course materials from NAFSA were too dense, though useful. Students also stated that they would like more time to talk about social etiquette in the U.S.

...such as concepts of personal space, apologizing too much or not enough, restaurant norms, that kind of thing. It also would be beneficial to talk about ideas such as American individualism and the strong belief in self-making (rags to riches) in greater detail.

Social issues such as LGBTQ rights, racism, and sexual harassment/assault were of the greatest interest to students, and in the evaluation, students stated they thought they were not addressed enough to understand the different perspectives that U.S. citizens hold regarding these topics.

This course model incorporates this student feedback along with a theoretical foundation in order

to create a holistic course which will truly help international students understand U.S. culture, their own culture, the process of adjusting to new cultures, and will be structured to be engaging to students through more activities, student-led discussions, conversations with guest speakers and student panels, and field trips to get students out into the community and surrounding region.

Goals and Objectives

From the needs assessment emerged the acclimation course goals and objectives. To address international student challenges and needs which research on international student cultural acclimation has highlighted. The purpose of the course is to increase the knowledge and understanding of U.S. culture among international students and provide them with the skills to interact with and become a part of the university community. The course will address the norms and idiosyncrasies of U.S. and local culture. This course is meant to be model that other higher education institutions in the U.S. can emulate in order to better support their international student population. The exact curriculum in each institution is open to adjustment and is at the discretion of the instructor and administration regarding the content. The following goals and objectives reflect the purpose of the course.

Program Goals:

- 1) Assist and support new international students with their academic and cultural acclimation to U.S people, geographies, and environments.
- 2) Create a strong relationship between students, the International Education/ISSS office, and on-campus resource offices
- 3) Increase the rate of overall international student satisfaction and experience in their host college or university

- 4) Offer a replicable model for higher education institutions to better integrate and support their international student populations

Student Goals:

- 1) Gain the ability to learn and interact with others in both the classroom and within their host community
- 2) Gain the tools to succeed academically and socially in their host community and the U.S. by using on and off-campus resources
- 3) Gain a deeper understanding of where cultural practices and values stem from in the U.S. and their own culture

Program Objectives:

- 1) Increase students' understanding of U.S. life, U.S. higher education, and U.S. cultural practices, including cultural values and norms
- 2) Provide students with a variety of opportunities to visit local and national sites to increase their knowledge of U.S. culture and geography through practical experience
- 3) Provide students an introduction to the local area and culture, the surrounding region, and the United States.

Student Objectives:

- 1) Obtain and demonstrate cultural understanding of U.S. cultural practices
- 2) Understand academic and cultural norms of a U.S. classroom
- 3) Develop skills to function and form connections more effectively in the U.S. classroom and community
- 4) Communicate and articulate differences in students' home cultures as compared to U.S. and other cultures

- 5) Learn about the geographies and cultures of the United States through field trips, projects, and/or service-learning activities

Program Description

“U.S. Exploration” is a seminar-style, experiential learning-driven course designed to assist new international students with the transition to SUNY Oneonta (or other designated university) and to provide relevant background regarding U.S. academic culture, U.S. culture, and the surrounding state. It will foster reflection upon the way students process their experiences abroad and provide opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue between instructor and students. It will also assist international students in becoming more involved with their university community and local community through OIE international student and study abroad events, speakers and student panels in the classroom, and an integrated community service project in the classroom.

The program scope targets students at an undergraduate higher education level. New international students are also new to U.S. university culture and can benefit from the guidance of an acclimation course. Potential participants may include any new international student who is in their first semester at the university, including new exchange students, freshman international degree-seeking students, new transfer students, and students returning from a leave of absence.

This course will be required for exchange students as part of their cultural exchange experience at their university’s partner institution, as well as for new freshman international students. However, it will remain optional (albeit strongly recommended) for incoming transfer and leave of absence (students who’ve studied before at the university, took a break, and are now returning) students. This parameter is based on my survey research and conversations with other International Education professionals, in which some said that they thought it was difficult to

capture the interest of all students in their course, because some simply did not want to be there or participate and did not think they could gain anything from such a course. Of course, there may even be new students who have a similar mindset but making the course optional for those who may already have experience in the U.S. allows for those students to have the freedom to decide the extent of their need for further guidance in cultural acclimation. An incentive to participate in the acclimation course are the cultural trips which are free for the students who are enrolled in the course, and about which the SUNY Oneonta OIE has received positive feedback from international students.

From international educator and student feedback, an ideal size for an acclimation course is approximately 20 students per classroom. This allows students to learn in a more intimate setting, participate in deeper discussions on culture, and ask the questions they have about their experiences at the host institution. If a university has a large international student population, it may require multiple instructors, or classes running at different times throughout the week. As well as an International Student Advisor, other individuals who would be qualified to teach such a course are ESL instructors or faculty members with experience working with international students. The instructor should possess knowledge or training in intercultural communication and have a good understanding of international students' needs.

The timeline for such a course would begin by writing a course proposal by the end of the Spring semester in May, to be approved through the university course approval system. At SUNY Oneonta, courses are submitted through a system called "Curriculog" and are then reviewed by a Curriculum Committee. See Appendix A for a detailed timeline. The course would run each semester, starting at the beginning of the semester, one day per week. SUNY Oneonta's course is held every Wednesday, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. It is currently worth three credits

but is shortened to two hours each week because of the required cultural excursions which are also a part of the course. The course credits for such a course could be reduced, depending on what the International Student and Scholar Services office at a particular university believes is best for their students and what works best for the instructor of the course. However, because SUNY Oneonta currently has a small number of international students, it was decided that more time taken each week for the acclimation course would allow the students and instructor to delve deeper into the topics discussed in class and therefore produce more meaningful learning outcomes.

Curriculum

The curriculum of this course will focus on cultural adjustment, background in U.S. academic, national, and local culture, lessons on U.S. social norms and values with guidance for social interaction on and off campus, and reflection upon international students' experiences living and studying abroad. It will incorporate experiential learning and be student focused, with activities bringing the students out of the classroom and into the university and local community along with discussions based on those students' experiences in and out of the classroom during their time in the United States. International students will have participated in an International Student Orientation as well as the All Student Orientation at the very beginning of the year. This course is meant to be a continuation of that orientation and is meant to provide more depth to their cultural knowledge.

Reflection

Students will reflect on their experiences from the beginning to the end of the acclimation course. At the beginning of their time at SUNY Oneonta, they will discuss their expectations as well as their academic and social goals at their host institution. One relevant successful activity

which I introduced in the SUNY Oneonta acclimation course was a letter-writing exercise in which the international students wrote a letter to themselves about their goals and expectations. The students then sealed the letters and the OIE kept them safe in the office until their last class, where they could open them, reflect, and discuss. Throughout the course, cultural adjustment should be addressed, both in classroom discussions and through short reflection papers. At SUNY Oneonta, students write reflection papers on the cultural trips in which they participate to deepen their experience, provide them the opportunity to remember what they learned from that excursion, and compare it to experiences or their life in their home country. This also serves as one of the evaluations of their learning during the course. In another institution's course, students wrote blog posts about their experiences and the topics discussed in class, which is another great reflection exercise and allows them to easily refer back to their previous writing.

U.S. Culture – Norms and Values

It is difficult to generalize about life and culture in the United States, as it is comprised of many different cultures and ways of life. However, it is useful to speak about common stereotypes and students' expectations or ideas they held before they arrived in the U.S. Topics such as communication, friendships and relationships, colloquial language, body language, dress, and the diversity that exists in the U.S. – both in terms of cultures and viewpoints or ways of thinking – are important to explore. SUNY Oneonta's acclimation course includes a U.S. student panel, made up of four to five volunteer SUNY Oneonta domestic students (recruited by the undergraduate student T.A.). The international students create questions ahead of time to ask the U.S. students, and we encourage the U.S. students to ask the international students questions as well.

Diversity of thought and the openness of that ideal in the U.S. is another topic that SUNY Oneonta international students found interesting and different than what they'd experienced their home countries. Ideas about gender, sexuality, religion, politics, and speaking openly about opinions, especially in the classroom, are topics that were well-received, as that was a cause of some culture shock to those students. Diversity in terms of ethnicity and culture is also a topic of interest to students. For this topic, it would be useful to invite a guest speaker such as the Chief Diversity Officer of the institution or a faculty member teaching a course in a relevant field.

U.S. Academic Culture

Studying at a U.S. university is often very different from an international student's experience at their home university. SUNY Oneonta students speak about this in the classroom and write a short paper about the similarities and differences in academic and classroom culture between the U.S. and their home county. They utilize reading materials that the instructor provides. In the past, the SUNY Oneonta course provided the NAFSA booklet on Classroom Culture in the U.S. From student feedback, we have gathered that these booklets, though full of valuable information, are very dry to read. They are heavy on information without examples that students can relate to. Our undergraduate Teaching Assistant did some research and consulted with an Anthropology professor about useful reading materials on the international student experience at U.S. universities. One book we plan to use is called, *My Freshman Year* by Rebekah Nathan. This book is a non-fiction novel, so it reads easier than a pamphlet filled with information. It is about a researcher who went "undercover" as an undergraduate student at a U.S. university, and details her experiences along the way. It includes topics such as academics, campus life, and perceptions of international students in the eyes of domestic students.

Citations, classroom culture, faculty-student dynamics, teaching styles are also important topics to discuss related to U.S. academic culture. In the SUNY Oneonta course, students are required to meet with their academic advisor and go to each of their professors' office hours, which assists students in forming a connection with their professors/advisors and gaining a better understanding of their classes if they need help.

Local and U.S. History, Government, and Politics

In order to get students acquainted with more local culture and history at SUNY Oneonta, students visit the Iroquois Indian Museum as a field trip, to gain a clearer understanding on U.S. Indigenous People's history which is often glossed over in traditional U.S. history books. Different regions in the U.S. offer their own particular culture, which students may miss if they don't take a course specifically related to the subject. In the Fall 2017 semester, I reached out to the Oneonta Historical Society, which has a building downtown with historical exhibits, and they were graciously able to give our class a tour of their exhibitions and artifacts. This brings history to life more than reading about it or watching a few videos and allows students to experience history and culture in a local setting.

Along with local history, U.S. politics and government are topics of which students should gain some understanding in order to better understand U.S. culture. Because not everyone is an expert in these areas, this is a good chance to bring in a guest speaker: either a professor of the university or a local government official. SUNY Oneonta invited a U.S. Politics and Government professor to speak with students, and they had interesting and thought-provoking conversations about gun laws, the laws that govern the nation, and laws or immigration policies that might be affecting international students, among other topics. Inviting faculty speakers is also a great opportunity for faculty to meet international students and vice-versa.

Health & Wellness (Physical, mental, emotional, sexual)

Adjusting to a new culture can be very taxing on students, physically, mentally, and emotionally. A lesson on health and wellness while being a student in a foreign country is important to offer to students. This lesson not only includes what to do to stay healthy but also features a discussion regarding sexual safety, consent, and gender issues. This lesson would benefit from a speaker from the university Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, or any similar resource/department provided at a campus.

The Environment and Climate Change

Climate change and environmental sustainability is a hot topic in the U.S. and one that is often discussed. There are initiatives on campuses around the U.S. to reduce waste, increase recycling, and promote sustainability. As this is a weighty subject for an instructor to take on, it is advisable to use a faculty guest speaker in this case. Inviting an environmental science faculty member or the sustainability coordinator to the classroom to speak provides students with professional knowledge about the U.S.'s impact on the environment and on the efforts occurring around the world to reduce the effects of humans upon the earth. This is an interesting topic to discuss as a class, since different countries and culture handle climate change in various ways and hold differing viewpoints on how to address the matter.

Cultural Excursions

Through trip reflection papers, we also have evidence of personal growth and meaning-making as a result of the trips in which students participate. The trips are open to international students first, and if there are seats remaining, the OIE invites students from the Geography department to join, as the SUNY Oneonta international student acclimation course is housed under this department. We have also had Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) students and

the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) join our trips, which allows for international students and U.S. students of different backgrounds to meet and form friendships, as well as explore an area they may not have had an opportunity to explore.

Coursework and Projects

Throughout students' time in class, they will participate in different activities, participating in events on campus, and exploring places around the region. In order to provide a more holistic experience for students (and follow the experiential learning cycle through the reflective observation and abstract conceptualization phases), there must be structured discussion and assignments to facilitate the movement through these stages. These can include the trip reflection papers, a summary/comparison paper of U.S. academic culture relating to their home country, and dialogues shaped in various ways, through "fishbowl" activities, team building exercises, and varied group work or discussions. The course will also provide opportunities to demonstrate what they've learned (the active experimentation phase). Students can test their skills in university activities on campus, of which they will need to attend at least three in the semester. The hope is that they will then become more involved in the campus community, through an extra "push" of it being mandatory for the course. Though the students in this particular course model are required to complete a number of these assignments, there should also be a larger, "end of semester" assignment or final. In the SUNY Oneonta course, students participate in group projects about their countries and cultures and present it to the class towards the end of the semester. Students are able to work with others from their country, or team up with someone from a different country and do a presentation together, comparing and contrasting different aspects of their cultures. This allows students to reflect on their own country and its ways of life, their identity in their home country compared to their identity in their host

community, and learn more about their fellow classmates' cultures. Another idea for a class project is to choose an aspect of U.S. culture and life to research and present in class.

Extra-Curricular Activities & Student Involvement

In order for students to implement what they are learning in the acclimation course, they also receive guidance from the international student peer mentor program, which consists of U.S. and international students who act as guides through campus life in the international students' first semester and often help students form friendships and become friends themselves. These peer mentors encourage the students to become involved in the campus and local communities and often attend events together. Students in the "U.S. Exploration" course will be required to attend three different extra-curricular activities, which could include joining a club and attending meetings, attending various student-led events on campus, or participating in a group or club off-campus.

Volunteer projects are not something the SUNY Oneonta acclimation course currently includes. However, volunteer activities bring the international students closer to the host community and the university community. It is an opportunity to put into practice ideas that they will discuss in the classroom, to meet domestic students and community members, and to step out of their comfort zone and push their learning edges. In this "best practices" acclimation course, participating in a volunteer day or event will also count as an "extra-curricular" activity.

To evaluate students' learning through these activities, students will be asked to write a blog post about their experiences on a classroom-owned online blog page. They will be given guidelines regarding the content of the blog post; however, it will remain mostly in the hands of the students, so that they feel a sense of ownership. This blog will be made available on the

International Office's website or Facebook page as a resource to incoming international students, and to students already attending the university.

Staffing Plan

At SUNY Oneonta, the acclimation course instructor is also the OIE International Student Advisor, who also bears the title, Adjunct Faculty. Other staff include the author's role of Graduate Assistant, or "Instructional Support Assistant," and an undergraduate student Teaching Assistant. There was talk at one point of changing this structure and moving the acclimation course to the Foreign Languages Department, where an ESL faculty member (working with international education or ISSS office) would take on the instructor role. However, at this point the instructor role will stay with the International Student Advisor.

There should also be guest/volunteer speakers invited by the course instructor to speak with the students about various topics. At SUNY Oneonta, speakers included the university president, who spoke about her path to her career and the challenges she faced along the way, a political science professor to speak on U.S. government and politics, and an environmental sustainability professor to speak on the U.S.'s role in climate change and the state of the environment. Students were also able to visit the local historical society where they received a guided tour of the exhibits.

Participant Recruitment and Program Marketing

This acclimation course will be offered to new international students (exchange, freshman, transfer, re-admit, and leave of absence returnees). Exchange Students are automatically registered for cultural acclimation course; however, the course is not mandatory and they are free to opt-out and drop the course if they feel they do not wish to participate in the class. There are also cultural excursions which are a component of the acclimation course, which

in the past has been a large draw for international students, as they are required to attend at least two trips within the semester and they are able to attend these trips for free. Meals are usually not included in the excursions; students must pay for these themselves.

Another aspect of participant recruitment will utilize the Office of International Education/ISSS Office website. Voluntary testimonials and “tips for incoming international students” from past acclimation course participants will be posted on the website, along with an explanation of the acclimation course. If students create a blog as a project for the acclimation course, if they give permission, the office could also display those blogs as a resource to potential new international students and to advertise the acclimation course.

It will also be useful to inform exchange partner schools that such a course exists and provide materials to them so they may provide their students with information about the course if they are thinking of studying abroad at SUNY Oneonta.

Logistics

Location

The location of the course would be in any classroom with a computer and projector on campus with various field trips occurring off-campus. The classroom should be conducive to frequent movement and group work, with space to rearrange the seating as needed. SUNY Oneonta’s excursions have included the Oneonta Historical Society, OIE cultural excursions to Niagara Falls, Boston, Washington D.C., Albany, Howe Caverns, Maple Hill Farm to learn the maple syrup-making process, an apple farm for apple picking in the fall, and the Iroquois Indian Museum near Howe Caverns.

The course could take place one to two times per week, depending on the availability of the designated instructor. For SUNY Oneonta, the course takes place one day per week

(Wednesday) from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., two hours long, with cultural trips making up the third hour for a total of three credits.

The SUNY Oneonta course began as an interdisciplinary course. However, these courses are permitted to be run only two semesters, before it needs to be housed under an academic department. SUNY Oneonta's acclimation course is currently housed under the Geography department. To be sustainable, an acclimation course should eventually be housed under an academic department.

Equipment

The equipment needed for an acclimation course includes basic classroom equipment, such as a whiteboard, writing utensils, large notepads and an easel, and technology (a computer and projector with a screen). Any other equipment depends on the activities offered in classes and on the instructor. Students will utilize these items for group projects, discussions, and dialogues, while the instructor will require them to lead lessons, show videos if necessary, and display other relevant information.

Transportation

Transportation needed for the course includes university vans for short-distance field trips and charter buses for larger excursions for longer distances. Students either live in dormitories on campus or live in apartments off-campus. They are responsible for transportation to and from the classroom. There are frequent buses with a route to and from campus as well, which new international students receive a bus schedule and map to help with transportation needs.

Health and Safety Plan

As this course takes place on the SUNY Oneonta Campus, or any university campus, the course health and safety plan will reflect the plan of the university campus. The course syllabus will include the fire safety evacuation location stated in the plan. For SUNY Oneonta, the location is another building in the vicinity of the building in which the course takes place. This location should be made clear to the students on the first day of class as the syllabus is discussed.

An additional plan should be set in place for cultural excursions/field trips which are included in the acclimation course. In the event that vans are being used for a trip, all van drivers must be university van certified (i.e. they've taken the on-campus van certification course) and a staff member must be one of the trip leaders, which can include a Graduate Assistant. There will be at least two trip leaders for each trip, and they will carry a first-aid kit with them as a safety measure. Emergency contact numbers are provided for each student on their travel itinerary for every trip. Students are advised to use the "buddy system" and at least stay with one other student when they are exploring an area. The trip leaders will have working cell phones on their persons at all times and will use the "Remind" app to text students with updates, which allows them to mass-text without giving out their personal cell phone number.

Crisis Management Plan

The acclimation course crisis management plan will follow the plan of the university campus, in our example case, the SUNY Oneonta campus. The course syllabus will include the contact information of the course instructor and any instructional support (Graduate Assistant, Teaching Assistant). In case of an emergency, the first number to call will be the University Police Department (UPD). This number will also be included in the course syllabus. A crisis emergency plan is particularly needed for OIE cultural excursions/field trips. Students will be

given a trip itinerary in advance with the trip leader's contact information, including phone numbers, if the leaders are comfortable with this. At SUNY Oneonta, the OIE owns an emergency phone, which is also used for the OIE trips. In case of emergency, if students are not with the trip leader for some reason, students should call UPD first, and then the trip leader. The first priority is the students' safety, so the trip leaders will also have an emergency secondary meeting location in each place on a student trip, and this will be communicated to students on their itinerary and on the van or bus before arriving at the trip destination. Any other potential dangers will be discussed with students as well. An example of this was a trip to Boston, where a large "March for Our Lives" protest was happening at the same time. We explained to the students the significance of the protest and advised them to be cautious while near that area and to avoid it if possible.

If there is an issue with an individual student or a group of students and they are experiencing or have experienced physical, mental, or emotional distress, the instructor should refer them to the Health and Counseling Center on-campus. If the instructor is the International Student Advisor, they can also assist the students with certain issues. However, if there is a serious concern and a student requires immediate attention, the instructor should guide and escort the student as necessary to the relevant professional services available on-campus.

Budget and Budget Notes

The budget for the international student course can be found in Appendix C. The cost of this course should be financed through the higher education institution, as it is a credit-bearing course on-campus. However, the cultural excursions may need to be financed in a different or creative way. At SUNY Oneonta, they are currently funded through a "Strategic Allocation of Resources" (StAR) grant, which provides funding for projects throughout the university.

Trips

The student trips through the OIE will incur the largest cost, as these include transportation, gratuity related to transportation if using a charter bus, entrance fees, lodging if it is an overnight trip, and meals if any are to be included. The SUNY Oneonta trips are free for the students of the international acclimation course, with any other student paying a minimal ticket fee of \$10 to \$45 dollars, depending on the trip. The fees are used for international student activities on campus. However, after receiving student feedback, SUNY Oneonta will make the trips free for any international student, so that cost will not be a barrier to enriching cultural experiences.

In terms of the cultural excursions, the SUNY Oneonta OIE applied for a three-year grant (StAR grant) specifically for international student trips. Without a grant, or something in the International Education office budget, it would be difficult to do trips that were further away from the local campus or included entrance fees. The cost for trips should either come from such a grant if there are not designated funds for trips in an office's budget or should be paid for through the Office of International Education/ISSS office. This grant funds the international student trips, which have been successful in that international students cite it as one of their favorite things about the acclimation course and part of their favorite memories at SUNY Oneonta.

Course Instructor

The budget for the international student acclimation course includes payment to the course instructor, which can be included in a yearly salary if it is part of the original job description or added on to their salary as an adjunct professor if the course is being newly created as additional support for international students.

Instructional Support

There could also be a small stipend per semester for an undergraduate Teaching Assistant, which gives international students a peer to interact with as well as gives a student valuable experience working in a classroom with international students. Some universities could also have a Graduate Assistant/Intern in the International Education office which would either be unpaid or paid a stipend. This was the situation for myself, as a Graduate Intern with a monthly stipend and one meal per day provided.

Evaluation Plan

The method of evaluation for this acclimation course is qualitative, though the number of international students attending the course will begin to be tracked, as well as the number of those students who stay for a four-year degree and those that transfer to a different U.S. higher education institution. Over time, quantitative data can then be analyzed regarding international student retention. Formative and summative evaluations will be utilized to evaluate this program. Formative evaluation is ongoing throughout the class, and summative evaluations will occur at the end of the semester. The short papers about international student challenges using the correct citation format, participating in U.S. classes, interacting with peers, and reflective papers regarding the cultural excursions in which the students participate will be utilized as an evaluation of their cultural and personal learning. There will be a course evaluation after every semester-long course (See Appendix D), which will include follow up interviews with the international students, conducted by a student T.A. These evaluations are anonymous in that the T.A. compiles the data, eliminating any identifying information before submitting it to the instructor. The individual conversations with acclimation course students serve to allow the students to elaborate on anything they wouldn't say in a paper or electronic survey. They are also

able to feel more at ease as they are speaking with a peer and in a neutral location of their choosing, such as a café, or somewhere else on campus where they feel comfortable.

My evaluation of the current acclimation course consisted of the data gleaned from the T.A. course survey and interviews, the international student reflection papers on cultural excursions and a personal reflection in the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 course, and my own online survey I conducted through SurveyMonkey with a consent form on Google Forms, targeting current and past students who participated in any version of the acclimation course. I also gave the option for students to participate in a Skype/Google Hangout conversation with me about the course; however, I did not receive any interest in an additional conversation from students, as many left immediately after the semester to travel during the breaks or return home.

Limitations and Considerations

With a limited amount of time to gather data, and with the lack of acclimation course models and research on which to base such an acclimation course, there are limitations that must be acknowledged and addressed. Because I chose to focus on feedback from the international students at SUNY Oneonta on the acclimation course for this CLC capstone, the results came from perspectives from certain cultures, while perhaps not taking into account others' perspectives. Also, the online survey did not ask for the students' country of origin, as there are a small number of international students and that would have been an identifying characteristic.

Another limitation of the research is that the acclimation course at SUNY Oneonta is offered to a smaller number of students than many universities. There were 56 international students in the Fall 2017 semester and 46 students in the Spring 2018 semester. Therefore, it was easier for the OIE to implement such a class, as they only needed one instructor, and one class period per week, instead of one instructor teaching multiple classes per week, or hiring multiple

instructors. I also received a minimal amount of feedback related to the course from the online course survey I created. However, I was able to use the official course survey and results from the one-on-one student interviews by the undergraduate Teaching Assistant. This provided valuable feedback about the course.

Currently, at SUNY Oneonta, the International Student Advisor teaches this course one time per week. However, from other conversations with ISSS staff at other higher education institutions, some said they could not find have time to plan lessons and effectively implement the course, or administration couldn't find someone willing to teach the course. The instructor must also possess intercultural competence and be able to adjust lessons to students' English language abilities and cultural differences. The availability of qualified instructors is a factor to keep in mind when planning such a course

Support and funding from the university administration in making the course credit-bearing, as well as finding an academic department to sponsor the course is another issue to be considered. If the International Student Advisor is teaching the course, they must be paid for their work. They could be considered an adjunct faculty member and be compensated this way, as the International Student Advisor is at SUNY Oneonta. Sponsorship from an academic department is needed if the course is to be sustainable. The course at SUNY Oneonta began as an Interdisciplinary Studies course (which one can run for two years before it needs to be under an academic department). Then it was placed under the Geography department, as the course looks at both U.S. culture and the environments and geographies that shape that culture.

Student interest and participation is another limitation. Student interest has been assessed through course evaluations and an online survey specifically about this course, but only for SUNY Oneonta students. When speaking to other International Education (IE) professionals who

were involved in a similar course, some stated that the students didn't want to attend an acclimation course. This could be because of a variety of factors – perhaps the student came from a culture more similar to the U.S., or because they found that the material covered in the course was not interesting to them. With such a course however, many students don't initially think they need extra help in acclimating to a culture and may want to experience it on their own, without realizing how much help structured time for reflection and discussion can offer.

The last limitation is that there is a possibility of the curriculum material becoming too generalized and/or reinforcing stereotypes instead of breaking them. To avoid this, it is important to continue to ask students “why.” Why do they think they have this image in their minds of the U.S. or a certain culture? What questions should they ask themselves when they find themselves making assumptions or judgments about a person, a culture, or even a country? Teaching self-awareness and keeping in mind self-authorship and emerging adulthood theories is important to help students reach a deeper level of understanding of where their assumptions and beliefs come from.

Conclusion & Implications

International Student Feedback

To sum up student responses from the online acclimation course survey and the interviews which accompanied the end of semester SUNY Oneonta course evaluation, students want more activities during class and less lectures, even from guest speakers. If an instructor invites guest speakers to the classroom, the structure should be relaxed and discussion based, rather than listening to a lecture on a specific topic. This fits with my course model, incorporating experiential learning theory into the class curriculum.

Positive aspects of the SUNY Oneonta course discussed in the survey and interviews included discussions on homesickness and cultural adjustment. Even if some students don't believe that is an important topic at the time, this may help them when they are feeling overwhelmed later in the semester or throughout their time at a foreign university. One student stated,

When we discussed homesickness at first it did not seem so important because it was still early on in the semester and I was excited to be there. However, weeks later when I first started feeling homesick, I could go back to the encouraging thought that I was not the only person who has ever experienced it before or that ever will because it is a normal reaction to being in a new place.

This response shows that the student experience of cultural adjustment varies depending on the student and that the difficult aspects of adjustment can arise at different times. If instructors of acclimation courses can equip international students with the tools to work through these thoughts and feelings of loneliness and homesickness, the students are able to take what they've learned and apply it throughout the entirety of their educational career, as well as in their everyday lives.

Another topic which was deemed helpful by international students was how to interact with their professors and participate in the classroom. Many students come from regions of the world where the teaching is more lecture based and students do not question their instructor. They often don't know how to even begin speaking to their professor, so the acclimation course should give tips on discussion topics or what kinds of issues they can go to their professor about. A student in the online survey explained how they used what they had learned in the SUNY Oneonta course:

Once I began interacting with my professors and showing interest in the things they were interested in it helped me see them as people just like me which reduced the inhibitions I felt towards approaching them with questions I had about what they were teaching and also to build a bond with them.

From listening to and reading about students' experiences, there are a number of misunderstandings that arise between international students and faculty members, especially with those professors who are not experienced teaching or interacting with international students. Issues may surface because a student can't understand everything a professor is saying or can't write notes fast enough. Sometimes students have felt singled out as a professor tries to include them in class but doesn't seem to do this to other students. By addressing these potential issues in the cultural acclimation course, students have a better understanding of the norms of a typical U.S. classroom and feel better prepared to succeed in their other classes.

Overall, students enjoyed the interactive aspects of the class the most, including activities and field trips. They would like more relatable reading material, such as case studies rather than a text book. The students would also like to discuss topics that are somewhat taboo, such as the U.S. perspective on social justice issues and more debated issues such as drugs and alcohol, reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, gun rights, and other current topics spoken about often in the U.S. and international media. Along with these topics, students want a better understanding of what lies behind the behaviors and attitudes they notice in their U.S. peers and people in the local community, such as values, national pride, concepts of personal space, and individuality.

International Education Professional Feedback

From conversations with individuals who have taught acclimation courses in the past, as well as from survey results, the main barriers they came across while teaching the course were:

- Lack of interest from students. In one case, the class was mandatory for new international students, so it turned out that some students had no interest in being there and actively did not participate in class. In the opinion of the instructor, these disinterested students created a different atmosphere for the class, one that was not conducive to learning.
- Finding enough qualified instructors for the course. One instructor stated that they enjoyed teaching the class and it was valuable for the students; however, working full time in an International Education office and teaching multiple sessions of the course was too much for one person, and they couldn't find any other willing instructors. Also, the question comes up as to who a qualified instructor is and what qualities they need to possess.
- Another issue is finding an academic department under which to house the international student acclimation course.

International educators stated that the most common challenges they see international students face are:

- Language barriers, lack of confidence in speaking English
- Adapting to new social norms and U.S. life and culture, making new friends, especially from the U.S.
- Homesickness or culture shock - being so far away from home,
- The food, and in smaller cities or towns, the lack of choices of food (i.e. no Asian or Indian markets in the area)
- The academic system, interacting in the classroom, and the differences between the U.S. and students' home countries

However, IE professionals also stated that what challenges students face often depend on the students, their background, and individual personality. There is not one answer for all students and this should be considered.

Takeaways and Recommendations for International Student Acclimation Courses

Through listening to students and instructors involved in international student acclimation courses, key takeaways from this research have been:

- Keep the acclimation course activity and student-focused. Experiential learning should be implemented in the classroom and outside of it to encourage students to become involved (and then stay involved) on campus and in their host community. This includes field trips, which could be to locations further away, or local to keep costs low. As a Graduate Assistant, I connected with a volunteer at the local historical society and they were happy to give a personal tour to the class – which ended up being very informative and more interesting than watching videos in class or reading about local history in a book. There are always things to learn about the local area and the surrounding regions, which allows students to get out of the traditional classroom where they are able to see and experience more than the host university life. Even in the classroom, activities to prompt thoughtful discussion about different points of view are important to help students reflect on experiences they've had or on topics about which they have questions but were maybe too afraid to ask.
- Collaboration is key. A higher education institution setting is full of valuable resources and sources of information; including its students and faculty/staff. Reach out to professors who may be interested in speaking and having a discussion with new international students for half of a class-period. This proved to be a highlight in many

students' experiences with the SUNY Oneonta class. Depending on the institution, you may also be able to show students different aspects of their host campus. The SUNY Oneonta President came to the classroom for one period to speak about their journey and how they came to be in the position they are now. Students were impressed that the President would take the time to talk with them, which showed them how student-focused Oneonta's university is, and well as many other universities in the U.S. Reaching out to the volunteer coordinator on campus to get students involved in a day of volunteering is another activity that may get students out of their comfort zones and interacting with other students or community members. Even off-campus, coordinating with local organizations such as non-profits or elementary/high schools, to provide an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange that benefits the international students and the other party.

- Be aware of the different nationalities in the classroom and make sure that everyone has space to speak in the class. If there is a majority of students from one country, be sure that perspectives from other regions of the world are equally heard. What is easy or natural to students of one culture may be difficult or new for another.
- Creating a safe and trusting environment in the classroom is extremely important. New international students won't know each other that well, though they may have met during International Student Orientation and the corresponding activities. However, to be able to have the important and valuable conversations in the classroom about differences in culture and points of view, the instructor must work with the students to create an environment that facilitates open dialogue and the comfort to ask questions and speak about the experiences they are having in their host campus and community. This environment should be cultivated on the first day of class, by teaching students about

classroom or team norms and allowing students to create their own classroom norms, such as, noticing if someone is not speaking and allowing them space to speak, keeping an open mind when different opinions are discussed, and if you don't understand or disagree with something someone said, ask them respectfully to explain their point further. These norms should be discussed and agreed upon by all and can be displayed in the room each class period.

Receiving this information and these suggestions from professionals and students, along with research and my own experience with international students and providing academic support for an acclimation course, confirms that cultural acclimation courses can be extremely useful tools in helping international students adapt to life in the U.S. or to a different part of the U.S. for transfer students. They are able to learn about U.S. culture and academic culture on a deeper level than international student orientations allow. It provides for them the space to address their concerns, have people to consistently talk to, and gives them opportunities to expand their comfort zones and take part in new activities on campus, explore the region of their host university, as well as meet faculty and students they perhaps would not have otherwise. There is still much research to be done in regard to the impact of such courses and how to best format the courses so they are effective for international students of many cultures and backgrounds. International educators should be sharing their experiences with such courses, including lessons and student feedback, so that these courses may improve and grow in higher education institutes in the United States. This capstone, through the collected research and feedback, fits the context of SUNY Oneonta, to assist in adjusting the course as needed to meet students' needs, as well as the larger context of the international education field, to contribute to the research regarding support systems to uphold overall international student satisfaction and success.

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Appendices

Appendix A

International Student Cultural Acclimation Course Implementation Timeline

Date	Course of Action
Jan 2019	Write course proposal for Fall 2019 Create preliminary course syllabus
Feb 2019	Submit New Course Proposal to the particular university's new course proposal system At SUNY Oneonta, course must be submitted electronically through "Curriculog" system. It must be approved by the department or program chair, by the Curriculum Committee, and by the dean of the college or school offering the proposed course.
April 2019	Approval of Course Received
May 2019	Advertisement and Recruitment – put on OIE website – provide info sheets to International Admissions Counselor and exchange partner contacts
August 2019	New international students are automatically enrolled in international student acclimation course
September - December, 2019	Classes in session
December 2019	Course evaluations are administered Student volunteers give course testimonials to add to website Incorporate evaluation results into next year's course syllabus/plan

Appendix B

U.S. Exploration

Course Syllabus Fall 2019

Course Subject and Number:**Course Title:** (Special Topics) U.S. EXPLORATION

Course Description: A seminar course specifically designed to assist new international students with their academic and cultural acclimation to U.S. geographies and environments. This course incorporates field trips to culturally and geographically significant sites such as Niagara Falls and Boston, among others.

Effective Term: Fall, 2019**Pre-Requisites:** New International Students, per instructor's approval**Grading Mode:** A-E**Number of Credits:** 3**Class Type:** Primarily seminar, with some field trips**Frequency of Offering:** 2-hour session per week (and 14 hours of field trip participation) - 13 weeks of lectures/instruction, 1 project, 3 writing assignments, 1 final paper

Justification: This seminar-style course is designed to assist new international students with the transition to [U.S. host institution] and to provide relevant background regarding cultural adjustment, U.S. higher education, U.S. culture, and the surrounding state.

Course Objectives: To provide a structured exploration of U.S. Life, U.S. higher education and cultural practices, as well as opportunities to visit both local and national sites. This course will provide an introduction to the local area, the region, the United States and the cultures within these areas. Students successfully completing the course will be able to interact with individuals of other cultures more comfortably both in the classroom and within the host community, as well as gain an understanding of U.S. culture and the norms and values from which it is shaped.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Obtain and demonstrate a cultural understanding of U.S. cultural practices
2. Understand cultural norms of a U.S. classroom
3. Develop cultural skills to function more effectively in the U.S. classroom and community
4. Communicate and articulate differences in students' home cultures as compared to U.S. culture
5. Learn about the geographies and culture(s) of the United States through field trips, projects, and/or service-learning activities

Meeting times & Location:

Wednesdays: 4:30-6:30 p.m. & field trip participation

Syllabus Change Policy: *This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.*

U.S. Exploration Course Schedule

Week #	Topic (s)/ Activities	Assignments Given	Assignments Due Today
Week 1	<p>Course Overview & Introductions:</p> <p>Introduction activity, course goals & objectives, syllabus review, creating classroom norms, expectations & goals exercise (“Letter to Self”)</p> <p>Introduction activity: what is “home” to you – stand on an imaginary map of the world</p> <p>Explanation (not shown in actual syllabus) Students will discuss what they want to get out of this class and what norms/expectations they have for the instructor and each other. They will write a letter to themselves about their initial impressions of the U.S./ new university and write their concerns and expectations/goals. This will be sealed and kept safe in the office & will be given to them at the end of the semester.</p>	<p>Read Ch. 1 & 5 of My Freshman Year: What a professor learned by becoming a student – due Week 2</p>	--
Week 2	<p>U.S. Classroom & University Culture</p> <p>Short ice breaker/warm up</p> <p>Discussion about U.S. academic culture (integrate book chapters from homework) On large paper – students get into groups and write down initial observations from classes. On other side – write what classes are like in their home country/culture Come together as a class and discuss – incorporate aspects from reading chapters</p>	<p>Read Ch. 3 & 4 of My Freshman Year: What a professor learned by becoming a student</p>	<p>Review reading from last week</p>
Week 3	<p>U.S. Student Life, U.S. Cultural Values</p> <p>Short ice breaker/warm up</p> <p>Watch short video on US cultural stereotypes – discussion afterward (what</p>	<p>U.S. Education & Culture Summary/Comparison Paper - due Week 6</p> <p>Come up with 1-3 questions for U.S. student panel (any</p>	<p>Review reading from last week</p>

	<p>have they observed in their U.S. peers, why do U.S. citizens value the things they do). What did the book say about U.S. values? Agree or disagree?</p> <p>Step forward, step back activity – to get them thinking about differences and similarities in their culture versus others – how does this compare to U.S. culture?</p>	<p>topic – will be given to them anonymously)</p> <p>Read Discussions on P.232-246: Succeeding as an International Student in the United States and Canada by Charles Lipson</p>	
Week 4	U.S. Student Panel		
Week 5	Health & Wellness	Come up with 1-3 questions for guest speaker on Politics/U.S. History	
Weekend	Field Trip – Local Site Day Trip (ex: SUNY Oneonta’s – State Capitol: Albany and Howe Caverns & Iroquois Indian Museum)		
Week 6	Guest Speaker: Professor – Political Science /U.S. History Dept.		Summary Paper is due
Week 7	<p>Living with Roommates in the U.S./ Housing (Off-campus Housing Coordinator – if available)</p> <p>Speakers - RAs</p>	Come up with 1-3 questions for guest speaker on climate change and the environment in the U.S.	Field Trip Reflection Paper due
Week 8	Guest Speaker: Professor – Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change in the U.S.		
Week 9	<p>U.S. Diversity and Race & Ethnicity Issues</p> <p>Guest speaker: Prof of African American Studies or Chief Diversity Officer or LGBTQ speaker</p>	<p>Research local history and come up with questions for guide</p> <p>Introduce Personal Final Paper – due Week 11</p>	
Week 10	Thinking Locally – Local History (trip to historical society/organization)		
Weekend	Field Trip – Further Away (Boston, Niagara Falls, Washington D.C.?)		
Week 11	Group Presentation Preparation (in class or out – up to instructor)	Prepare Questions for President	Personal Summary Paper due
Week 12	Guest Speaker – University President / Higher Administrator		Field Trip reflection paper is due
Week 13	Group Presentations (Country & Culture)		
Week 14	<p>Wrap Up and final evaluations / Re-entry and reflection activity</p> <p>Open “letters to self” that students wrote at beginning of year. Discuss differences & similarities in their expectations vs. reality</p>		

	<p>Students form circle for discussion on floor or in chairs– What was one or a few highlights from their semester? What were the largest challenges?</p> <p>What will they take with them (learning, skills, experiences...etc.) as they go back home or come back for next semester?</p> <p>Group photo!</p>		
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Required Texts:

My freshman year: What a professor learned by becoming a student by Rebekah Nathan (provided by instructor)

Succeeding as an International Student in the United States and Canada by Charles Lipson (provided by instructor)

Suggested Texts:

Local text (on local history/culture)

Introduction to American Life by Mary Tinkham, Lanie Denslow, Patricia Willer, NAFSA Association of International Educators

US Classroom Culture by Alisa Eland, Michael Smithee, Sidney L. Greenblatt, NAFSA Association of International Educators

Health and Wellness by Judith A Green, NAFSA Association of International Educators

Instructors & Special Topics Guest Speakers:

- Denise Leinonen: Instructor of Record
- Graduate Assistant
- Undergraduate Student Assistant
- Faculty and professional staff guest speakers, student panel

❖ **Contact Information & Office Hours:**

Denise Leinonen, Instructor of Record:

**Office Hours & Location:* Monday-Friday/ 9:30-4:30: Alumni Hall, 103

**Contact Information:* E-mail: denise.leinonen@mail.sit.edu / Phone: 555-555-5555

- ❖ _____, Graduate Intern: Classroom Assistant
 *Office Hours & Location: Monday-Thursday/ 9:30-4:30: Alumni Hall, 103
 *Contact Information: E-mail: _____ / Phone: 555-555-5555

General Requirements: There are two required short writing assignments, based on 2 field trips which are due on the given date provided in class. These are one-page “reflection papers.” Assignments must be complete and edited for correct punctuation, grammar and spelling. Late assignments will not be accepted and will be recorded as “0.” Alternative assignments may be arranged with the instructors if needed.

Participation in both the class sessions and field trips are key parts of the course. Each student is expected to be actively involved in class activities. Active involvement means the greatest possible participation by all members of the class. Class participation will be evaluated. Regular class attendance is required as part of your participation grade. Attendance will be taken each class. If you arrive to class more than 10 minutes late, you will be marked absent. Two absences are allowed before attendance will affect your participation grade.

- ❖ During this course, the student **must** schedule a brief introductory meeting with their academic advisor (degree seeking students) and with each of their course instructors for each enrolled course this semester.
- ❖ There will be small group class presentations based on the small group projects from week 4.

Late Policies:

It is expected that assignments be handed in on time. If you hand in an assignment late, 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted from your assignment grade for each business day that it is late. (Ex: due Tuesday but handed in on Thursday B+ → B- / due Thursday but handed in on Monday = B+ → B-).

Grading Structure:

2 short field-trip reflection essays	10% (5% each)
Field trip participation (2 trips)	10% (5% each)
U.S. Education Comparison Paper	30%
Appointments with each course instructor and academic advisor (with very brief written summaries per email on these appointments)	15%
Small group class presentation	15%
Personal Summaries, Compare/Contrast final paper	10%

Class participation

10%

Disability Statement (based on SUNY Oneonta policy)

All individuals who are diagnosed with a disability are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. As such, students may be entitled to certain accommodations within this class. If you are diagnosed with a disability, please make an appointment to meet with Accessibility Resources, 209 Alumni Hall, ext. 2137. All students with the necessary supporting documentation will be provided appropriate accommodations as determined by the Accessibility Resource Office.

Plagiarism Statement (based on SUNY Oneonta policy)

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines plagiarism as “the taking of someone else’s work (the thoughts, writings or inventions of another) to use as one’s own.” In an academic context, plagiarism implies a deliberate act on the part of the writer or researcher to use the work, ideas or expressions of others as if they were their own.

Academic dishonesty is defined as “any act by a student that misrepresents or attempts to misrepresent to an instructor or any college official the proficiency or achievement of that student or another student in any academic exercise for the purpose of influencing a grade on a work assignment, or on an examination or quiz, or in a course as a whole; that also includes effort intended to alter any record of a student’s academic performance by unauthorized means.”

Deliberate plagiarism is **cheating** and academic dishonesty. This institution holds a very firm view on this: plagiarism will be severely penalized. [See the university *Student Handbook*, “Procedures of the Standing Disciplinary Board.”] Depending on the nature of the case, students may incur a penalty, from failing the assignment to dismissal from college.

Religious Accommodations (based on SUNY Oneonta policy)

State Education law (Section 224-a) states that any student who is unable, because of his or her religious beliefs to attend classes on a particular day shall be excused from any examinations, study or work requirements. The College is obligated to provide an equivalent opportunity for students to make up any examination, study or work requirement that they may have missed because of such absence.

Emergency Evacuation Procedures

According to the College Emergency Evacuation Procedures, “evacuation is required any time the fire alarm sounds, an evacuation announcement is made, or a university official orders you to evacuate a building to the Evacuation Assembly Area. After the building has been evacuated, the building cannot be re-entered until University Police gives permission.” For your security, please review the complete emergency guidelines on the university’s website here:

_____. ***Emergency Evacuation Location:** _____

Syllabus adapted from the 2017-18 SUNY Oneonta International Student Acclimation Course

Appendix C

International Student Acclimation Course Budget Detail (Per Semester)

Expenses	Cost	Units	Total
<u>Salaries:</u>			
Instructor (as adjunct professor)	\$3,000/semester	1	-\$3,000.00
Graduate Intern (part of total monthly stipend for position)	\$0	1	-\$0.00
Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (stipend)	\$500/semester	1	-\$500.00
<u>Equipment:</u>			
Texts/ Reading Materials	\$0 (1 text) \$8 (1 text)	20	-\$160.00
<u>Space:</u>			
Classroom (on-campus course)	\$0	1	-\$0.00
<u>Transportation:</u>			
Paid through StAR grant			
Local student trip: (campus vans, entrance fees)	Vans: free - \$0 #1 Entrance fee: #2 Entrance fee:	2 vans #1 entrance fee #2 entrance fee	-\$300.00
Larger student trip: (charter bus, entrance fees)	Trip #1 Charter bus: \$2,000 Trip #1 Entrance fees: \$500		-\$2,500.00
	Trip #1 Charter bus: \$2,000 Trip #2 Entrance fees: \$500		-\$2,500.00
<u>Total:</u>			-\$8,960.00
<u>Revenue:</u>			
3 course credits/ student (For degree-seeking students only – exchange students’ tuition waived as per partner agreements)	\$2,040.00	10 degree seeking	+ \$20,400.00
<u>Grand Total</u>			+11,440.00

Note: Budget based on a classroom of 20 students

Other Funding Sources:

The Office of International Education will apply for the StAR (Strategic Allocation of Resources) grant through SUNY Oneonta in order to receive funding for culturally significant excursions locally and regionally. These trips will be offered to all international students at the university, not just those taking the cultural acclimation course. However, it will be a requirement for the acclimation course participants to participate in two of three trips offered as part of their overall grade. There is no cost to students on these trips; however, they must pay for or bring their own meals.

Appendix D

Course Evaluation Form

U.S. Exploration Course Evaluation

In an effort to assess and improve the U.S. Exploration course for future students, your honest feedback regarding this course is requested. Please do not put your name on this course evaluation, as it is anonymous. Please write answers for each question.

- 1) What part of this course did you find most helpful in your adjustment to [host institution] or the United States?
- 2) What part of the course did you enjoy the most? Please identify what you think are the strengths of the course.
- 3) What part of the course did you not like or could be improved or changed in the future? Please explain why.
- 4) On average how many hours per week have you spent on this course? (Including doing readings, reviewing notes, writing papers, preparing a presentation, and any other course related work)
- 5) Feedback for other students: What advice would you give to a future student who is taking this course?

For the statements below please circle your response on a scale of 1 – 5 where:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

- | | Strongly Disagree | | | Strongly Agree | |
|--|-------------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| 6) The instructor engaged the class in productive discussions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7) The instructor encouraged participation in class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8) The instructor increased my understanding of the course material. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9) The instructor helped me identify resources to carry out course work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10) The course helped develop my ability to interact with diverse people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11) The course helped my writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12) The course helped my communication and presentation skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13) Instructions (including syllabus, readings, handouts, etc.) were clear. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14) Overall, I am satisfied with this course. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

15) **Please write any additional comments or suggestions for the U.S. Exploration Course here:**

Appendix E:

International Student Acclimation Course Survey Instrument: For SUNY Oneonta International Students (SurveyMonkey)

1. In which version of the SUNY Oneonta international student acclimation course did you participate (it changed depending on the year you began)?

- 1 credit “International Student Experience” / “American Life”
- 2 credits “American Discovery”
- 3 credits “American Discovery”
- I don't remember / Other (explain if possible)

2. What topics did the class cover that were helpful to you? Why were these topics helpful?

3. What topics were NOT discussed that you wished would have been included?

Why are they needed?

4. What was your favorite part of the class? What was your least favorite part of the class?

5. What has been the most difficult part of being an international student at SUNY Oneonta? Why?

6. What has been MOST helpful to you during your time at SUNY Oneonta?

- U.S. students/ peers
- Other international students/ peers
- The international student acclimation course
- The OIE staff
- Other resources / people on or off-campus (please specify)

7. Do you think the acclimation course instructor(s): (check all that apply - do not check a box if the statement is not true in your opinion)

- Listened to your needs?
- Was inclusive/ Gave space for everyone to speak?
- Covered relevant topics that impact international students?
- Provided students with a good understanding of local and U.S. culture?
- Taught students effectively about U.S. university and academic culture?
- Taught students effectively about cultural differences & cultural adjustment?
- Other / Comment

8. What skills, knowledge, and/or abilities have you gained through this course, if any?

9. Would you advise a new international student to take the acclimation course?

- Yes
- No

Additional Comment

10. Are you willing to participate in a short follow-up interview about the international student acclimation course either on Skype, Google Hangouts, or in-person? If YES, type your primary email address in the space provided and Denise Leinonen, OIE Graduate Assistant, will contact you through email. I sincerely thank you for your time!

Yes

No

Email Address:

DONE

Appendix F:

International Student Acclimation Course Survey Instrument: For Instructors/ Creators
(SurveyMonkey)

1. What is the history of the international student acclimation course in which you were involved as far as you know? How did it get started? (State the university/institution in which you worked if you are willing)

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2. What do you think are the benefits of offering a new international student acclimation course?

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3. Who could/ should be the instructor of such a course? What qualifications should they have?

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4. For you, ideally, what would the format of the new international student acclimation course be (in terms of type of class, how often/ how long, teaching style, structure of lessons...etc.)? What was the format in the class in which you were involved?

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5. What do you think is the largest issue or challenge for international students at the university for which you work(ed)?



6. What are commonly expressed concerns that you've noticed international students have BEFORE beginning to study at a U.S. university (if you had contact with them beforehand)?



7. What are the largest challenges of offering an international student acclimation course at a university?



8. What do you think are the most important topics to cover in an international student acclimation course?



9. What topics do you wish you could discuss more with the international students?



10. What resources/literature do you think should be offered in an international student acclimation course?



DONE