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Radical Empathy and Community Empowerment in Practice: International Student Retention at SUNY Plattsburgh

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Radical Empathy and Community Empowerment in Practice:

International Student Retention at SUNY Plattsburgh

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

6 May 2019

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Table of Contents

Abstract	5
Introduction	6
Background and Rationale	9
SUNY Plattsburgh Background	9
SUNY Plattsburgh Initiatives and Key Events	11
Program Rationale	16
Theoretical Foundations	17
Student Development	17
Intercultural Communication	18
Adjustment and Integration	19
Contact Hypothesis	20
Needs Assessment	20
Observations	21
Interviews	21
Findings	24
Goals and Objectives	30
Program Goals and Objectives	30
Participant Goals and Objectives	30
Program Description	31
Curriculum	33
Staffing Plan	35
Program Marketing	36
Student Recruitment and Admissions	37
Logistics	37
Health and Safety Plan	38
Crisis Management Plan	39
Budget	40
Evaluation Plan	41
Formative	41
Summative	41

Conclusion	42
References	43
Appendix A: Recruitment Letters	47
Appendix B: Consent Statement	49
Appendix C: Interview Guides	50
Appendix D: Interview Themes	52
Appendix E: Health and Safety Waiver	53
Appendix F: Crisis Levels	54
Appendix G: Budget Notes	55
Appendix H: Formative Evaluation Survey	57
Appendix I: Summative Evaluation Survey	58

Abstract

The purpose of this capstone project is to design a program that tends to sociocultural challenges of SUNY Plattsburgh international students and Plattsburgh area community members to improve campus and community relations in order to, ultimately, improve retention of international students. U.S. higher education institutions depend on the recruitment and retention of international students due to lack of funding at the state and federal levels of government. However, amidst turbulent political times, international student numbers are decreasing in the United States at a startling rate. Through observations of the 2017-2018 academic year and interviewing SUNY Plattsburgh international students and Plattsburgh area community members, cross-cultural understanding and connection were revealed as their most pressing needs. Pragmatic approaches that utilize radical empathy and civic engagement to address these needs are the cornerstones of this service-learning program design.

Key words: international students, retention, community, empowerment, stereotypes, racism, cross-cultural understanding, radical empathy

Radical Empathy and Community Empowerment in Practice:
International Student Retention at SUNY Plattsburgh

International students have become an integral component of higher education in the United States as a result of globalization, decreases in federal and state funding for education, and strategic internationalization initiatives at colleges and universities (Green & Ferguson 2011). Not only do they enrich campuses with their unique perspectives and help prepare domestic students with cross-cultural skills to be competitive in the global market, they provide substantial economic benefits as well. NAFSA, the Association of International Educators, found that “the 1,094,792 international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$39 billion and supported more than 455,000 jobs to the U.S. economy during the 2017–2018 academic year” (NAFSA, 2018). It is also reported that 65% of the funds that they use to fund their education comes from sources outside of the United States (Institute of International Education, 2018). Furthermore, international students pay out-of-state tuition at public universities, which can be more than double that of in-state tuition. This helps to alleviate some of the financial burden placed on higher education institutions and domestic students due to declining monetary support at the federal and state level which began during the Reagan administration (Fergus, 2014). This decrease in funding since 1981 continues to force institutions to raise tuition year after year and domestic student loans to balloon (Fergus, 2014). Until the U.S. government decides that funding education is essential to the development of the nation and its people, recruitment, attendance, and the success of international students while studying in the United States remain critical to the economic viability of U.S. higher education institutions.

However, international student numbers have declined in the past two years as evident in the most recent Open Doors report (Baer, 2018). The Institute of International Education cites

that “roughly one in four responding institutions (24 percent) indicate that international students expressed the desire to leave or have left the United States due to the current climate, up from 16 percent in Fall 2017” (Baer, 2018, p. 2). This grim number left me asking several questions. Are higher education institutions equipping students with the tools they need to be successful in a turbulent political climate to have positive interactions with surrounding communities, especially communities that may not align ideologically with the, oftentimes, liberal campuses nor mirror their demographics? Are colleges and universities setting students up to fail by formulating a perceived set of norms that does not necessarily exist when they step foot off of campus, thus causing them to want to leave the United States before graduating or their counterparts back home to choose to pursue their education in another country in the first place? These were the questions that I asked myself during my practicum as International Student Services Assistant at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Plattsburgh’s Global Education Office (GEO).

When one thinks of a successful student, what does a successful international student look like? At GEO student services and programming were often referred to as “retention tools” by leadership. Therefore, if observed from a strategic, fiscal standpoint, successful students could be defined as students who stay to complete their academic programs and graduate. They also have positive experiences, which encourages students from their home countries to pursue higher education in the United States, hopefully at the same institutions. In order to help ensure that high retention rates are achieved and to continue funneling students through established recruitment channels, colleges and universities have enacted strategies to support international student success by addressing academic, immigration, and sociocultural challenges. Some of these strategies include establishing English language-learning programs to prepare students for

college-level English and creating international offices to serve the unique needs of international students regarding visa matters, cultural adjustment, and integration.

To attend to cultural adjustment and integration challenges, international offices have put together a myriad of resources and programming initiatives unique to their institutions. Some examples include specialized orientations for international students, peer mentoring programs, community partner programs, acclimation courses, and various events and activities where international students are given an opportunity to showcase their home countries and cultures. However, through my observations of various intercultural programming strategies in the field, one piece that I noticed was missing was programming to address political climate fluctuations, specifically, and how they can impact the international student experience.

During my time at SUNY Plattsburgh, from July 2017 to June 2018, the College underwent tumultuous events that included the dismantling of the Center for Community Engagement; a racist post on social media that circulated campus and ignited student-led protests across campus and the city; and accusations that the Chief Diversity Officer had behaved inappropriately with women. These events brought simmering feelings to the surface, revealing that a number of students, especially students of color, have felt unwelcomed and unsafe in Plattsburgh (Hirsch, 2018). In response, the College's president, John Ettl, put together a Social Justice Task Force to investigate the situation and suggest actionable steps to make it a safer and more welcoming community for all.

In my opinion, though, the College's response was reactive and not conducive to sustainable change, as there was no substantive commitment. The campus and community need a more proactive approach where they work together to foster a more harmonious environment, where everyone feels heard and has the tools that they need to live amongst one another in a

mutually beneficial way, as there are great assets that both groups can share with one another. In light of the Social Justice Task Force's findings and the desire from students, staff, and community members to work together to build mutual respect and understanding, the program that I have designed could be a solid foundation for building better campus and community relations, thus improving the international student experience. It is essential that the international student experience be incorporated into SUNY Plattsburgh's strategic plan for moving forward, as the U.S. social and political climate tremendously impacts their perceptions, experiences, and ultimately their decision to pursue higher education in the United States at SUNY Plattsburgh (Baer, 2018).

For the International Education (IE) capstone exercise, I am completing the Design and Delivery/ Design Concepts and Evaluation Course-Linked Capstone (CLC). Through the CLC, I hope to achieve specific personal and professional learning objectives: to create a viable program that SUNY Plattsburgh could, in fact, implement and to solidify my standing as an IE professional by contributing an innovative approach to addressing multiple challenges in the field.

Background and Rationale

SUNY Plattsburgh Background

SUNY Plattsburgh is a four-year public comprehensive college with about 5,700 undergraduate and graduate students. It prides itself on being a "rich and diverse environment" (School Profile, 1996-2018). Over a quarter of SUNY Plattsburgh students come from "ethnically diverse backgrounds," and the College welcomes over 350 international students from over 70 different countries (2018 Campus Plan, 2018, p. 5; International Admissions, 1996-2018). Colleagues also informed me that SUNY Plattsburgh now has a recruiter based in New

York City, which has contributed to the campus's increased diversity the past few years.

However, the city of Plattsburgh, NY, where SUNY Plattsburgh resides, provides a distinct backdrop in regards to its location, demographics, and politics that does not reflect the community on campus.

Being that the College is part of the greater State University of New York system, many international students have assumed that Plattsburgh, NY would be more diverse and urban than it is due to "New York" being in its name. However, Plattsburgh is a post-industrial town tucked away in the northeastern corner of New York State, 5 hours north of New York City and only miles from the Canadian border. Described as the "Adirondack Coast," it is situated between the Adirondack Mountains and Lake Champlain, across the Lake from Burlington, VT. It is an outdoor enthusiast's paradise, as hiking, camping, kayaking, and other outdoor activities are plentiful (School Profile, 1996-2018). Plattsburgh is also a predominantly Christian community with a population nearing 20,000 and 87.3% of it identifying as white (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Despite what some might expect of this isolated town with a demographic limited in diversity, in November of 1999, Plattsburgh elected the first openly gay mayor in New York State, Republican Daniel Stewart. He is a veteran of the United States Air Force, who ran on a platform that included "more police officers, after-school programs, and a plan to revitalize the economy by drawing tourists to the town's War of 1812 battle sites" (Sengupta, 1999). His ambitious plan for developing the Plattsburgh economy won over residents, and neither his sexual orientation nor other LGBT+ issues were brought up. Many LGBT+ activists viewed this as a victory and a sign of progress for smaller towns across the United States (Sengupta, 1999). However, as a result of SUNY Plattsburgh and Plattsburgh's distinct and, what some might say, contradictory profiles, there is oftentimes a feeling of disconnect between the campus and the

surrounding community. International students come to town and have to adjust and integrate into two new environments—campus and Plattsburgh.

To support international students in adjusting and integrating into the U.S. university system and the Plattsburgh community, the Global Education Office at SUNY Plattsburgh has implemented various programming initiatives. During my time as International Student Services Assistant, they mainly included International Student Orientation, the Partners in Cross-Cultural Learning (PICL) program, Night of Nations, and presentations on visa regulations. These programs have run for many years, as they have proven to positively impact retention rates of international students (Vogl, 2017). However, amidst a divisive political climate in the United States and declining international student enrollment, growing concern over social justice issues was ever present on campus and revealed the College's need to address them.

SUNY Plattsburgh Initiatives and Key Events

In order to gauge the needs of SUNY Plattsburgh international students, the campus as a whole, and the surrounding community, recent initiatives and significant events must be analyzed to have a sense of where each group is at, what works, and how to move forward together. Having harmonious campus and community relations helps to ensure that students, especially international students, have positive educational experiences. SUNY Plattsburgh recognizes the importance of good campus and community relations, as well, and includes “[building] our community connections” as one of its strategic elements in the 2018 Campus Plan (2018). SUNY Plattsburgh pledges that “[students] will be welcomed and supported by faculty, friends, staff, and our community” (SUNY Plattsburgh's Mission & Vision, 1996-2018). In an attempt to make students feel more welcomed and connected to the community, the College propelled special programming and marketing initiatives. They included the Partners in

Cross Cultural Learning (PICL) program, the #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign, and the Center for Community Engagement (CCE).

To support international students, specifically, PICL was launched in January 2006. Its goals were:

To ease the transition of international students to SUNY Plattsburgh and the surrounding community; to allow community members the opportunity to experience the cultural richness found at SUNY Plattsburgh; [and] to develop a deeper appreciation of at least one other culture through sharing personal experiences and social activities (Partners in Cross Cultural Learning (PICL) Program, 1996-2018).

Through the program students expand their support system and, oftentimes, view their community partners as their home away from home. PICL continues on to this day and has proven to be useful in helping international students to develop close relationships while in Plattsburgh, thus enriching their time there.

Another initiative targeted towards international students was the #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign. After the 2016 presidential election, SUNY Plattsburgh joined in Temple University's campaign initiative, "You Are Welcome Here," in an effort to make international students feel welcomed to the United States. The College utilized the slogan in its marketing, hung up a banner with it in the main student center on campus, and displayed it in and around the Global Education Office (#You Are Welcome Here, 2016). SUNY Plattsburgh sought to foster a sense of comfort and unity on campus so that international students knew they were a vital part of the community.

A third initiative that SUNY Plattsburgh created was the Center for Community Engagement. Launched in September 2016, the CCE's goal was to connect the campus

community as a whole to the Plattsburgh community through various events. It sought to create “an engaged campus and a stronger community” (Vallelunga, 2018). The Coordinator of the CCE and lecturer, Julia Devine, brought everyone together through creative events like CommUNITY Night at the Pond and a reading festival. CommUNITY Night at the pond included art, music, food trucks, and even a rock-climbing wall (Hirsch, 2017). Ms. Devine stated, “When you bring people together in a creative way, you’re able to approach more difficult topics and open the door to a deeper relationship” (Vallelunga, 2018). Building relationships to build trust was at the forefront of this effort.

Unfortunately, due to tight budget constraints, Ms. Devine received a non-renewal letter for the 2018-2019 academic year, as the Center for Community Engagement would be disbanded. Students were not happy about the College’s decision to do this and even created an online petition to save Ms. Devine’s position. It garnered 1,445 signatures. Students saw her role as fundamental to campus and community life, but the College’s leadership did not yield on its decision (Vallelunga, 2018). Eliminating such a key figure in fostering a sense of unity and trust between the campus and Plattsburgh community was the beginning of a series of events during the 2017–2018 academic year where SUNY Plattsburgh leadership was called into question by students in regards to its concern for truly creating a safe and supportive community for all students.

On February 14, 2018 a racist Snapchat post circulated the campus and ignited campus wide protests. It was created by a SUNY Plattsburgh freshman from the local Adirondack region. The “snap” appeared to threaten the physical safety of black people. The student admitted that it was an ill-conceived joke that was part of a continuous game within a private Snapchat group to see who could say the most ludicrous statement. After this “snap,” though, a member of the

group had enough of the discriminatory humor and shared the photo with others on campus. As more and more students saw it and word spread around the community, anger and frustration propelled a series of marches and meetings (Hirsch, 2018a).

On February 16, during a campus town hall meeting regarding the Snapchat post, many students of color vocalized their disapproval of SUNY Plattsburgh leadership, including the Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. J.W. Wiley. They stated that he should have done more to make the campus “feel safe and inclusive” (Hirsch, 2018c). One female student of color accused him of even disrespecting women on campus. He denied the accusation and stated that throughout his time at SUNY Plattsburgh, he had “fallen victim to the myth of the black rapist... and workplace vendettas” (Hirsch, 2018c). A few days after the town hall meeting, an anonymous letter appeared in the student center bathrooms stating that he had sexually harassed women both verbally and physically. It declared that the students needed a Chief Diversity Officer who they could talk to and who would protect them. It asked him to step down from his position to help begin the process of making the campus feel safe (Hirsch, 2018c).

This was not the first year that SUNY Plattsburgh experienced racially charged incidents. On October 23, 2015, the campus newspaper, Cardinal Points, printed a cartoon on its cover that many viewed as racist and offensive. The cartoon depicted a black man smiling, wearing a cap and gown, and walking through a “rundown, urban ghetto” above the article title, “Minority admission rates examined” (Hirsch, 2015). Students stated that the “image revealed a deeper culture of prejudice and inequality on the campus” (Hirsch, 2015). At the rallies held after its release, students shared personal anecdotes of discrimination and called for more conversation and action surrounding change on breaking down unfair stereotypes that impact their experience at SUNY Plattsburgh.

As a result of this incident, Cardinal Points leadership stepped down from their positions. The newspaper stated that its staff would go through diversity trainings each semester to help prevent situations like this from happening again. Additionally, SUNY Plattsburgh's President Ettlting formed the Diversity Task Force (DTF) (Hirsch, 2015). The DTF is comprised of "SUNY Plattsburgh faculty, staff, students, and community leaders" to help "evaluate and investigate SUNY Plattsburgh diversity efforts [and] offer recommendations to [the] Provost/President/College Council" (Diversity Task Force, 1996-2018). It is meant to support the Center for Diversity, Pluralism, and Inclusion (CDPI) by being an extended set of eyes and ears to ensure that the College is meeting its diversity goals (Diversity Task Force, 1996-2018).

SUNY Plattsburgh leadership has implemented additional strategies in response to the events of the 2017–2018 academic year. Firstly, after the College conducted an official investigation amid allegations, it fired the Chief Diversity Officer on June 22, 2018. Secondly, President Ettlting defined ten action steps to "address diversity and campus climate matters" which included implementing the Social Justice Task Force (Recommendations of the Social Justice Task Force, 2018). The Social Justice Task Force's work will "inform other action steps the College should undertake and/or what other factors should be considered" (Recommendations of the Social Justice Task Force, 2018). In its recommendations, it supported student-led initiatives that sought to engage and educate the surrounding community on matters relating to social justice by connecting with community organizations in Plattsburgh (Recommendations of the Social Justice Task Force, 2018).

In addition to SUNY Plattsburgh leadership organizing initiatives to foster a more welcoming and inclusive environment, Plattsburgh community members rallied together on March 22, 2018 for an event called "We Walk Together" to show students their support. They

marched with students up and down a main road on campus to express that they welcome all in Plattsburgh and that the racist views of some do not represent the community as a whole. Rabbi David Kominsky, one of the organizers, stated, "We value you. We want you here. We want you to feel safe" (Hirsch, 2018b). This event emoted a sense of hope and togetherness. It reflected that the students, campus, and community yearned to find a way to overcome these challenges.

Program Rationale

International students are a vital component to the economic viability of SUNY Plattsburgh. It is essential that the College takes measures to ensure that the campus and community environment is a welcoming one and one where students feel safe, despite the U.S. sociopolitical climate. The perception that the United States is an unwelcoming environment for international students, especially international students of color, is proving to be a challenge in recruitment efforts, thus decreasing the capital that they bring in, especially since other countries, such as Canada and Australia are becoming increasingly more appealing (Baer, 2018). Not only do I hope that this program design will produce long lasting changes for the SUNY Plattsburgh and Plattsburgh community relationship and improve the international student experience, but I hope that it also sets an example for other higher education institutions in similar contexts on how to overcome social justice challenges that impact students.

The program that I have designed for SUNY Plattsburgh aligns with the College's 2018 Campus Plan, as "[building] our community connections" is one of its strategic elements. It also aligns with the Social Justice Task Force's recommendation to support student-led initiatives that seek to engage and educate the surrounding community on matters relating to social justice by connecting students with community organizations in Plattsburgh (Recommendations of the Social Justice Task Force, 2018). Furthermore, SUNY Plattsburgh has pledged that "[students]

will be welcomed and supported by faculty, friends, staff, and our community” (SUNY Plattsburgh’s Mission & Vision, 1996-2018). By creating a program that aligns with established plans and pledges, it provides the College with a viable way to put meaning to their words.

Considering the events surrounding social justice on campus and in the community, a proactive approach to building a relationship of mutual learning and understanding by educating SUNY Plattsburgh students about the community in which they reside while also educating the community about the experiences of international students and students of color in Plattsburgh would hopefully lead to a more harmonious environment and improve the international student experience.

Furthermore, I hope that this program would empower students by developing their intercultural communication skills, understanding of their new surroundings, sense of self, and leadership skills so that they can continue their education with confidence and possess the ability to be active participants alongside community members in strengthening campus and community relations.

Theoretical Foundations

Designing a program that seeks to empower students, a campus, and a community while addressing issues surrounding social justice, i.e. race and intercultural relations, requires thoughtful preparation by grounding it in theoretical research. For this program, I will incorporate research on student development, intercultural communication, international student adjustment and integration at U.S. campuses, and the contact hypothesis.

Student Development

SUNY Plattsburgh’s international student population largely consists of students who Arnett (2007) describes as emerging adults. Emerging adulthood encapsulates individuals in their

late teens to mid twenties, mostly from industrialized societies. They are in a period of their lives where they are conceptualizing who they are and where they fit into the world. It is a period of personal growth and exploration and where transformational experiences can have a long-lasting impact on their lives. Pursuing an education abroad, in the United States, outside of their home culture context during this time can shape the trajectory of their life.

Creating a space for international students to reflect on the challenges that they face as emerging adults living and studying in a foreign culture could help them formulate a path that reflects their own hopes and dreams. Additionally, pursuing an education abroad “offers an ideal setting for students’ significant learning and development because they encounter new places and people, take in new ideas and information, test themselves, and, in the process, discover something new about themselves and their potential” (Gillespie et al., 2009, p. 445). It is also a chance to look at themselves critically, and define or redefine themselves.

Intercultural Communication

Furthermore, an education abroad provides the opportunity to develop emerging adults’ intercultural communication skills, which are growing more necessary as the world becomes more and more interconnected and employers are looking for graduates who can work successfully across cultures. Students who choose to study in the United States are likely to be open-minded. However, creating the opportunities for students to look deeply into themselves in order to see their filters and remind them how their culture influences their view of the world and how that might affect their new relationships abroad could increase their self-awareness. This is key in the development of intercultural communication skills (Moore Griffin, 2008).

Strengthening their self-awareness and ability to communicate more effectively cross-culturally can help them in their new environment abroad as they build new relationships.

Knowing that the words they choose, their own behaviors, and how their mind works increases consciousness to their intercultural interactions in the United States. They may look more to find a common “language,” or mutual understanding during their experience. When students are self-aware, “[they] are conscious of [their] belief systems and behaviors... Self-aware people are in tune with themselves and others. They are able to discern their motivation for acting in a given way and can listen to and learn from how others see them” (Moore Griffin, 2008, p. 188).

Incorporating the self-awareness piece into the program design could aid in assuming best intentions first. This could be particularly useful in a divisive climate where people are on high alert. It leaves room for a conversation to clarify or educate, which could be particularly useful in the Plattsburgh community based on past experiences and events.

Adjustment and Integration

Furthermore, a program that includes both domestic and international students would foster an environment for friendship amongst one another. SUNY Plattsburgh colleagues and I have observed that international students and domestic students do not mix a great deal. We attributed this to colleges and universities frequently having separate freshman orientations, a time when students establish their new friendships. Additionally, it can be attributed to the tendency for international students to form enclaves (Chen & Ross, 2015, p.155). Enclaves consist of peers from home or similar cultures, as they find comfort amongst those who speak the same language or come from the same country. It is a sort of “home away from home,” a chance for them to relax, and receive much needed support from peers who understand what they are going through in their new surroundings (Chen & Ross, 2015, p.170). However, the downside to this is a lack of development in English language skills. Socializing with U.S. students in a program, such as the one I have designed, would provide an opportunity to develop this area and,

perhaps, provide greater insight into the host culture, making adjustment and integration into SUNY Plattsburgh and the Plattsburgh community easier (Chen & Ross, 2015). Domestic students could be a resource for international students to better understand U.S. culture on campus and U.S. culture in the Plattsburgh community.

Contact Hypothesis

I have also incorporated the contact hypothesis into the program design to improve campus and community relations. The contact hypothesis states that in order to improve relations between groups “six necessary conditions... need to exist: common goals, cooperative interdependence, supportive norms, personal interaction, and opportunity for friendship” (Young, 2010, p. 3). Mere contact is not sufficient to improve relations and reduce stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination as evident in the hostile events that took place in Plattsburgh over the past few years. All parties must work together and cooperate to achieve a common goal that is upheld by everyone, including institutions, such as SUNY Plattsburgh administration, student-run organizations, community organizations, Plattsburgh City government, and Clinton County government, among others (Young, 2010). All stakeholders have been considered and incorporated into the program design.

Needs Assessment

Every campus and every community are unique and create a distinct environment when combined with one another. Taking this into consideration, I wanted to know what SUNY Plattsburgh international students and Plattsburgh area community members specifically need most and what will serve them best according to them. By including both observations and interviews in my needs assessment plan, I hoped to discover what their most pressing issues were

so that I could incorporate them into this program design. By utilizing these two methods of research, I was able to gather rich data.

Observations

By working in the SUNY Plattsburgh Global Education Office daily from July 2017 to June 2018, I was able to observe first-hand SUNY Plattsburgh initiatives, the significant events of the 2017–2018 academic year, and the College leadership’s response to the events and student and staff concerns. Not only did I have informal conversations with colleagues, but also the campus as a whole received regular emails from SUNY Plattsburgh’s president, John Ettling. He would update students and staff about actionable steps that the College was taking in regards to the events and concerns. Furthermore, I have utilized news resources to collect details about what students and the community need. These observations shaped the design of my inquiry and what questions I asked during the interviews.

Interviews

For the interviews I used purposive sampling to select and interview four SUNY Plattsburgh international students who were on campus during the 2017–2018 academic year and four members of the Plattsburgh community who lived there during that time frame as well. My intent was to interview a diverse range of people in regards to race, gender, and country of origin. To recruit participants, I first utilized the relationships that I established during my time at the College and those whose contact information I still have. When recruiting community participants proved challenging, I researched online Plattsburgh area community-based organizations and contacted individuals privately through their direct email which was provided on their organization’s website. I also contacted one individual whose information was provided to me by my second-tier supervisor at SUNY Plattsburgh.

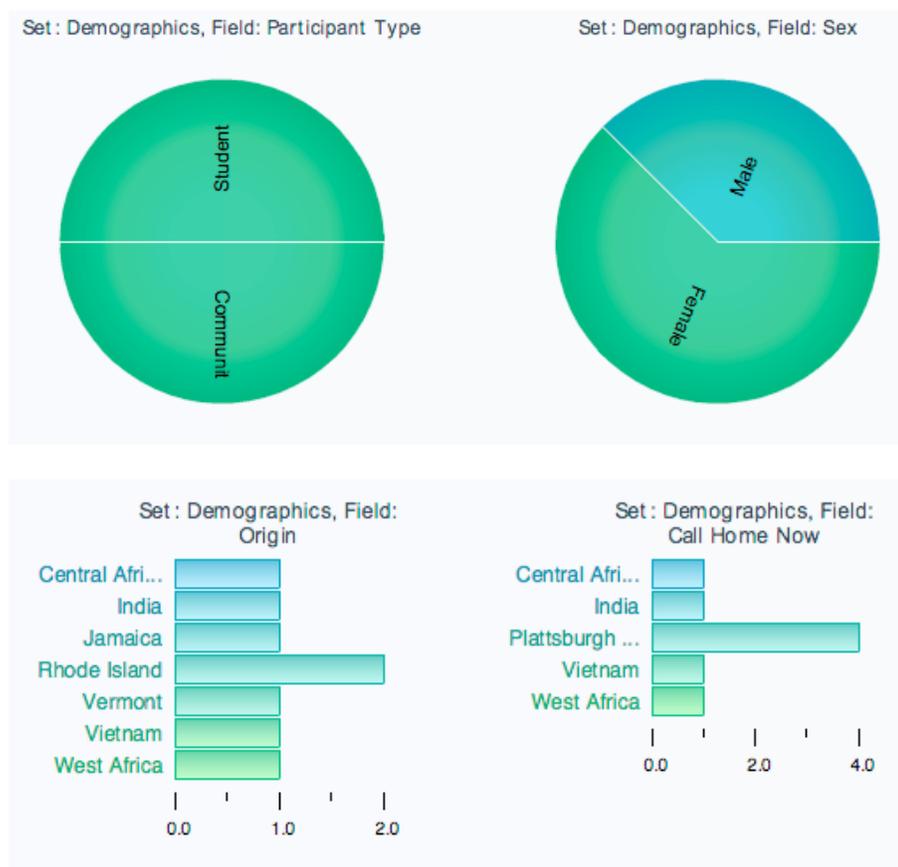
As a result of not only needing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from SIT but from SUNY Plattsburgh, as well, to conduct these interviews, I was required to have a “faculty/staff champion” from SUNY Plattsburgh to support me in the recruitment process to ensure that I was abiding by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Therefore, I utilized my second-tier supervisor. I intentionally only asked my supervisor for contact information of potential participants and never communicated whether or not the suggested individuals participated in order to protect their privacy. The interviews were conducted privately over Skype or Facebook and recorded using my iPhone recorder.

In order to ensure that the interview process was conducted ethically, I took a number of additional measures to protect participants. In my initial contact [Appendix A] through Facebook, LinkedIn, or email, I sent participants an informed consent document [Appendix B] for them to review ahead of time so that they had time to understand the full nature of the study, their anonymity would be protected, and they could opt out at any time during the interview. Since this research could have evoked traumatic experiences from the past, such as racist or other discriminatory encounters, I wanted them to be aware of this possibility prior to agreeing to proceed with the interviews. Additionally, I transcribed the conversations in Microsoft Word, leaving out their names and associated organizations and then uploaded the transcribed interviews to Dedoose to analyze the data. For the student participants who are from African countries, I categorized their countries by region, West Africa and Central Africa, in order to protect their identity since they were either the only one or one of few students from those countries.

One of the potential limitations of this needs assessment that I foresaw was that given my practicum at SUNY Plattsburgh was over and I was no longer located in Plattsburgh, it could

have been more difficult to connect with potential participants for my research. Students may have also been located in various time zones, since I was open to including alumni as well. Fortunately, time zones were not an issue and connecting with students proved easy through Facebook; as I left the account that I used for my position at SUNY Plattsburgh, “Courtney at GEO,” open for this purpose specifically. Connecting with community participants proved more challenging, but through the support of my supervisor, researching Plattsburgh area community organizations, and directly reaching out to community members, I was able to obtain a diverse pool of participants and reach my goal of eight total participants.

The following charts represent the participants of my study:



The interview questions [Appendix C] were formulated based on my observations and what I needed further clarity on to better understand the experiences and perceptions of SUNY

Plattsburgh international students and Plattsburgh area community members. I wanted to know if my observations were, in fact, accurate and also to learn what was most critical to address according to them, rather than placing my own assumptions on what their most vital needs are. Additionally, the prepared questions were merely a guide and not a rigid script in order to leave room for further inquiry in case participants revealed information that left me wanting to ask additional questions.

Findings

Through my observations, racism, stereotyping, disconnect between SUNY Plattsburgh and the surrounding community, and reactive approaches to solving a complex problem were the most pressing issues. Subsequently, the interviews revealed several themes to address and incorporate into the program design [Appendix D]. The most reoccurring themes included cross-cultural understanding and connection. Rochelle, a female student from West Africa, spoke on the need for cross-cultural understanding:

I think to have in mind that even though internationals are open-minded, but we also do have a lot of stereotypes, obviously. I am not just speaking for me, but my other international friends I hang out with, I know about it, and the little tiny... now this is hard because different internationals from different places have their very own different vision and what offends them. You know, it's their culture. But, very tiny expressions can make an international feel unwelcome in the community, not only in the Plattsburgh community, but even in their academic environment at our school. It almost creates a little barrier. We'd be like, oh yeah, there we go... that type of person... something like that. So maybe it would be useful to have a little course, pre-course, not only for

internationals for their stereotypes... for the community members and what most likely internationals would be sensitive to hear. (Personal communication, February 6, 2019)

Sam, a male student from India, described how connecting international and domestic students more purposively, providing the opportunity for dialogue would be helpful:

I believe if there was more interaction with domestic students, so kind of like a mini orientation or something after the international orientation... where you actually get to meet and spend time with domestic students as well. I mean I know the RAs, as an RA myself, try to bridge the gap between international and domestic students. But I feel the international students could be a little more hesitant to the whole change, so that doesn't initially lead to dialogue. So something to bridge that gap would have helped a lot.

(Personal communication, February 5, 2019)

Next, engagement with the international community and the Plattsburgh community, especially incorporating the youth in the surrounding area, emerged as necessary for building bridges. Diana, a female community member from Rhode Island, stated:

I think having international students here is one of the best things. I know there's also a group... we had a student from Jordan that stayed with us for a while that went to school here. So, I know there's a group that also does high school student exchanges and things like that. And, I think that's where you have to go to: elementary, junior high, high school. Those are the students... that's the age level you have to hit with exposure to more diverse experiences. (Personal communication, February 10, 2019)

Furthermore, international students expressed a desire to integrate into their new surroundings. Anna, a female student from Vietnam, affirmed:

Being away, being abroad is part of why you come. You want to learn the people, learn about the culture, and what they believe. So being in a class that gives you the opportunity to meet more people and kind of, you know, blend in better is exceptional. And, I think that's really helpful. And, I really want to fit in, you know, if they offer some class like that. And it just helps with the transition better, you know? (Personal communication, February 12, 2019)

Additionally, community members communicated a strong need for the Plattsburgh community to interact with the international community. Joseph, a male community member from Rhode Island, conveyed:

When I moved from Boston and I came up here, I was like wow! I would go to Lake Placid. We'd go up to Montreal. We'd go over to Vermont to Church Street, you know, Burlington. And there were so many people who'd say they'd never been to Montreal. They didn't even go to Lake Placid. They were very cloistered. And, I think, to an extent having the university helps to take some of that away and force people to acknowledge that there are people outside of the Plattsburgh area. And, I think that's a very good thing. People need to be aware that there's more than our small little corner of the world. (Personal communication, February 11, 2019)

Lastly, interviewees expressed challenges regarding diversity, stereotypes, and racism. Edward, a male student from Central Africa shared:

I had everything from racism to anything you can imagine. I never thought it would be like that, but I faced it. So, I guess I had to fight. The thing I did, and I think everybody should do is... when you face those types of situations, you just have to share with

people, so they can know what is happening. (Personal communication, February 9, 2019)

Furthermore, Shannon, a female community member from Jamaica, stated:

And if the incident hadn't happened last year... that caused a lot of media outlets to run the whole situation over the media and all of that, they wouldn't have taken heed. They would have just kept sweeping it under the rug... and have these international students come over here and be treated the way they are treated... [International students] do have to pay an enormous amount of money to come here and get an education, yet they are not being treated equally. And, I don't think it's supposed to happen that way because if the tables were turned and they were going to, especially my country, trust me... they're treated even better than my own citizens. (Personal communication, February 11, 2019)

One finding that is particularly interesting is the Plattsburgh government's awareness of the need to strategically plan for a more welcoming and inclusive environment for the betterment and sustainability of the community. Amanda, a female community member from Vermont, stated:

The city knows that they have to work on that too. They're really working hard at being a destination for Canadian visitors... they're really working on image and attracting people, keeping the youth in the community here. And, we know that youth... they care a lot more about global, I guess, issues, and exposure, and culture, and are less likely to move to an all white community like Plattsburgh... there was a goal to get a certain number of new families to move into Plattsburgh by a certain year... What do we have to do to make this community more attractive? And, I think what you're doing; the research that you're doing right now and the program that you're creating in your mind is... it

speaks directly to one of the parts of that goal. Like we need to make this community more inclusive, welcoming, culturally appreciative, and all of that... the greater that the town structure, governance structure can work with the university's governance structure... everybody wins, right? (Personal communication, February 10, 2019)

Despite having faced challenging circumstances in Plattsburgh, there was a sense of hope in a couple of the interviews that things could change in Plattsburgh amidst the current political climate. Edward from Central Africa addressed how his perception of the community evolved during his time in Plattsburgh:

Obviously, it changed. It's also because of the political context at the time. I mean... until today. So, that really contributed to change the way I thought about the community. But, I don't really blame them like I told you. Some people behave the way they behave because they just don't know. If they know what's happening... if they know where you are coming from... if they know another reality, I bet they would be thinking differently because if I think a certain type of way, it's because I learned. I tried to go toward people who are not from my country, from my society. I tried to understand where they are coming from... why they're thinking some type of way. So if the other party does the same thing for me, I believe things can change. (Personal communication, February 9, 2019)

Joseph from Rhode Island spoke to the importance of empathy and focusing on grassroots initiatives:

All we can do is have faith that we go about our lives and do things that we think are right and good and try to espouse a middle of the road policy to people that we can understand and empathize with their feelings whether that be to the far left or the far

right... Like I said, we have to work on our own small community. I can make things a little more comfortable in Plattsburgh for people who are in need and those people in turn are happier. Maybe, as we do that around the world, things will get a little better. And when people aren't uncomfortable, afraid, worried about where their next meal is coming from, living on the edge of poverty, perhaps, they will feel less need to look for scapegoats to blame their problems on and things can get better. (Personal communication, February 11, 2019)

As a result of conducting the Needs Assessment, the Goals and Objectives of the program design have been amended from the Capstone Proposal to tend to what was revealed as the most pressing needs of international students and the Plattsburgh community. The program is a two-sequence course that spans across two semesters, covering topics that tend to better cross-cultural understanding and fosters an environment for international students to develop deeper connections with other international students, domestic students, and the community. It educates domestic and international students on topics regarding diversity, intercultural communication, politics, civic engagement, race, identity, group dynamics, and leadership in an interactive course, while creating space for educating the community on these topics, as well, in a service-learning component. It operates from a place of "radical empathy," a term Dr. Tatsushi Arai (2017) utilized in his Mediation class at SIT Graduate Institute, as it seeks to understand in order to connect, creating space for SUNY Plattsburgh students and the Plattsburgh community to come together, learn other realities, and collaborate on a project to improve the condition of the community as a whole and, consequently, the international student experience.

Goals and Objectives

Program Goals and Objectives

- 1) The program would help to improve international student retention rates at SUNY Plattsburgh by
 - a) Providing students with the opportunity to develop close relationships with domestic and other international students;
 - b) Providing greater insight into human behavior, cross-cultural understanding, and U.S. politics.
- 2) The program would provide students with practical tools to address real world challenges by
 - a) Providing opportunities to learn and apply intercultural communication theory to optimize multicultural team productivity;
 - b) Providing opportunities to learn strategies and frameworks from community organizations that are working towards the betterment of Plattsburgh as a whole.
- 3) The program would support the Social Justice Task Force's recommendations to engage and educate the surrounding community on matters relating to social justice by
 - a) Connecting students to opportunities to work with community organizations or implement their own projects in Plattsburgh;
 - b) Provide students with the opportunity to apply to become campus-community liaisons upon completion of the program.

Participant Goals and Objectives

- 1) Students will develop greater awareness of their cultural lenses and those of the Plattsburgh community by

- a) Being able to identify various meanings of particular behaviors depending on the cultural context;
 - b) Being able to identify norms that are different in their new environment compared to norms in their home communities.
- 2) Students will learn challenges people of varying identities face depending on the context by
- a) Reading and listening to the stories of people from various backgrounds;
 - b) Engaging in class discussion about these stories and, hopefully, sharing their own.
- 3) Students will develop greater confidence and improve their sense of self by
- a) Being able to push their comfort zones and completing activities that challenge them;
 - b) Being able to articulate how they see themselves and how they have grown from the beginning of the course to the end.

Program Description

In order to achieve program and participant goals and objectives, the program that I propose has taken into account existing resources at SUNY Plattsburgh so as to utilize available talent and expertise. In order to be mindful of human resources and cost, it would replace the existing PICL program to serve the most pressing needs of international students. This program consists of two courses that are worth two credits each. Both courses satisfy the general education requirement, including the Integration Requirement in Global Issues (General Education, 1996-2018). The first course is a prerequisite to the second course. It is interactive and covers topics regarding stereotyping, intercultural communication, social psychology, cultural and ethnic diversity, Plattsburgh and U.S. politics, civic engagement, team building, leadership, race, and identity.

The second course is the service-learning piece where students will work side-by-side with an existing organization or implement their own project. If students choose to work with an existing organization, they must be active participants by dedicating at least two hours a week attending meetings, actively engaging in dialogue, and implementing a project with the organization within the Plattsburgh area community. Students who seek to implement their own project in the community must, first, receive approval from the course instructor. The project must demonstrate that they are actively engaging with the Plattsburgh community through dialogue, teamwork, and attention to the needs of the community for at least two hours a week. Students also have the option to work independently or to pair up with another student, allowing connections to carry over from the first course and, potentially, deepen. During the final class, students will present their projects via a poster presentation session, which will be open to the public. Afterwards, they will give a 10-minute presentation on their project to all attendees: classmates, the instructor, and community members.

Each course has 10 spaces for international students and 10 spaces for domestic students. Students who are interested in participating, but cannot register due to spaces filling up, may be placed on a waiting list. If not all spaces are filled by the end of the registration period, the students-in-waiting may be granted a place in the program. It is open to all students, but marketing and recruitment efforts would be targeted towards first year students so as to build longer-lasting connections that leave greater impact. Initially, each course would be offered once a year: the first course in the fall and the second course in the spring. However, if they are in high demand and the budget allows, they would each be offered once a semester.

Curriculum

The program curriculum consists of specific topics for each class in the first course. Since there would be possibly seven different instructors with unique skill sets, expertise, and personalities, I want to allow them some freedom to put together their individual class or classes as they see fit. However, part of the existence of this program is to foster more opportunities for connection amongst international and domestic students, so classes must be interactive.

Dialogue, activities, and movement are highly encouraged.

Cross-Cultural Connections and Service I

Class 1: Course Introduction

This class will cover Intercultural Communication and TED Talk “The Danger of a Single Story” by novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Students will be introduced to the novel, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as it is assigned reading. Students will be connecting the knowledge learned throughout the course to the book as they read, preparing for discussion of it during the final class and in the final paper.

Class 2: Social Psychology

This class will be a modified version of the PSY 361 course, introducing topics related to aggression, outgroup bias, and interpersonal attraction” (2018-2019 Undergraduate/Graduate Catalog, 1996-2018).

Class 3: Cultural & Ethnic Diversity

This class will be a modified version of the SWK 305 course geared towards a broader audience, introducing topics related to “the impact of cultural and ethnic diversity in [U.S.] society...Oppression, exploitation, prejudice, discrimination, and devaluation

of groups based on ‘differences’” (2018-2019 Undergraduate/Graduate Catalog, 1996-2018)

Class 4: Teambuilding & Leadership

This class will provide students the opportunity to develop their ability to work in teams, their leadership skills, and their ability to challenge themselves to push beyond their comfort zones, all while experiencing the natural beauty of the Adirondacks. The class will travel as a group to Ausable Chasm, “The Grand Canyon of the Adirondacks,” and participate in the Adventure Trail ropes course.

Class 5: Civic Engagement 1

Students will learn strategies for engaging with the local community. The class will travel together to visit the Rotary Club of Plattsburgh to learn about their work in the community and to get to know some of the needs in the Plattsburgh area.

Class 6: Political Landscape of Plattsburgh and the United States

This class will be a modified version of PSC 345, exploring “demographic and attitudinal foundations of voting choices in U.S. and N.Y. elections” (2018-2019 Undergraduate/Graduate Catalog, 1996-2018).

Class 7: Civic Engagement 2

This will be a continuation of Civic Engagement 1. The class will travel together to attend a Plattsburgh Town Board Meeting to gauge a wider sense of community needs. After the meeting, the class will meet with local government leaders to ask further questions regarding underserved needs in the community and plans to address them.

Class 8: Race & Identity

The class will analyze and discuss *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Students will utilize the knowledge that they learned throughout the course to contribute to the discussion and incorporate these ideas into a final paper. For the final 5-page paper, students will be required to compare and contrast their life experiences to that of Ifemelu and Obinze, the main characters of the novel.

Cross-Cultural Connections and Service II

Class 1: Introduction

Students will learn frameworks for conducting needs assessments to help them as they explore where they are able to best serve the needs of the Plattsburgh community.

Class 2-7: Service Project

Students will utilize the knowledge they have acquired from Course 1 and the first class of Course 2, working alongside a local organization or conducting their own service project in the community.

Class 8: Poster Presentations

Students will participate in poster presentations, sharing with attendees the work that they have done throughout the semester and describing the impact it has had or it will hopefully have on the community.

Staffing Plan

SUNY Plattsburgh's Global Education Office (GEO) would coordinate the program. The graduate assistant who would have coordinated PICL would now become Coordinator of this program and instruct Class 1, the introduction, of Cross-Cultural Connections and Service I. My hope would be to recruit Julia Devine, former Coordinator of the Center for Community

Engagement, to become one of the main instructors, leading Civic Engagement I, Civic Engagement II, and Teambuilding & Leadership while also being the sole instructor of Cross-Cultural Connections and Service II. For the remaining courses, Plattsburgh professors who currently specialize in these topics would be brought on board. If an individual specializes in more than one of the topics, they can teach all of those topics. If they are only specialized to teach one, that is fine as well. Any combination works. For each class an instructor teaches, they will be credited 0.25 credits to their total number of credit hours. SUNY Plattsburgh administration will be responsible for compensating instructors of the course. However, the graduate assistant would still fall under GEO's budget.

If the Program Coordinator and Instructor (s) are not van certified, hiring two van drivers will be required to transport the class to excursions off campus: Ausable Chasm, the Rotary Club, and the Town Board Meeting.

Program Marketing

This program would be marketed in several ways: at International Student Orientation, at Freshmen Orientation, in the Course Catalog, by professors and academic advisors, and using flyers around campus, especially in the Angell College Center (the ACC), the Center for Diversity, Pluralism, & Inclusion (CDPI), and the Global Education Office (GEO). The Program Coordinator will work together with GEO's Marketing and Communication Coordinator, Michelle St. Onge, utilizing the Office's social media platforms on Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook to promote the program and the poster presentations at the end of Course 2. Students will also be responsible for promotion of the poster presentation session, utilizing strategies they learned throughout the program.

Student Recruitment and Admissions

The goal is to recruit a diverse range of students to participate in this program so that the class is rich with varying perspectives and stories for class discussion. Also, the course would target new international students and domestic freshmen, but all students are welcome to register. Recruitment efforts would be heavily focused on the Fall International Student Orientation and the Fall Freshmen Orientation before students register for classes, since the fall semester has the largest incoming class. Spring Orientations would also have sessions to recruit participants so as to plant the seed for the fall semester.

Logistics

Due to the nature of this course and the topics covered, Course 1 will have to be mostly evening classes during the week so that students are able to meet with local community groups when they have their meetings. However, the Teambuilding and Leadership class excursion to Ausable Chasm will take place on a Saturday, when the park is open and there is daylight. The Introduction and Poster Presentations of Course 2 will take place in the evening, as well, so that community members can also attend. Course 2 Class 2-7 can take place at the convenience of the students and those that they are working with on their project. They will have to log their hours and have a designated contact at the organization sign to confirm their attendance. Students must dedicate 12 hours total, two per week for six weeks, to their community service projects.

Since Course 1 and Course 2 are worth two credits each, they will each meet once a week for two hours for eight consecutive weeks. Classes will meet in the following locations:

Cross-Cultural Connections and Service I

Class 1-3: SUNY Plattsburgh classroom

Class 4: Meet at designated location on campus. Travel together to Ausable Chasm.

Class 5: Meet at designated location on campus. Travel together to the Rotary Club.

Class 6: SUNY Plattsburgh classroom

Class 7: Meet at designated location on campus. Travel together to Town Board Meeting.

Class 8: SUNY Plattsburgh classroom

Cross-Cultural Connections and Service II

Class 1: SUNY Plattsburgh classroom

Classes 2-7: To be determined by student, instructor, and community partners

Class 8: SUNY Plattsburgh student center, the Angell College Center

Transportation to community organizations and excursions will be provided for Cross-Cultural Connections and Service I. Students will be required to meet at the designated location no later than 15 minutes prior to van departure. Each van can hold 24 people: 20 students, two instructors, and 2 van drivers. However, transportation to and from service sites for Cross-Cultural Connections and Service II is the responsibility of the students.

Health and Safety Plan

In order to ensure the health and safety of all participants during this program, special guidelines will be put in place for the excursions off campus. First, all students must wear a seatbelt when riding in the SUNY Plattsburgh vans. Secondly, students must wear appropriate attire for the Ausable Chasm excursion. Sneakers or hiking shoes are required and all students must wear a helmet.

In order to participate in the course, students must be at least 18 years of age and sign a health and safety waiver [Appendix E], demonstrating that they understand any potential risk that might be involved in participating in the course, especially the Adventure Trail activity, and that SUNY Plattsburgh is not liable should any unfortunate event occur.

Crisis Management Plan

The Adirondack region is not known for any natural disasters, terrorism, or extreme political unrest. However, potential crises, such as a car accident, could arise while traveling to and from Ausable Chasm, the Rotary Club meeting, the Plattsburgh Town Board Meeting, and service locations. The Adventure Trail ropes course also poses potential risk for injury. If a crisis situation should arise, the Coordinator and/or Instructor will follow the following steps:

- 1) Increase **knowledge** of the situation. Evaluate the trustworthiness of the information, call emergency responders, and notify all staff present. Communicate if the crisis is a Level 1, 2, or 3 [Appendix F]. The crisis level can be readjusted throughout the crisis, as more information is provided or the situation de-escalates.
- 2) **Assess** the situation further. Identify the first responder and assess the severity and time sensitivity. The decision maker first in line is the Program Coordinator. If they are not present, next in line is the Instructor. If the Program Coordinator or Instructor is incapacitated or unreachable, next in line is a designated Lead Student. Check in on the emotional status of the participants.
- 3) **Communicate**. Contact SUNY Plattsburgh Police to inform them of the situation and then the Associate Vice President of Global Education. Identify a safe location and gather there. Communicate only the essential information to participants in order to minimize panic.
- 4) Make a **decision** in a timely manner, while being clear and firm.
- 5) **Take action**. Again, locate all participants and talk to them individually if necessary. Fill out an accident report and record events, actions, and other pertinent information in real time to reduce the risk of forgetting key information. Reflect on the decisions made thus far and make adjustments as needed.

6) **Reflect.** When the situation subsides, connect participants and staff to mental health services. Create time and space for self-care, like yoga, other forms of exercise, journaling, Way of Council, etc.

7) **Return to normal.** Review the crisis management plan and its effectiveness. Obtain feedback from all stakeholders and make adjustments where needed (Gehen et al., 2016).

Budget

Considering SUNY Plattsburgh's current financial state, the goal is to minimize additional cost to the College. GEO PICL funds would transfer over to this program to cover transportation costs and the excursion to Ausable Chasm. Based on PICL's budget for the 2018-2019 academic year, GEO's contribution could be up to \$1,000. Additionally, each year GEO hires a Graduate Assistant to coordinate the cross-cultural learning program, so that is already built into its budget. The College would bear the cost of compensating professors for additional teaching hours. Refer to Appendix G for Budget Notes.

GEO Contributions:

- Ausable Chasm Excursion: \$608.51
- Rotary Club Excursion: \$92.54
- Town Board Meeting Excursion: \$94.29
- Graduate Assistant (Program Coordinator): \$8,688

College Contributions:

- 4 Credits for Instructors: To be determined by SUNY Plattsburgh administration

Evaluation Plan

Formative

In order to evaluate how the Cross-Cultural Connections and Service program is operating, students will be required to answer a short survey [Appendix H] after Classes 4 and 8 in both Cross-Cultural Connections and Service I and II. The Program Coordinator will utilize Survey Monkey to administer the surveys to students via email. In order to ensure that students participate in the surveys, completing the surveys will be a component of their participation grade. The Program Coordinator will be the designated person who collects, analyzes, and synthesizes the data.

Summative

To evaluate the results of the program, the Program Coordinator will also administer a survey where students analyze their own cross-cultural understanding [Appendix I] at the beginning of Cross-Cultural Connections and Service I, at the end of Cross-Cultural Connections and Service I, and at the end of Cross-Cultural Connections and Service II. The Coordinator will collect, analyze, and synthesize this data as well. The surveys will evaluate how much students individually and as a whole perceive their overall growth in cross-cultural understanding. The students' five-page papers and poster presentations will be utilized by the Coordinator to analyze the program's impact on cross-cultural understanding and connection to the community as a whole. And finally, retention numbers year-to-year will be analyzed to gauge the program's impact on international students' desire to stay and complete their education at SUNY Plattsburgh.

Conclusions

In an age where U.S. higher education institutions lack federal and state funding and remain dependent on the recruitment and retention of international students, innovative practices must be put into place to ensure international students complete their education in the United States and continue to be recruited to study in the U.S. through established recruitment channels, despite the political context. SUNY Plattsburgh international students and Plattsburgh area community members have expressed the need for cross-cultural understanding and connection in order to improve their experiences. The Cross-Cultural Connections and Service Program addresses these needs through a radically empathetic approach by providing students with intrinsic insight into the new community in which they reside and creating space for deep, authentic connections to form with the community, domestic students, and other international students. It empowers students and community members by creating opportunities for students to educate the community on cross-cultural challenges and implement a project that will make a positive impact on the overall well being of the community. As a result of this program, students would be adequately prepared to, potentially, become campus-community liaisons, working with SUNY Plattsburgh leadership and Plattsburgh area leaders to continue projects that they have already begun. Furthermore, students who have completed this program would be well equipped to act as resources for ways to continue strengthening campus and community relations. By fostering an environment of cross-cultural understanding, collaboration, and service, international student numbers and their experiences at SUNY Plattsburgh could improve.

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Appendix A
Community Member Recruitment Letter

Dear [community member's name],

I hope this message finds you well and that you are staying warm!

My name is Courtney, and I am a master's student at SIT Graduate Institute. I completed my practicum at SUNY Plattsburgh's Global Education Office during the 2017–2018 academic year. I am in the process of writing my capstone (master's thesis) in which I am designing a service - learning, leadership, and integration program for international students at SUNY Plattsburgh.

For this project, I must do some research to guide my program design. Therefore, I will be interviewing 4 SUNY Plattsburgh students and 4 community members. I am hoping that you would be willing to allow me to interview you for this project :)

Please find attached to this email the informed consent document that I will read at the beginning of each interview, so you have an idea of the parameters of this study. The interview would take place via Skype or Facebook video and should take approximately 30 minutes. I would like to conduct interviews as soon as possible, ideally next week!

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Courtney

Courtney Gehen | Master's Candidate
SIT Graduate Institute
International Education
(716) 748-9440

Student Recruitment Letter

Hi [student's name],

How are you? I hope this message finds you well and that you are staying warm!

I am in the process of writing my capstone (master's thesis) in which I am designing a service - learning, leadership, and integration program for international students at SUNY Plattsburgh.

For this project, I must do some research to guide my program design. So, I will be interviewing 4 SUNY Plattsburgh students and 4 community members. I am hoping that you would be willing to allow me to interview you for this project :)

Please find attached to this message the informed consent document that I will read at the beginning of each interview, so you have an idea of the parameters for this study. The interview would take place via Skype or Facebook video and should take approximately 30 minutes. I would like to conduct interviews as soon as possible, ideally next week!

Please let me know if you are able and willing to participate in this study! Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Courtney

Courtney Gehen | Master's Candidate
SIT Graduate Institute
International Education
(716) 748-9440

Appendix B
Consent Statement

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by me, Courtney Gehen, a master's candidate at SIT Graduate Institute. The purpose of this research is to help guide a program design to build more harmonious relations between SUNY Plattsburgh and the surrounding community in order to improve the student experience, especially that of international students.

Approximately 4 SUNY Plattsburgh international students, current and/or alumni, and 4 Plattsburgh area community members who lived in the Plattsburgh area during the 2017–2018 academic year will participate in the study. Each participant's interview will be recorded and subsequently transcribed by me, the interviewer. If you would like to receive a copy of your interview transcript to review and/or expand upon your answers before the data is analyzed, please contact me within 24 hours upon completion of the interview.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be given a pseudonym and will remain anonymous with only me, the researcher, knowing your identity. There are no foreseeable risks to participants of this study, with the exception of possibly bringing up past events that may have been challenging to experience.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to participate, to withdraw from the study after the interview has commenced, or to refuse to answer any question asked by me, the researcher.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at any point in time.

Appendix C
Interview Guide for Students

1. Tell me about where you call home.
2. What made you decide to come live and study in Plattsburgh, NY?
3. Did your expectations meet reality? Please, explain why or why not.
4. What challenges have you faced while being a student at SUNY Plattsburgh?
5. Is there anything that you think would have helped to make your transition into life on campus and in the surrounding community any easier?
6. Do you think having more friends from the United States would be helpful? If so, how?
7. Do you think it would benefit other international students? If so, in what ways?
8. How connected do you feel to the Plattsburgh community?
9. Do you have any stereotypes unique to the Plattsburgh community? To the United States?
What are those?
10. Have these stereotypes changed or stayed the same? If so, how?
11. What types of projects would you be interested in working on in the community?
12. Would you want to take a course that did excursions off campus? For example, trips to get to know the local culture, service projects?
13. Do you have any suggestions for excursions and/or activities?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share?

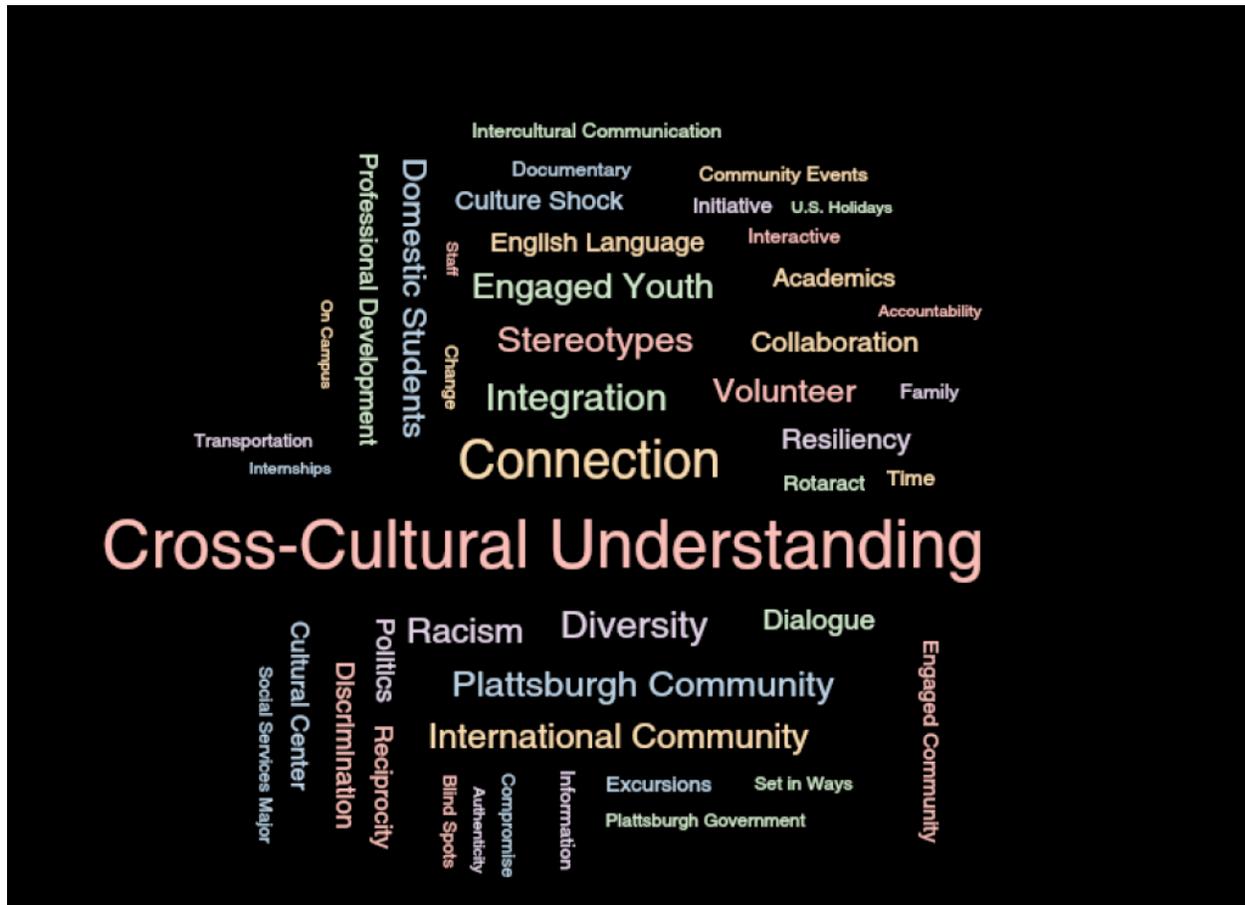
Thank you for your time and insights.

Interview Guide for Community Members

1. Tell me about where you call home.
2. What made you decide to live or stay in Plattsburgh, NY?
3. What role do you believe SUNY Plattsburgh plays in the community?
4. Do you have any stereotypes in regards to the College and/or the students that go there? What are those?
5. How often do you interact with SUNY Plattsburgh students? International students? Can you describe these experiences to me: Are they positive, negative, or neutral?
6. How do you feel when you hear that some international students, especially those of color, do not feel safe in Plattsburgh?
7. What do you think can be done in order to change this?
8. Would you or your organization be interested in working with SUNY Plattsburgh students on implementing projects within the community?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and insights.

Appendix D
Interview Themes



Appendix E
Health and Safety Waiver

I understand that the service and adventure disciplines of the Cross-Cultural Connections and Service I and Cross-Cultural Connections and Service II curriculum at SUNY Plattsburgh inherent risks. These activities include, but are not limited to, participating in Ausable Chasm's Adventure Trail ropes course and traveling to and from Ausable Chasm, the Rotary Club, the Plattsburgh Town Board Meeting, and designated service locations.

In consideration of the right to participate in Cross-Cultural Connections and Service I and Cross Cultural Connections and Service II classes, trips, or projects, I have and do hereby assume all risks and will hold the State of New York and SUNY Plattsburgh and its agents harmless from any and all liability, actions, causes of action, debts, claims, demands of every kind and nature whatsoever which may arise out of or in connection with my instruction or participation in any trips arranged for me by SUNY Plattsburgh. These terms, therefore, shall serve as a release and assumption of risk for myself and my heirs, executor and administrators and for all members of my family.

By my signature I acknowledge that I have read all of the above and that I understand and accept the risks inherent in my participation in these activities.

This release and assumption of risk waiver shall remain in full force and effect once the courses stated above have commenced until their completion.

Name: (please print) _____

Signature: _____ Dept. Rep.: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

(Annual Release & Assumption of Risks for Expeditionary Studies Majors, 2019)

Appendix F
Crisis Levels

Level 1 Low (No Immediate Threat)

Level 2 Moderate (Safety at Risk)

Level 3 High (High Risk/Harm Occurred)

(Gehen et al., 2016)

Appendix G
Budget Notes

Ausable Chasm Excursion

- Local School Group Admission Rate = \$5.00 per student, Free for teachers
 - 22 people (20 students, 2 Van Drivers, 2 Free Teachers) x \$5.00 = \$110.00
- School Group Adventure Trail Rate = \$15.00 per person
 - 22 people (20 students, 2 Teachers) x \$15.00 = \$330.00
- 8% Sales Tax (Admission + Adventure Trail) = \$475.20
- Transportation
 - SUNY Plattsburgh Van = \$14 per day + \$0.70 per mile driven
 - $\$14 + (\$0.70 \times 13.3 \text{ miles}) = \23.31
 - Van Driver = \$11 per hour (approximately)
 - 2 Van Drivers (\$11 x 5 hours) = \$110.00
 - Transportation Total = \$133.31
- Total Cost
 - $\$475.20 + \$133.31 = \$608.51$

Rotary Club Excursion

- SUNY Plattsburgh Van = \$14 per day + \$0.70 per mile driven
 - $\$14 + (\$0.70 \times 2.2 \text{ miles}) = \15.54
- Van Driver = \$11 per hour (approximately)
 - 2 Van Drivers (\$11 x 3.5 hours) = \$77.00
- Total Cost = \$92.54

Town Board Meeting Excursion

- SUNY Plattsburgh Van = \$14 per day + \$0.70 per mile driven
 - $\$14 + (\$0.70 \times 4.7 \text{ miles}) = \17.29
- Van Driver = \$11 per hour (approximately)
 - 2 Van Drivers ($\$11 \times 3.5 \text{ hours}$) = \$77.00
- Total Cost = \$94.29

Appendix H
Formative Evaluation Survey

Please describe what works for you in this course.

Please describe what does not work for you in this course.

Do you have any suggestions?

Appendix I
Summative Evaluation Survey

Directions: Rate yourself on the following, where 1 indicates strongly disagree; 2 indicates disagree; 3 indicates neither agree nor disagree; 4 indicates agree; and 5 indicates strongly agree:

I understand the dynamics of cultural differences and can apply that understanding through engagement with another culture.

1 2 3 4 5

I can see global connections in the analysis of significant issues and perceiving multiple perspectives and interpretations of those issues.

1 2 3 4 5

I see myself as a global citizen.

1 2 3 4 5

I understand how my identity impacts my experience with the “global other.”

1 2 3 4 5

I can understand and appreciate the context and perspective of the global other.

1 2 3 4 5

I can apply cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness to a variety of situations, societies, and cultures.

1 2 3 4 5

(Gobbo, 2017)