First-Year Experience: International Students

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FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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PIM 74

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

May 16, 2016

Advisor: Dr. Sora Friedman
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Abstract

International students come from various backgrounds, academic ability, English fluency, and knowledge of American and academic culture. Through a series of student surveys and interviews with both students and international education professionals, this capstone attempts to meet the need that international students are expressing at Worcester State University (WSU). One way international educators can attempt to fill this gap is through building a First-Year Experience (FYE) program that is uniquely for international students. The FYE will start as a series of workshops called International Student & Scholar Workshop Series. The workshops will cover the areas students said they were lacking in support, which include finding on-campus jobs, applying for scholarships, getting social support, and having more resources to comfortably integrate into WSU’s community. The second component of the FYE is the Student Social Hour hosted by the International Programs Office. The social hours are important because international students expressed difficulty meeting other international and American students. Social hour sessions will be geared towards helping students improve their English skills, inviting different clubs and organizations on campus to come mingle with international students, and other related activities. This part of the program is designed to help bridge the gap international students feel when trying to make American friends and find a niche in Worcester State’s community. The foundation for a future First-Year Experience program will address the explicit needs of international students at WSU and utilize on-campus resources.
Introduction

International students come from all over the world to study in the United States with the leading places of origin being China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia (IIE, 2016). There are many factors that influence an international student’s choice in selecting a study abroad destination. The top six factors are experiencing new ways of thinking and acting in the field of study, improving chances for an international career, receiving a broader and more flexible education, gaining opportunities to develop their personality and become more independent, and improving career aspects and their chances of getting a job in their home country (Obst & Forster, 2004). However, what are the reasonings international students use to specifically select U.S. institutions for their destination of study? The most important reason is the reputation of academic qualifications or degrees and the second is fluency in English (Obst & Forster, 2004). Students also chose their destination by first deciding on a university (Obst & Forster, 2004). It is also important to students that the university offers a specific program or course in their area of specialization (Obst & Forster, 2004). A few other top reasons for choosing the United States is the possibility to receive financial aid from the host university, technologically advanced teaching and learning methods, and levels of support and advice given to international students (Obst & Forster, 2004). Offering First-Year Experience program, or a similar program, would help address the unique needs of international students, as well as increase the levels of support and advice that international students rank as important when selecting a U.S. higher education institution to study at.
Positioning

Working in the International Programs Office (IPO) as an intern, I have been able to experience two different aspects of international education. The first aspect is study abroad advising and programing and the second is international student support and programming. Both study abroad and international student support have their own uniqueness and value in the field of international education. However, international students require additional support while studying in the United States. After discussing the different needs of international students with the Director of International Programs at Worcester State University, I became interested in learning more about Freshman Seminars and First-Year Experience (FYE) programs for international students. There is not a lot of research on FYEs or freshman seminars for international students, but the information available is informative and interesting. It would be beneficial to WSU international students to have a FYE program and to expand on the research done on the topic of international student FYE programs.

Worcester State University

WSU is situated in Worcester, Massachusetts. It is the state’s second largest city, which is home to 181,045 residents and houses nine colleges and universities. WSU was “founded in 1874 as a teacher-training school and has grown to become a traditional liberal arts and sciences university” (WSU, 2014). WSU offers “programs spanning the biomedical sciences, business, humanities, behavioral sciences, the health professions, and, of course, education” (WSU, 2014). Worcester State University also “offers 61 undergraduate majors and minors, 31 master’s degrees,
post-baccalaureate certificates, and advanced graduate study certificates as well as real-time access to online, noncredit professional training” (WSU, 2014). WSU hosts a range of international students. Degree-seeking international students make up about 0.8 percent of the student body (WSU Fact Book, 2014), which equates to 59 international students from various countries (WSU Fact Book, 2014). This does not include exchange students and international students enrolled in the Intensive English Language Institute (IELI). The exact number of combined international students studying at WSU is not official, but is somewhere around 75 to 100 students. According to the WSU Fact Book (2014), one of WSU’s goals is to “implement recruitment strategies designed to increase diversity within the student body” (p. 17). As the student body diversifies, which includes recruiting more international students, there will be a need to increase international student support.

**Literature Review**

Since 1948/49 when the Institute of International Education (IIE) started recording the number of international students studying in the United States, there has been a steady increase. According to IIE, in 1948/49 there were a total of 25,464 international students (Enrollment Trends, 2016). During the 2013/2014 academic year there was an 8.1 percent increase in international students studying in the United States from the previous year (Enrollment Trends, 2016). Moreover, during the 2014/15 academic year there were a total of 974,926 international students studying at American colleges and universities, a 10 percent increase from the year
before (Research and Publications, 2016). Massachusetts alone hosts 11 percent of international students enrolled in a higher education institution (IIE, 2016). According to IIE (2016), 58 percent of international students in the United States come from four countries: China (31 percent), India (14 percent), South Korea (7 percent), and Saudi Arabia (6 percent). The impact that international students make on the economy cannot be overlooked. With a steady increase in revenue, the U.S. saw $30.8 billion dollars spent on the U.S. economy by international students last year, 2014/15 (IIE, 2016).

**International Students on U.S. Campuses**

Having international students on campus also benefits domestic students and exposes them to cultural sensitivities and global understanding. Mamiseishvili (2012) states “internationally diverse student body[ies] bring valuable educational, cultural, and economic benefits to U.S. colleges and universities” (p.2). American students will also acquire the skills to interact with people from diverse backgrounds, work in today’s global workplace (Mamiseishvili, 2012) and be prepared to become global citizens (NAFSA, 2003). The contributions of international graduate students are great. According to Andrade (2005) “not only do they contribute to university research programs, they also serve as teaching assistants, enabling universities to offer undergraduate courses, particularly in scientific fields where American students are in short supply” (p. 102). Although international students make many positive contributions, they often face additional transitional and adjustment challenges living in a foreign culture and speaking a foreign language. Unfortunately, international students are usually unprepared,
whether it be emotionally, psychologically, or both, for being a minority in an unknown majority culture (Andrade, 2006). The language barrier (English) is the most significant problem that most international students face (Mori, 2000). There are other variables that affect international students’ academic success, like time management, classroom dynamics, social and educational assistance, students’ motivation and attitudes, and students’ perception of their own success (Abel, 2002).

**English Proficiency and Academics**

Language is the major barrier for international students in the United States and would present a problem for anyone moving to a foreign country. Language difficulties faced by international students are varied and different depending on where they are from. Studies show that international students are usually the best educated in their home societies, which result in their families, friends, and academic sponsors holding unrealistic expectations (Mori, 2000). They may have great English skills in comparison to their peers in their home country, but not by American standards (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Therefore, students often experience feelings like anger and frustration or lack of confidence when they encounter problems using English and feel that their professors and peers judge them negatively (Sarkodie-Mensah). Andrade (2006), along with Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas (2000) agree, “sensitivity to language ability often hinders class participation” (p. 87).

Interestingly enough, achieving the minimum TOEFL score does not mean a student is proficient or completely competent with the language (Wan, 2001).
Andrade (2006) and other researchers agree "international students experience difficulty understanding lectures and reading materials (Lewthwaite, 1996; Wan), completing writing assignments, taking tests, expressing opinions, asking questions (Wan), and taking notes (Lewthwaite)" (p. 87). Also, with a limited vocabulary, test instructions can be hard to understand, students need extra time when reading texts, and students may not be able to fully or clearly express their knowledge in course papers and on exams (Robertson et al., 2000). In the study conducted by Mori (2000), international students reported that they were “uncomfortable speaking in English; some were afraid to talk to professors; and some were not confident in communicating with others” (p. 18-19).

**Cultural Background & Classroom Culture**

International students also face challenges because of the difference in educational systems. Sarkodie-Mensah (1998) states that in different countries, professors are highly respected by students and may have certain titles, honors, or other appropriate accolades before their names. International students may face a dilemma when addressing professors in a casual manner in the United States, such as by their first name (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Students are also taught to agree with their professor (Ladd & Ruby, 1999) rather than have their own views, ideas, and opinions. In other countries, lecture notes are viewed as absolute truths (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998) and consequently, international students typically have not developed the ability to draw their own conclusions (Ladd & Ruby). Students from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have been trained to sit quietly in the classroom, listen to lectures, and memorize information in preparation for exams.
that are typically only given once a year (Mori, 2000). Therefore many international students are not prepared for the dynamic American education system that is composed of various components, such as pop quizzes, group work, independent library research, active participation, and term papers (Mori).

Group work is a difficult concept for some international students to grasp. Students who come from Asia may be more familiar with group work and instead may be challenged by the idea of “being individualistic and engaging in self-initiated critical thinking” (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). The direct opposite is seen when students from cultures where individual work is expected may have a difficult time adjusting to group work (Sarkodie-Mensah). Either way, international students will look for people from their own cultures for group work or they will seek out other foreigners. When this alternative is made possible, “it creates the opportunity for international students to become isolated from their American peers, thus preventing them from benefiting from a chance to interact with American students” (Sarkodie-Mensah, p. 217).

Additionally, students are not used to the informal and casual atmosphere of American universities, and the use of the Socratic methods, in which students are expected to challenge the professor and engage in debate (Sarkodie-Mensah). International students may be shocked when American students enter and exit the classroom without permission. As well, the jovial atmosphere of the classroom and excessive talking may be misconstrued as disrespectful (Sarkodie-Mensah). Nor are they used to interaction with professors in and outside of the classroom (Ladd & Ruby). Andrade (2006) identifies other aspects of classroom culture that can be
challenging depending on if they are from a collectivist or individualist culture. This may affect the way students study and they may be uncomfortable with coursework that forces them to stray from their studying preferences. Moreover, “international students are also unaccustomed to professors’ expectations regarding attendance, tardiness, self-directed learning, and academic honesty, particularly plagiarism” (Andrade, 2006, p. 88). Lastly, professors also have different teaching styles and accents, which may create misunderstandings (Robertson et al., 2000).

**Social Adjustment**

Social adjustment can be equally difficult for international students. They have left behind their friends, family, and social networks and are forced to create new social networks in an unfamiliar culture (Lacina, 2002). Fitting into a new society and making friends are part of the social network challenges students face, and this may cause them to focus more on their studies than on building friendships and social involvement (Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). International students have to figure out a way to fit into society and make friends. Friendships have different meanings across cultures; international students view friendships as meaningful, deep, and long lasting (Morris, 1960) which is different than the American friendship which can be seen as casual (Andrade, 2006). Also, the lack of familiarity when it comes to social relationships can lead to social isolation (Andrade), a major problem international students face.

International students may misunderstand certain informal invitations Americans use such as “I’ll call you sometime” and may feel hurt when Americans don’t follow through (Mori, 2000). They also may misunderstand idioms and
college slang like “get out of here” which they interpret to mean “leave” but which really means “you’re kidding me!” (Lacina, 2002). Americans mean no harm by these polite conversation-ending phrases, but international students can misinterpret them and expect a phone call or get together. Adams and Marshall (1996) stated “individuals need a sense of uniqueness and a sense of belonging” (p. 429), and a personal identity that includes social membership.

**First-Year Experience Programs**

International students face many barriers, as mentioned above, when studying in the United States. However, there are many different ways international students can be supported during their academic journey. One significant way to support incoming international students is to create a First-Year Experience (FYE) program. Such programs may also be called Freshman Seminars, First-Year Seminars, and a Freshman Orientation Course. Whatever the name, these programs are a common means of assisting students with the transition to higher education. According to Andrade (2009):

> Although these seminars generally share the same goal, that of providing the necessary information, skill development, and academic engagement required for success at college, specific characteristics such as course objectives, content, class size, grading, sponsoring academic units, and assessment approaches vary (p. 483-484)

There are many benefits to implementing a FYE for international students. Glass and Garrett found that “completing an orientation during the first term of enrollment promotes retention and improves GPA among first-year students”
First-Year Seminars are one way to assist students and to monitor students’ progress. An FYE would allow staff to receive feedback from the students and would be a great opportunity for students to “give inputs as to what they had expected to learn, what they actually learned, and what additional information they think would be helpful” (Isomine, 2015, p10). This intervention seeks to support students’ adjustment and persistence to graduation. Interestingly, according to Andrade (2006) international students, overall, have received less attention in the area of first-year seminars than domestic freshman, even though international students face more barriers and need additional support.

Worcester State University already offers a Freshman Seminar that is required for all incoming freshman, including international students. One may think that it would be beneficial to international and domestic students to have a seminar that incorporates both groups, however, this is not necessarily true. While international students may face some of the same obstacles as domestic students, the need to “address the unique adjustment and informal needs of this group, and at an appropriate linguistic level (Andrade, 2009) is extremely important. First-Year Experience programs should also involve peers and faculty and provide support systems so international students are able to succeed academically (Mamiseishvili, 2012). This type of program should also help students gain the confidence and
ability needed to participate in in-class discussions, group work, and other aspects of the American classroom.

**Theoretical Background**

Tinto’s (1975) college departure theory explains the influences behind why students stay in school or end up dropping out. The influencing factors of students’ individual characteristics and dispositions: entry characteristics (family background and prior schooling), goals and commitments (student aspirations and goals), and institutional experiences (academics, co-curricular involvement, faculty and peer interactions) are all important factors that play a role in whether a student persists or departs (Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1975) also states that a lack of integration into the college social environment equates to low commitment, which increases the probability of a student leaving college to pursue other activities. A student may be able to achieve integration in one area, like their social sphere, but not in the other. Insufficient integration into the academic domain of college (poor grades/performance) or vice versa, an adequate academic life but no social life can lead to dropping out of college (Tinto, 1975). Mamiseishvili (2012) quotes:

> Tinto's (1975) model emphasizes that student's integration both into the social and academic systems of the institution has a positive impact on their subsequent goal and institutional commitment that consequently enhances the likelihood that they would persist to completion of their postsecondary education (p. 4)

Astin (1984) also provides ample evidence that frequent faculty and peer
interaction has a positive correlation with student outcomes. According to Astin (1984) “Students who interact frequently with faculty members are more likely than other students to express their satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships...[and] intellectual environment” (p. 525). Astin also states that students who live in a dorm or residence hall, join a sorority or fraternity, participate in sports (or other extra-curricular activities), and work on campus are more likely to feel involved on campus (1984). The more often a student is on campus, the higher their opportunity of coming into contact with other students, professors, and faculty, which can result in a greater sense of attachment to the institute (Astin, 1984).

Gardner (2001) also identifies other transitional factors that American college students face such as “selecting a field of study, earning good grades, learning to study effectively, managing their time well, making new friends, interacting with faculty, and committing to timely graduation” (Andrade, 2006, p. 87). American students are not the only ones who face these transitional issues, international students do as well, and according to the literature on international students, they face two additional factors (Andrade, 2006). The first factor is cultural background and second is English language proficiency for those whom English is not their native language (Andrade). “Student’s home cultures and their ability to understand and adapt to American culture affects their academic and social adjustment in college” (Andrade, 2006). Tinto (1996) also states that a student’s experience in their first year of college is usually recognized to be vital in the pursuit of his/her long-term educational goals, persistence, and gradation.
Lastly, students who complete their first year of college are more likely to return for their second year and to persist (Horn and Carroll, 1998).

Astin’s student involvement theory is a solid foundation for the key factors behind why students stay in school or end up dropping out. The student involvement theory supports student retention and the need for an FYE. Astin (1984) defines student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). A highly involved student is one who spends a lot of time on campus, devotes many hours to studying, participates in student organizations, and interacts with faculty members and other students (Astin, 1984). Consequently, the uninvolved student neglects their studies, does not spend a lot of time on campus, does not participate in student organizations or extracurricular activities, and does not interact with faculty members and students on a regular basis (Astin, 1984). The theory argues, “that a particular curriculum, to achieve the effects intended, must elicit sufficient student effort and investment in energy to bring about the desired learning and development” (Astin, 1984, p. 522).

Andrade’s findings are supported by Astin’s involvement theory. Andrade (2009) did an extensive study about First-Year seminars for international students and the findings are largely positive. The seminar focused on active learning, which may be uncommon for some students, and included pair and group work, interviews, presentations, guest speakers, computer use, and journaling (Andrade, 2009). The purpose of Andrade’s study “was to determine to what extent the seminar affected successful student adjustment beyond the first year” (2009, p.
The findings indicated that the students were not only well adjusted, but the seminar impacted their adjustment (Andrade, 2009). According to Andrade (2009) “Students reported regular participation in curricular and cocurricular activities and involvement with diverse peers” (p. 501). The seminar also impacted their active learning behaviors and students reported that they had developed the ability to successfully interact and feel comfortable in and out of class with peers from different countries (Andrade, 2009). Although the “evidence shows that international students felt somewhat less comfortable with American students and professors than with peers”, students nonetheless reported appreciating different cultural viewpoints and being comfortable with the campus culture (Andrade, 2009, p. 500). Other factors received higher ratings such as support services, pertinent university policies, and cultural interaction (Andrade, 2009). Students also “indicated that the most useful seminar activity was vocabulary learning” (Andrade, 2009, p. 501).

Even with such positive outcomes it is impossible to prove that retention gains are the result of a particular program (Bean, 2005) and “so is proving that successful adjustment is the result of a first-year seminar” (Andrade, 2009, p. 503). “However, this study shows that students view the seminar positively and feel it made a difference in their campus experience, not only in the first year but into the second year” (Andrade, 2009, p. 503). Although it may be impossible to prove a first-year seminar increases retention rates of international students, Andrade’s study proves that there is a positive correlation. The study is also supported by Astin’s involvement theory. Students who feel more involved, like the students in
Andrade’s study, are more likely to succeed. A first-year experience program has the ability to help international students adjust to campus life by: feeling more involved with their peers and faculty, active learning possibilities, becoming familiar with campus policies, procedures and resources, American culture and appreciation of diversity, and regional history and culture. Students who are able create a strong attachment to their institute are more likely to succeed and graduate. The FYE program aims to support international students with their adjustment, which could also lead to higher retention rates of international students.

This paper will present a First-Year Experience (FYE) program that mitigates the challenges and problems facing international students during their first year in college. A FYE would address cultural differences, English language proficiency, peer and faculty interactions, and how to balance a healthy social and academic life. The program specifically aims at supporting Worcester State University international students during their first year to increase overall student adjustment and retention.

**Needs Assessment**

This needs assessment contains data based on surveys and interviews (Appendix A) with Worcester State University students. Out of sixteen degree seeking international students, eight students took the survey and two of the eight participated in the interview process. The survey consisted of 28 questions, which included open-ended questions and questions based on the Likert rating scale.
**Student Survey Questions**

*General*

Both the survey and interview process was voluntary and the participants were 18 years or older. Out of the eight students that took the survey four were freshman, one was a sophomore, two were juniors and one was a senior. Two students were from the Democratic Republic of Congo, two students were from Kenya, and one student was from each of the following countries: China, India, and Cote d’Ivoire. For four of the students this was their first time travelling outside of their home countries. Out of the other four students, two had only been to one other country, one student had travelled to three different countries, and the fourth student had travelled to eight countries. English was not a native language for the eight participants. Out of the eight participants, four lived off campus, one lived on campus, and the other three did not confirm whether they lived on or off campus. Five participants took part in an ESL program before enrolling as a degree-seeking student at WSU and out of those five, one participant specified that he participated in the WSU ESL program. The other three participants did not partake in an ESL program before enrolling at WSU.

*Policies and Procedures*

Question eight asked students how familiar they were with the following policies and procedures: major requirements, class registration, university website/catalog, non-academic services, purpose of general education classes, learning centers (library, tutoring, etc.), honor code, and grading system. Three students strongly agreed, one agreed, and one somewhat agreed that they were
familiar with major requirements. One student strongly agreed, two agreed, and one somewhat agreed that they were familiar with class registration. One student agreed and one somewhat agreed that they know how to use the university website and/or catalog. One student disagreed with being familiar with non-academic services. One student somewhat agreed, and one disagreed about being familiar with the purpose of general education classes. One student somewhat agreed that they knew about the learning centers, and two students somewhat agreed and one strongly disagreed about being familiar with the honor code. Lastly, one student strongly agreed and one agreed that they were familiar with the grading system.

Based on the Likert scale, the responses were mixed between strongly agree to strongly disagree. Some students show a need for extra support in the mentioned areas, where some students already understood the policies and procedures. The areas students showed the most need in was non-academic services, learning centers, purpose of general education classes, and honor code.

**English Proficiency**

When asked, “Do you feel that your English skills were sufficient for social interaction?” all but two students agreed that their English skills were sufficient for social interaction. One student said no because he “didn’t speak English four years ago.” The second student said both yes and no because he “still need[s] practice, perhaps a lot.” For the survey question “Do you feel that your English skills were sufficient for academic work?” the answers varied. Out of the six responses three students said yes, one student said no, one said “not the best, but just enough to get going,” and lastly, one student wrote “I had to adapt, some time I was in classes
where the professor spoke to fast that you couldn’t hear, but adaptation, always adaptation [sic].” The next question was “What types of English language support did you feel you needed during your first year?” Five students answered with the following responses “talking to people,” “maybe some common phrases which Americans use. If we were exposed to those I think it will be easy for us when we hear from others,” “my biggest problem was the listening I couldn’t hear [understand] people,” “none,” “I would say writing was the most important, you might be able to speak but for academic writing is everything.” The responses from the three questions based on English proficiency varied. Some felt confident in their English ability and were academically and socially successful where other students fell somewhere in the middle and others were lacking in English proficiency both academically and socially. English language support in the form of writing, listening, and speaking is a need for most of the international students who participated in this survey.

**Academic and Social Involvement**

Question 17 asked students to rate statements based on their first year. Five of eight participants chose to answer this question. The first of six statements was “I was comfortable talking to my professors’ in the classroom and outside of class. One student strongly agreed, two agreed, and 2 somewhat agreed. The second statement was “I was well-adjusted to American culture and WSU.” One student strongly agreed, two agreed, one somewhat agreed, and one disagreed. The next statement was “I participated in social/academic/religions activities.” None of the students strongly agreed, only one agreed, three students somewhat agreed and the fifth
student disagreed. The fourth statement was “I felt part of campus life.” None of the students strongly agreed or agreed, 4 students somewhat agreed and one disagreed. The next statement was “I was involved with peers in a social and academic setting.” None of the students strongly agreed, two students agreed, and three somewhat agreed. The last statement was “I was able to make as many friends as I wanted.” None of the students strongly agreed, two agreed, two somewhat agreed and one student disagreed.

For question 18, students were asked if they felt they had the ability to make friends. Many of the five responses were positive, except one. One student mentioned that she “didn’t think so because I had a little culture shock the people from here were making all different face looking at me so that made me step back and be alone so I had only a few friends and used speak with professors a lot.” One student stated that he “had the ability to make friends but not in the way I would have made friends using my mother tongue. Another student stated that he was able to get to know people because they all arrived around the same time but “not everyone became my friend, but we all had good relationships.”

Question 19 asked, “Did you feel socially involved on campus (spent time with friends, extracurricular activities, joined a club/organization)? Five of the eight participants answered this question. One of the students stated that they went to events most of the time and one other student said he joined student government. The other three responses were not very positive. They were “no not at all,” “I am not good at making friends and also do not like to much social life,” and “not really involved but I’m working on it.”
The last question in this section asked students "were you able to partake in classroom discussions? How comfortable did you feel"? The five responses to this question were generally positive and all the students felt they were able to partake in class discussions. However, one student said yes only “if I knew the topic I definitely went forward to participate in the discussions.” Another student said they felt stressed at first “but once you start it comes easy.” A third student said, “there was a time when I felt awful speaking and there was a time when I just try my best.”

From the data gathered, again student response was varied. However, many of student responses showed that they did not feel academically and/or socially involved in some ways like feeling a part of campus life and help participating in social, academic, and/or religious activities. Even though participants said they were able to take part in classroom discussion, they still struggled or did not feel confident in their speaking skills.

Additional Comments

Question 24 was “What do you wish you’d known about the services offered on campus as a freshman”? Out of the 5 responses students said they wished they had known about the printing services, food court, applying for scholarships, and work regulations for international students.

Responses from the surveys and types of support international students are still lacking is varied. Many of the participants felt that they had sufficient knowledge of the campus and campus resources, however there were still students struggling. They were struggling with becoming part of campus life and engaging in social and academic activities. They were having a hard time meeting and making
friends with both domestic and other international students. The more positive responses were related to academic success, while the less positive responses were because social support was lacking.

**Student Interviews**

Two WSU students volunteered to be interviewed for this study. Student A was a J-term start in 2013 and is now a senior who will be graduating in May. Student B started as a freshman in the fall of 2013 after attending the IELI program and is currently a junior.

*Would you please tell me about when you first arrived at WSU and your first semester? (EX. International student support, orientation, integration into your classes, social experiences)*

Student A expressed that she did not have an official WSU orientation when she first arrived on campus and could not recall exactly why, but this really impacted her first year on campus. Even though the Director of International Programs held a meeting and went over the basics, the student still had to discover places like the library, food court and such on her own. Since student B started off in the IELI program, his transition to being degree-seeking student was a bit different. He felt that he had a leg up because he “started off [his] freshman year by being president of the French Club.” Student B also felt that he had to get socially involved as quickly as possible and could not wait to see if people would approach him first. He also expressed that even though he were socially successful during his freshman year, he noticed that his international friends were struggling to make friends, make connections, spend time on campus, and attend school events.
Student A also had a difficult time with Blackboard and using Gmail. This student expressed that they did not use these programs at her high school in India and she needed more IT support. Student A stated that the domestic students wouldn’t approach her first and would not mingle with students from different countries. During her freshman year, her only friends were professors. She slowly started making friends in class and through tutoring students in Math, however, socializing was still difficult.

*Are you familiar and comfortable using the student services on campus? (EX. Career services, counseling services, academic success, writing center, health services center)*

*And how often do you use these services?*

Student A did not know about the career services and counseling services, but knew about the academic success center. However, she thought it was only a center for taking tests, since that is where she took an exam there. But it is actually a center that can help with finding advisors, tutors, and where a student can ask questions about blackboard and Gmail. Student A also did not know about the career service center until her sophomore year when she started looking for part-time on campus jobs. Lastly, student A knew about the writing center, but did not use it. Student B was required take the freshman seminar class and in that class, the career service’s staff taught the students how to write a resume, how to use LinkedIn, and gave career advice and information. In the freshman seminar class, students are advised on the counseling services and the writing center was also mentioned, but students have to find it on their own. From student B’s perspective, WSU is a small campus, so students will eventually find their way around and find
the service centers on campus, but it was difficult to do. Both student A and B said that they knew about the health services center on campus because all international students are required to have health insurance.

*Can you tell me what the graduation requirements are and do you meet with your academic advisor?*

Student B did not know, until it was time to register for classes, that when a student chooses their major they are also assigned a student advisor. He was told to meet with his advisor before registering for classes but did not know what an academic advisor was and had to ask questions in order to figure out what an academic advisor was. After finally meeting with his student advisor, student B did not feel that his advisor was really there to help choose classes. He eventually switched advisors to an advisor from the Business department and his new advisor went over all the graduation and major requirements and was very effective. Student A knew the graduation requirements, did not have any problems with her advisor, made appointments as needed, had follow up meetings, and always knew if she was fulfilling credits. Student A said without her student advisor, she would not have know if she would be able to petition to participate in graduation this May and take the rest of her credits over the summer. Without the help of her advisor, this would have been impossible.

*Could you tell me about how you feel about your classes? Do you understand the homework, essay, and test requirements? Attendance policies? Do you feel comfortable asking questions during class and meeting with your professors during their office hours?*
Student A felt very shy in class and had a difficult time adjusting because she joined two classes late. She also felt it was inconvenient to ask questions and was worried her peers would think the questions were silly or stupid. Student A did not have a problem completing assignments, but the deadlines were strict, which was different from her home country and made things a little difficult. Student B’s experience was slightly different since he started in the ESL program where they had homework everyday, which ended up helping him adjust. However, writing essays was very difficult, especially since the way he wrote essays was completely different from what WSU professors expected. Student B also stated he understood the test requirements depended on how detailed the professors’ syllabi were. International students also have to learn about attendance requirements, because it impacts their visa status and grades. He also felt comfortable meeting with professors face to face, but was not always comfortable asking questions during class. If he were in one of his business classes he would go for it and ask questions. But when he was in an elective course with other students he didn’t know, he was more reluctant to ask questions in class.

Do you feel you are proficient enough in English to be academically and socially successful? What types of English language support do you need?

Student A struggled with common phrases domestic students used and had to Google the phrases or else she could not understand what her peers were talking about. Also having a limited vocabulary was a struggle and people with accents were difficult to understand. Student B used the writing center and would never write a
paper without utilizing the services offered there, and even as a junior he still goes to the writing center for help.

*What types of support were you (still are) lacking during your first year at WSU? What can we do to help you improve your experience at WSU?*

Student A needed help finding on campus jobs since she ran into many obstacles trying to get hired and needed help filling out all the required paperwork, which is even more work for international students than for domestic students. She also wished she had known that international students could apply for scholarships and which ones international students are eligible to apply for. Social support was also lacking, especially during her freshman year. This academic year, the International Programs Office (IPO) hosted meetings for international students, but this was not the case for previous years. Student A also stated international students need help getting acquainted and meeting with domestic students. Student B would have also appreciated knowing about scholarships and how to apply for them. He also mentioned, like student A, that he wished there would have been monthly international student meetings where international students could make friends. The meetings are important, because “before you never saw international students except at the end of the semester or at the President’s dinner.” Student B also said “It would have helped for the IPO to introduce us to student activities” for example clubs, organizations, volunteering, and reminding students to check their What’s Happening at the Woo emails, so they can join pre-planned events. It also would have been very helpful if students were introduced to the president of club X or
group X and received help on how to join a club. Student B ended the interview by stating that more social support is needed.

*Any last comments or recommendations?*

Student A reiterated the need for help in the following areas: common phrases, vocabulary, jobs, clubs, Blackboard, Gmail, and scholarships. She ended with it would be nice to have help or support getting around Worcester and how to get to places like Wal-Mart, restaurants, and places to hang out. Student B recommended that the IPO staff need to remind international students that it may not always be easy to be accepted into a club or in a social setting but students should keep going and not give up.

From the data gathered from the two student interviews, the international students at WSU need varying types of support. But there were also some commonalities where both students said similar things such as, needing to continue the international student meetings and having a specific time for international students to gather and make friends. Both students also emphasized the need for more social support (clubs and organizations), along with support in applying for scholarships. Both students also had vastly different orientations and starting points. Student A started during the J-term and did not attend a freshman seminar or international student orientation. So her struggles are much different from Student B, who first started in WSU’s ESL program and then enrolled as a degree-seeking student in the fall with other international students. He also attended the international student orientation and the freshman seminar. It is still unclear why Student A did not attend the mandatory freshman seminar, but this seems to be the
main reason why she did not know a lot about the services offered on campus and how to use them. But one thing is clear, even with the mandatory freshman seminar, international students are still lacking in support during their freshman year.

**International Education Professional Interviews**

Five different professionals from four universities, who work with international students, were interviewed (Appendix B) and all interviewees gave permission to have their name and university used in this capstone. The fifth interview will not be used in this capstone due to the fact that information gathered did not relate to first-year experience programs or freshman seminars for international students, but instead, she shared her experience working with international student orientations up until 2006. The four interviewees are: Heather Funk, Director of International Programs at The American College of Thessaloniki; Carolina De la Rosa Bustamante, Student Engagement Specialist at SUNY Plattsburgh; and Daniel Hoyle, the Associate Director of the International Students and Scholars Center, and Holly Frohlick, Student Academic Integration Coordinator at Arizona State University.

*Why do you think First-Year Experience Programs/Freshman Seminars are important for international students? Or not?*

According to Heather Funk, first-year programs are very important to help students gain a new perspective. If one is talking about these programs in the sense of a course then it helps synthesize learning, especially if the moderator is a facilitator and not just lecturing, but facilitating, asking deep and provoking questions that get students to start discussing. However, the seminars are less
effective if too heavily guided and the students do not have a lot of time to interact with each other or the materials. The most important thing is to have a good discussion moderator so the discussion never dies and continues outside of the classroom.

Carolina De la Rosa Bustamante says they are important because it gives the faculty a chance to enforce the knowledge and answer questions that students are facing in real life. Students will be less overwhelmed if the information is given over a period of time, rather than all up front during orientation when students are jet lagged and have so many things to deal with and figure out.

According to Daniel Hoyle an FYE is important if it is done well in terms of content and timing. International students have to deal with things such as new geography, climate, language, culture, and possibly government and/or family expectations. An FYE should also be a continuing process if they meet the unique needs of international students. Holly Frohlick also agreed that an FYE should meet the unique needs of international students.

*How did your office start planning to create and implement the FYE/Freshman Seminar at your institution? Please tell me about the process.*

ACT recently launched a freshman seminar program last fall with a partner university from the U.S. The students who join this program are regular January starts, but the university was looking for an alternative opinion for them. This university contacted ACT knowing that they have first year seminar programs and they the partner university asked, “What can you offer our students?” Together they designed what is called the Mentorship Program. The program consists of about 15
students, one professor, and one coordinator from the home institution. The students take two classes with ACT professors and three with the professor who came with them. ACT also provides activities and excursions for the Mentorship Program students.

The FYE at SUNY Plattsburgh is a one-credit mandatory course that usually starts during the first week of classes and is a total of ten sessions. Staff in the Global Education Office mainly teach the program. Carolina did not work for SUNY Plattsburgh when the program was first created and implemented, but initially what happened was first year courses were implemented across the campus for all students. And then eventually Carolina’s supervisor determined that is was a great opportunity to have one specifically for international students.

Holly shared that a new Senior Director started at ASU in April 2014 and he and the Vice President agreed that the first thing to do was address the unique issues of international students and to provide an expanded orientation, especially since the international student population had exploded over the last five years and the university needed to catch up with that explosion. First Holly and Daniel started the initiative called Academic Foundations Program, which another university might call and extended academic orientation. This extension to the freshman international student orientation adds two days of workshops. They are hoping to expand this program into the first semester and beyond both in an informal and formal way. Holly has taken up two initiatives, one a Coffee Conversation Hour that is hosted every Friday. Students can come hangout, chat, eat snacks, meet American students, improve their English and make friends in an informal way. The second
initiative is an Academic Advantages Workshop. At the workshops, they encourage students to come learn about the topic at hand and ask more questions. There was no previous model at ASU, so they had to do an assessment, start from scratch, and build a rapport with other units on campus.

What makes it effective?

Heather shared that there are two things that make the program effective. The first is the selection of students. They really choose students who are looking to get something out of the semester and are willing to put in the efforts. The second is the staff who work with the students, because the students are only here for three months, so they do not have a lot of time to build deep ties with the community. Once they get settled and get into a typical routine, it is time for them to head back home. The staff that ACT chooses to work with the students help them adjust as quickly as possible and are there to support the students with anything they need.

The things that make the FYE program effective at SUNY Plattsburgh are the timeliness of the information and the relevance to what is happening in the student’s semester. Having a maximum of 25 students per class is another thing that makes it effective. Staff from the Global Education Office teaches the FYE, which makes it effective because it strengthens the relationship between the office and the international students.

What makes ASU’s program effective is the informality of it, because the students already spend a good deal of their time in the classroom and in structured activities. They also have a space of their own to hang out in and this has helped feed some of the energy in the building where the office located. The curriculum are
based on topics students are interested in as opposed to artificial imposed topics; lastly, there is no extra homework or assignments.

What are its greatest challenges?

From Heather’s perspective, one of the challenges students may face is the affordability of the program. She also said fortunately they have not faced a lot of challenges due to “working with people who are visionaries” but are connected with the details to make it a reality. She also said they do face unforeseen things that you cannot plan for, like a death in a student’s family, mental or physical health, but they have support services on campus for students to utilize.

Staffing is a challenge at SUNY Plattsburgh, especially in the fall because they have a much larger international student cohort. A small group of students are able to test out of the program but they have had to tweak the conditions depending on the availability of their staff. Another challenge is having students with different English language ability in the class. Some of the students are enrolled in the ESL program or the English Bridge Program, so keeping everyone equally engaged and making sure those students who have a lower proficiency level are still able to understand the most essential aspects of what they are trying to get across is critical.

One of the main challenges that ASU faces is international student participation. Even though the information presented in the Academic Foundations Program and other initiatives is important, it is hard to get students to attend. ASU hosts about 10,000 international students on four different campuses, which is also another challenge. Thus, it is difficult to reach and provide ways for all students to
participate in the activities. Another challenge is the mode in which information is shared. Some students prefer an online format, some prefer one-on-one, and others won’t do anything without their peer groups.

*How has the FYE/Freshman Seminar benefited students at your institution? What is some of the feedback from your students?*

It has increased the number of students at ACT, which is a positive benefit. The students like interacting with each other and the American students have also brought different ideas and a sense of school spirit with them that a European school does not have by nature. The American students participate in student government and have helped bring some spirit days to school, an enthusiasm for doing activities on campus, participating in clubs and sports, while the European students tend to drink coffee and sit on the patio. So this makes the campus a bit more lively and the students, faculty, and everybody else appreciates that.

From survey responses the FYE program at SUNY Plattsburgh received, the students said the program was very helpful and informative. Students also thought the class helped them create a plan for their overall wellbeing as a student. Carolina also said the program allows students to ask questions they might not otherwise address, and creates a safe place for discussion of things that pertain specifically to international students.

Since the program is so new at ASU, they have yet to collect data through real, formal surveys but plan on doing so at some point. However, Holly and David did share some anecdotal feedback from a few international student mentors that help out at the workshops and presentations that are offered at the two-day
orientation. They said things like the program was really informative and they wish they had some of this stuff when they first came to campus, and that it was really helpful.

*How is your FYE staffed?*

At ACT the office staff includes the Director of International Programs and Student Services, a Study Abroad Coordinator, a Student Services Coordinator, a few Student Services Assistants, the Director of Clubs and Activities, and the Mentorship Program RA, as well as professors who teach the courses. For the Mentorship Program, as mentioned previously, the partner institution sends one professor and a coordinator.

At SUNY Plattsburgh, the FYE program is staffed by Carolina and her Associate Director. During the fall when there are two sections and they both teach a section, but during the spring, Carolina teaches the only section. They also have a graduate assistant that acts as a teacher’s assistant for the class and helps with administrative duties.

At ASU the program is staffed by Holly, and Daniel supports her as needed. They are slowly getting more staff in their office involved, but about 75 percent of their staff started last year. They also collaborate as much as possible with the International Student Engagement Team. Both departments help each other out with staffing and promoting each other’s events.

*How did you budget for your FYE?*

Heather planned her budget very carefully. She states that it’s important to “analyze out everything you could possibly need to budget for. Whether it is buses
to pick people up at the airport, or its trash bags because you are going to do a neighborhood cleanup day, or whatever you can possibly think about putting into the trip you plan that out in advance.” Once you have planned that out in advance, you get the prices from your local suppliers in writing and make sure you have the right information going into your budget.

At SUNY Plattsburgh, the FYE instructor position was written into Carolina’s job description so there was nothing extra to budget for. ASU is lucky that money has been allocated with the goal to continue supporting the growing international student population. However, they are unsure if the money will be allocated the same way or as generously for the next year academic year.

*What are the curriculum components and how did you choose them?*

The curriculum components are different depending on the program at ACT. Sometimes a professor from the United States has an idea for a specific course, then the ACT faculty works together with the partner universities’ faculty to hit all of the objectives. Heather has also helped design freshman seminar type courses for other groups before. They are typically designed around a particular topic each week. These classes are most successful when the topic is big but the activity is small at the beginning of class and then it spurs on a discussion that takes place the rest of the class. She also mentioned it’s good to tie in the class topic with activities or guest speakers and add different layers of experiential learning.

The SUNY Plattsburgh FYE program curriculum components are an introductory class, maintaining your f-status, a class on cultural differences and similarities, campus life and alcohol, community involvement and study abroad,
career planning, academic planning, values and academic writing, exploring diversity on campus, and a final wrap up class. Depending on the class topic, they invite guest speakers and utilize on campus resources and services.

At ASU they choose their curriculum through scholarly articles and researching what curriculum looks like at other institutions. They also incorporate other academic departments like the career center.

*How has the FYE/Freshman Seminar affected international student retention and overall student success?*

For ACT, it does not apply as much as the home school. The students come for a semester and then leave and return to their home institution. The home institutions that ACT works with have said they have a higher retention of students who have done a first-year experience than ones who have traditionally started in the fall. SUNY Plattsburgh’s Global Education Office is in the process of gathering data to assess retention, so there is not hard data. Since the program is new at ASU, they have not reached a point where there is measurable data.

*What do students enjoy most?*

Heather stated that the students enjoy everything. They like hiking Mount Olympus and anything that pushes them physically. The students also like learning through experience and professors who are lively and engaging.

Carolina’s personal opinion is that the students feel that their needs are acknowledged and there is a class that is designed just for them where they can learn some insightful things in classroom discussions. The students may not enjoy this, but find the immigration session is very helpful and explains how their visa
impacts their student status and their time at SUNY Plattsburgh. ASU international students feel a sense that they belong and that they are represented.

The data gathered from the four interviewees was used as a guide to create part of the curriculum for the proposed WSU FYE. The information also helped in the development of the budget section, along with the types of workshops and on campus resources that should be used for parts of the Workshop Series for international students.

**Participant Needs**

While some of the responses gathered from the surveys were varied, it is still clear that international students are lacking support academically and socially. The data gathered from the student interviews overlap with some of the survey responses. According to the surveys and student interviews, WSU students need more support engaging in social activities on campus and becoming involved in student activities. They also need a group that is specifically designed for them and their unique needs. As both interviewees mentioned, there was no international support group when they started, and it would have been very helpful to have had that support group from the beginning. The information gathered about feeling comfortable asking questions and partaking in classroom discussions also overlapped. The interviewees both stated that they were not 100 percent comfortable joining class discussions and only would join in if they knew the students in their class or the topic. Survey responses were very similar and the majority of the participants did not join in classroom discussions or were hesitant to join. Only two students felt able to comfortably participate in classroom discussions.
Another area of need is, as mentioned above, help applying for scholarships. This topic seemed to be very important to the international students who were interviewed. Even though the participants felt that their English was sufficient for academic and social interaction, the participants still expressed a need for social integration into campus. They want more help getting involved in clubs and organizations on campus, they also want support finding on-campus jobs, they need a social hour set up just for them so they can feel comfortable and ask questions they would not ask otherwise, and they also need support making friends and creating social bonds with other students.

**Program Description**

The First-Year Program designed for Worcester State University international students will consist of two components. The first is a series of workshops called International Student & Scholar Workshop Series and the second component is continuing the student check-in meetings but renaming them to be called Student Social Hour. Both components are optional and are not for credit, but students will be encouraged to participate. During the IPO international student orientation students will be given the workshop schedule and flyers. The Director of International Programs will give a brief explanation of each workshop and the importance of attending. Students will be highly encouraged to attend the workshops to get more information before making individual appointments go over information that could be learned at the workshops.
The program called International Student & Scholar Workshop Series will consist of eight workshops (Appendix C) and run throughout the fall and spring semesters. Each workshop will vary depending on the topic, facilitator, and student interest. However, each workshop will utilize on-campus resources and include guest speakers from different departments. The workshop titles are as follows: Academic Culture at Worcester State, Blackboard and Gmail, Academic Advising, Student Services Overview, Career Planning, Campus Life and Getting Involved, Scholarships, and Maintaining your F-1 Status. More information on the workshop topics can be found in the curriculum section. The workshops are designed to help international students adjust to and learn more about WSU, the community, on-campus resources, immigration regulations, and ways to socially integrate on campus.

Workshops will run once a month for an hour. However, the conference room will be booked for two hours to accommodate a workshop that goes over the time limit, or if students want to stay and ask more questions. The workshops should start two weeks into the semester in order to give students time to settle into their classes and adjust their class schedule. Workshops will be booked on campus in one of the conference rooms in the Student Center. Each workshop time and day may vary depending on the availability of guest speakers, but should be scheduled during class breaks or in the late afternoon.

Originally the IPO hosted meetings called “student drop-ins” for international students and exchange students. However, the title sounds more like a check-in rather than a time to meet other students, both international and domestic.
Therefore, these meetings have been renamed Student Social Hour and will continue to run twice a month. Renaming the meetings to Student Social Hour makes it sound more social, like the name intends. These meetings will be centered on creating a social atmosphere during which international students can meet other international students and domestic students. During the meetings the intern will set-up game nights, social events with on campus clubs and organizations, jeopardy/bingo night open to all students and off campus events like bowling, hiking and ice-skating. The intern will do a needs assessment at the start of each semester find out what types of events international students are interested in in order to increase student interest and participation. The main point of these meetings is so that international students can build a community and make friends at WSU.

The Student Social Hour will be held every other Thursday from 4:00pm-5:00pm in the International Programs Office located on the third floor of the Student Center. The meetings will begin the second week of the semester and end the week before finals. If the group becomes too large to be hosted in the IPO, then the Student Social Hour will be held on the same floor but in the dining/lounge area right outside the IPO office.

**Program Goals & Objectives**

*Goals:*
1. The FYE program will offer eight extensive workshops for international students to attend and gain more in-depth knowledge on WSU.

2. The FYE program will increase international student support and offer monthly social meetings, where international students can make friends and become part of a community.
3. The FYE program will offer students opportunities to learn more about American culture and improve their English language skills.

Objectives:
1. To create a safe space for international students to ask questions, learn about WSU student services, and on campus clubs/organizations.
2. To establish social networks for international students from their freshman year until graduation.
3. To provide connections with student services on campus so international students know that they are available.

Participant Goals & Objectives

Goals:
1. International students will gain a broader knowledge of their F-1 visa status and how it affects their life in the U.S. and at WSU.
2. By participating in events regularly, international students will gain the ability to socialize, make friends, and increase vocabulary and common English phrases.
3. International students will learn how to utilize the advisory services, how to choose and register for classes.
4. International students will expand their knowledge on Blackboard and Gmail.
5. International students will become aware of clubs and organizations on campus and how to join.
6. International students will learn about which scholarships they are eligible for and receive tips on writing a scholarship essay.

Objectives:
1. To increase international student participation in social activities and events during their academic career at WSU.
2. International students will increase their English language proficiency by regularly attending Student Social Hours.

Potential Participants
For the workshops, the potential participants are degree-seeking students typically in their first year. However, these workshops are open to all degree-seeking international students and scholars, exchange students, and students studying English as a foreign language. The Student Social Hour potential participants are all international students and scholars, exchange students, study abroad returnees, IPO work-study students and all other WSU students.

Stakeholders
The following is a list of stakeholders that have been identified:

- Prospective FYE students may be concerned with being able to attend all the workshops due to class schedules and possibly having limited English ability. They will benefit by becoming socially and academically prepared students.
- The International Programs Director may be concerned with staffing the program and receiving the stipend for the intern. Another concern is student participation in the workshops and social hours.
• The President of Worcester State University and the Provost may be concerned with building the program and future program cost benefit ratio.

• The faculty would benefit because international students will gain knowledge on topics like class participation, etiquette, and plagiarism.

**Program Marketing**

The Workshops Series and Student Social Hours will be marketed in a few different ways. The first is including two different informational flyers (Appendices D & E) with the application materials international students receive. This will enable students to plan ahead of time and decide what workshops they would be interested in attending and what types of unique services WSU offers for its international students. The same flyers and brochures will be prepared to hand out during Education USA fairs, and for WSU Intensive English Language Institute (IELI) students who are interested in continuing their studies at WSU as a degree-seeking student. The IPO is highly considering partnering with College Study US (CSU) and the marketing materials would also be sent to our representative through CSUS. Future marketing ideas are promoting the Workshop Series through Blackboard where all international students can see the schedule and workshop descriptions while enrolled at WSU.

**Student Recruitment**

The Director of International Programs and the intern will recruit international students during international student orientation. The Student Social
Hour flyers and workshop schedule will be handed out to all the students with a brief explanation. The director and intern will also talk about the student social hour program details. Also, the students will be sent Google calendar invites for both programs so they can RSVP and/or invite fellow students. They will also receive reminders by email the week before and the day of in order to recruit students.

Curriculum

Taking into consideration the unique needs of international students the following curriculum has been developed in order strengthen international student support. Based off the feedback from current international students through surveys and interviews, the curriculum is designed to bridge the gap between orientation and the first year international students are enrolled as degree-seeking students. The curriculum is designed with other ideas and information gathered from the interviews with international education professionals who design and create FYE’s for their international student population.

The current curriculum takes various learning styles into consideration and is set up to make the workshops enjoyable and engaging, with a variety of learning methods. Depending on the topic, workshops may include guest speakers or presenters from different academic services on campus, large group discussions, small group discussions, hands on activities, and time for questions and feedback.

International Student & Scholar Workshop Series

1. Academic Culture at Worcester State: This session will address topics such as how to address a professor, discussing when to ask questions during class,
the protocol on arriving late or leaving early, and class expectations, etc. The academic environment that international students come from may be different from the American academic system and could be confusing for many students. This specific workshop offers a safe space for students to ask questions and compare and contrast different types of academic environments. The director of the international programs office, along with the clerk and intern will re-introduce themselves to students and run this session together in order to build repertoire with the students.

II. **Blackboard & Gmail**: This session will familiarize students with Blackboard, how to view classes, submit assignments and more. There will also be a short tutorial on how to use Gmail, a password reset overview and other IT help. A staff member from the IT Help Desk in the Learning Resource Center asked to be a guest speaker for this session.

III. **Academic Advising**: Having an academic advisor may be a new concept for some international students, and students may need guidance on what kind of questions should they can/should ask their advisor. This session will cover what an academic advisor is, how a student can find out who their advisor is, how to make an appointment, what to talk about at an advisor meeting, tips on choosing classes and more. This session will run a few weeks before spring registration in order to help international students prepare beforehand. A staff member from the Academic Success Center will be asked to be a guest speaker for this workshop.
IV. **Student Services on Campus:** This session is for students who want to know what different kinds of services are offered on campus—from the library to learning about how international students can study abroad. Students will be introduced to all services on campus, where they are located, and what types of services are offered. The Intern and Clerk from the International Programs Office will run this session together.

V. **Career Planning:** This workshop will cover how to find an on campus job and application process for this. It will also cover when and how students can use OPT/CT and plan accordingly. Other topics will include resume building and introducing companies that are known for hiring international students. The Director of the International Programs Office, the Intern and Director of Career Services will run this workshop together.

VI. **Scholarships:** This session will cover what scholarships international students are eligible to apply for and include tips for writing scholarship essays and what a scholarship essay looks like. As well as how to utilize the writing center so students can get help with writing and reviewing scholarship essays, and essays in general. A staff member from the University of Advancement Office and the Writing Center will be asked to be a guest speaker at this workshop.

VII. **Maintaining Your F-1 Status:** The Director of International Programs will run this session. This is a great opportunity for students to ask questions about their student visa after settling into campus. A lot of information is shared at the orientation and can be overwhelming; therefore students may
not have questions at the time. This is an open session where students can ask questions about their visa status and for them to think through situations where they could lose their status.

VIII. **Clubs & Organizations on Campus:** This session will focus on introducing international students to different types of clubs and organizations on campus. Students can ask questions to the club members and find a club that fits them, as well as work on becoming a part of campus culture academically as well as socially. The Intern from the International Programs will run this session and invite club presidents and members to be guest speakers at this workshop.

**Student Social Hour**
Not only did students need extra academic support, but social support as well. The Student Social Hour is designed to give students informal time to meet and mingle with other students, practice their English, and bond with the IPO staff. Due to the nature of this program and the informality of it, there is no coursework or tests. The social hour is also a fun time for international students to meet American students and other international students. Each social hour will be set up around a different topic, and each topic will depend on the current students’ interests and needs. The topics could range from learning common phrases and slang to being introduced to on campus clubs and organizations to learning how to play American games. This is a special time for international students to feel involved on campus be part of the WSU community, make friends, and be a part of a group on campus.
**Staffing Plan**

The International Programs Office is staffed with a full-time director, clerk, and usually four to five work-study students. The academic year 2015/2016 was the first year the IPO was able to fund a part-time intern that worked about 15 hours a week. In order for the FYE programs to run smoothly, the IPO staff may need to take on additional duties.

*Director of International Studies*

The director should support the intern as needed and attend the workshop(s) related to F-Visas and immigration. The director will supervise and oversee all workshop topics as needed.

*Clerk*

The clerk’s duties may include booking conference rooms for the workshops and helping the intern with other logistics. She/he should help the intern become familiar with student services on campus as well as, attend and help at the workshops when applicable.

*Intern*

The intern will be in charge of implementing the International Student and Scholar Workshop Series as well as leading the Student Social Hour meetings. Some of the duties may include meeting with staff and/or faculty, finding guest speakers, email correspondence with students, staff, and faculty, planning social activities and events, involving domestic students in the Social Hours, finding club/organization presidents who are interested in meeting international students and talking about their clubs, marketing the programs, carrying out the evaluation plan and
implementing the curriculum for the International Student and Scholar Workshop Series. Part of the intern's responsibility is to check in with the director on an as needed basis and keep the director updated with how the workshops are running and the evaluations. The intern may be responsible for other duties not listed here.

Work-Study Students

Work-study students should assist the intern with any of the above-mentioned duties. They should also attend the Student Social Hours and help at the workshops when applicable.

Health and Safety

The basics of health and safety for international students at WSU is to enroll in a health insurance program, have the appropriate immunizations, and submit a completed health form the Health Center. All of this information is covered during orientation. If a student has questions related to health, they should seek out the professionals who work in the Health Center. The IPO will support and help students who need help with paperwork or seeking out the Health Center.

Crisis Management

The safety of all students on campus is very important to Worcester State University and the International Programs Office. Worcester State has personnel representing all divisions of the University including, but not limited to, University Police, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, University Technology, Administration and Finance, and Facilities, which compromises the Incident Management Team
(Emergency, 2014). Responses to an incident, whether it is prior, during, or/and after, will be conducted based on the existing framework of WSU policies and procedures. If there are any exceptions those will need to be conducted by, or with approval by those WSU administrators directing and/or coordinating the response (Emergency, 2014). The WSU police take every threat very seriously and use an Emergency Plan that is based on the national standard. Campus police take every situation seriously and depending on the situation, may call the state police, FBI, and/or the Worcester Police Department to assist. Listed below are two important ways that WSU students can prepare for an emergency and/or incident:

*Weather and Emergency Alerts*

The Alert System is used to notify the campus community when there is an emergency of any kind. The students are automatically notified through their WSU email with details and safety information. Students may opt to register their cell phone numbers to receive alerts by text.

*Emergency Contact Registration*

All students are required to have an emergency contact registered so that in the event of an emergency or injury, WSU officials can contact the students’ designated emergency contact.

*International Programs Office*

There is no crisis plan specifically for the IPO. If there is a crisis, the Director of International Programs waits to be contacted with information on what he/she is expected to do. The Director is expected to follow institutional policy and chain of command.
**Evaluation Plan**

Andrade (2009) states how important it is for monitoring to be entrenched in the design of a program. Monitoring must involve “data collection, examining program components and student learning, sharing data with stakeholders, and making program changes based on conclusions” (Andrade, 2009, p. 486). A system like this may be people intensive, however if implemented appropriately, it will result in cost benefits, and will keep students enrolled and successful (Andrade, 2009). The evaluation plan proposed for this capstone is comprised of both formative and summative assessments.

**Formative**

At the end of each workshop short surveys (Appendix F) will be passed out for the students to take with a section for comments. These surveys are mandatory, however students may choose not to answer all the questions. Students may also choose to remain anonymous when filling out the surveys. These surveys will be analyzed to see if any changes need to be made to current or future workshops.

**Summative**

Students who participated in the workshops will be asked to participate in an online survey (Appendix G) at the end of each semester. The survey will include questions that cover workshop content and program and student objectives. International students who participated in the Student Social Hours will be asked to take an online survey (Appendix H) at the end of each semester. The survey will consist of questions relating to social adjustment and will ask for student feedback.
The surveys will be analyzed in order to make necessary changes to the next semester Student Social Hours.

Conclusion

Limitations of the Study
One of the main challenges and limitations of this capstone were the number of freshmen international students enrolled at WSU. Out of the 18 degree-seeking students only four freshmen took the survey and none of those freshmen volunteered to be interviewed. Taking this into consideration, all degree-seeking students were later asked to volunteer in the survey and interviews. This way there was a higher chance to find out what types of support international students were lacking, and in a sense are still lacking. The initial plan for the FYE program was to make it into a required course, however there are not enough students enrolled to create a traditional FYE and have taught by a professor or IPO staff member. Another challenge this FYE faces is the lack of staff in the IPO to run the program. If the funding proposal for the intern is not accepted, then the proposed workshops and student social hours will fall to the director of international programs and the clerk, who both already have other functions of their job. However, even with the limitations and challenges, this is a solid foundation to build a strong FYE program for the growing international student population at WSU.

Closing Statement
First-Year Experience programs are an integral step in helping international students integrate in to a college community different from their own. This added support is very important in that it helps international students learn about their
new community, the American university system, cultural differences, aids them in making social connections and friendships, and learning more about American culture. The FYE proposed in this capstone works on meeting the needs expressed by current WSU international students. By adding the International Student and Scholar Workshop Series and the Student Social Hours, the international programs office, and Worcester State University as whole, can work towards meeting the expressed needs of the international student body.

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### Budget

**Academic Year 2016-2017**

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<td>Semester</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5,000</td>
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**Budget Notes**

The full-time staff and work-study students are already paid through WSU and therefore are excluded from this budget. The FYE program utilizes on campus resources so the proposed budget only includes funding for an intern. The budget
for the intern, which will be requested by the Director of International Programs from Academic Affairs requesting $2,500 stipend per semester.
Appendices

Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me what year and semester you started your degree at WSU? And what is your current academic status?
2. Would you please tell me about when you first arrived at WSU and your first semester? (Ex. International student support, orientation, integration into your classes, social experiences)
3. Are you familiar and comfortable using the student services on campus? (Ex. Career services, counseling services, academic success, writing center, health services center) And how often do you use these services?
4. Can you tell me what the graduation requirements are and do you meet with your academic advisor?
5. Could you tell me about how you feel about your classes? Do you understand the homework, essay, and test requirements? Attendance policies? Do you feel comfortable asking questions during class and meeting with your professors during their office hours?
6. Do you feel you are proficient enough in English to be academically and socially successful? What types of English language support do you need?
7. What types of support were you (still are) lacking during your first year at WSU? What can we do to help improve your experience at WSU?
8. Any last recommendations or comments?
Appendix B

International Education Professional Interview Questions

1. May I use your name, title, and university in my written research: First-Year Experience: International Students?
2. How long have you worked in the field of International Education?
3. Why do you think First-Year Experience/Freshman Seminars are important for international students? Or not?
4. Tell me about the FYE program at your institution:
5. How did your office start planning to create and implement the FYE/Freshman Seminar at your institution? Please tell me about the process?
6. What makes it effective?
7. What are its greatest challenges?
8. How has the FYE/Freshman Seminar benefited students at your institution? What is some of the feedback from your students?
9. How is your FYE staffed?
10. How did you budget for your FYE?
11. What are the curriculum components and how did you choose them?
12. How has the FYE/Freshman Seminar affected international student retention and overall student success?
13. What do students enjoy most?
14. What would be your advice for me, if any
Appendix C

International Student & Scholar Workshop Series Schedule

Fall 2016 Workshop Schedule

**Academic Culture at Worcester State:**
Wednesday September 21, 2016
4-5pm, Location TBD
* Topics such as how to address your professor, asking questions during class, arriving late or leaving early, class expectations, etc. Students will have plenty of time to ask questions.

**Academic Advising:**
Tuesday October 11, 2016
4-5pm, Location TBD
* This session will cover what an academic advisor is, how to find out who your advisor is, making an appointment with your advisor, what to talk about at an advisor meeting, tips on choosing classes and more!

**Blackboard & Gmail:**
Wednesday November 2, 2016
* This session will familiarize students with blackboard, how to view your classes, submit assignments and more. There will also be a short tutorial on how to use Gmail, resetting your password and other IT help.

**Student Services on Campus:**
Thursday December 1, 2016
4-5pm, Location TBD
* This session is for students who want to know what different kinds of services are offered on campus--from the library to learning about how you can study abroad. Students will be introduced to all services on campus, where they are located, and what types of services are offered.

- Schedule may change based on guest speaker and staff availability.
- TBD- To Be Determined.
Spring 2017 Workshops

Career Planning:
Tuesday January 31, 2017
3-4pm, Location TBD
* This workshop will cover how to find an on campus job as well as planning for your OPT/CT. Career services will talk about resume building and companies that are known for hiring international students.

Clubs & Organizations on Campus
Wednesday February 22, 2017
3-4pm, Location TBD
* This is a great opportunity to learn more about on campus clubs and organizations. Meet members for different clubs & organizations and learn how to join. We will also share volunteer opportunities and how to stay connected with the community around WSU.

Scholarships:
Thursday March 16, 2017
3-4pm, Location TBD
* This session will cover what scholarships international students are eligible to apply for and include tips for writing scholarship essays and what a scholarship essay looks like.

Maintaining your F-Status:
Tuesday April 18, 2017
3-4pm, Location TBD
* The Director of International Programs will be running this session and it will be a great opportunity for you to ask questions about your visa and any travelling plans you may have during the summer.

- Schedule may change based on guest speaker and staff availability.
- TBD- To Be Determined.
Appendix D

*International Student & Scholar Workshop Flyer*

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**Welcome!**

The International Student & Scholar Workshop Series is designed to take support for international students one step further. Each workshop is uniquely designed to help you achieve academic excellence, meet other international students, get involved on campus and utilize on campus resources! There are a total of eight workshops. Four workshops will run during the Fall semester and four more in the Spring. These workshops are also a great place to ask questions and get to know WSU staff, especially the International Programs staff who will be your support throughout your academic journey.

**Workshop Topics:**

- Academic Culture at Worcester State
- Blackboard & Gmail
- Academic Advising
- Student Services Overview
- Career Planning
- Campus Life & Getting Involved
- Scholarships
- Maintaining your F-1 Status

Location: Student Center, Second Floor

Time & Dates: To be determined & based on staff availability
Appendix E

Student Social Hour Flyer

Looking for a place to socialize and meet international and American students? Well, look no further! The International Programs Office hosts a student social hour where you can meet new people, practice your English, ask questions about American culture, learn about volunteer opportunities, participate in on campus events, and more!

Location: International Programs Office, Student Center 317
Time: 4pm-5pm
When: Every other Thursday
Appendix F

Workshop Survey
(Sample Survey)

Workshop Title: ________________________________ Date: _____________________

1. What was the most valuable thing you learned in this workshop?

2. What changes would you make to this workshop?

3. What would you keep?

4. Additional Comments:
Appendix G

End of the Semester Workshop Survey
(Sample Survey)

1. How many workshops did you attend?
2. What was your favorite workshop? Why?
3. What workshop(s) did you benefit from the most?
4. What improvements do you suggest?
5. What did you learn about the services offered on campus and how to use them?
6. How familiar are you with WSU classroom culture since attending the workshop? (If applicable)
7. How familiar are you with the academic advisory services since attending the workshop? (If applicable)
8. How likely are you to apply for scholarships since attending the Scholarship Workshop?
9. What topic(s) would you like to learn about but weren’t offered?
10. Additional Comments:
Appendix H

Student Social Hour Survey
(Sample Survey)

1. Do you feel like you are a part of the WSU community since you joined the Student Social Hours?

2. Have you joined any clubs or organizations? Or plan to?

3. How has the Student Social Hours helped you to make more social connections?

4. Do you plan to continue joining the Student Social Hours next semester?

5. What types of improvements could the IPO make to the Student Social Hours?

6. What do you enjoy the most about the Student Social Hours?

7. What are some challenges you faced during the Student Social Hours?

8. Do you feel your English language and knowledge of American culture has improved?

9. Additional Comments: