

Community College of Philadelphia
2009-2010
Leadership Institute

Final Project Report

***CULTURE SHOCK:* International Students in the United States**

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Culture Shock: International Students in the United States

Our group of the 2010 Leadership Institute consists of Cathy Collins (Site Administrator of the Northwest Regional Center), Colleen Kelly (Staff Recruiting Specialist, Human Resources Department), Theresa Payne (Administrative Associate, Dual Admissions Programs) and Marianne Mielke (English Faculty). We were charged with developing a project that would increase student success, and here is a report on the development, implementation and future of our project:

Background: Early on, we decided that we wanted to focus on international students, so we set out to find how we could best serve this small but diverse population. We spoke with Jessica Black, John Bernard and the staff at International Student Services and attended their pre-semester orientation in order to find out what programs were already in place. Adam Chambers, President of the International Student Club gave us a glimpse into issues faced by international students. An email survey of international students gave us a further look at the problems they face. Our mentors, Sharon Thompson and Linda Fellag, guided us in focusing our project and finding our niche within the college community.

As a result of our research, discussions and consultations with our mentors, we came to the conclusion that International Students could benefit from additional orientation sessions throughout the semester. We identified several potentially beneficial topics, but we ultimately decided to focus on a project that would alleviate feelings of isolation in international students and connect them to the rest of the college community.

The Project: With funds from the Leadership Institute, we ordered a copy of a DVD entitled *Culture Shock: International Students in the United States*. This 26-minute recording is used at

orientation sessions at many colleges that have a large international student population. We contacted Pairat Sethbhakdi, founder of the International Festival. She and David Prejnar slotted us to show our video during the festival.

In addition to the publicity done by the organizers of the International Festival, we also did our own recruitment for the event. We specifically targeted international students, ESL students, past and future study abroad students, and faculty who deal with any of these groups.

On the day of our session, Tuesday, April 6th, we had a packed audience in the Small Auditorium. The majority of attendees were ESL students who had come with their class or as individuals. There was also a good showing of faculty, staff and administrators who worked with International, ESL or study abroad students or had spent time abroad themselves.

During the 85-minute session, we showed the film and then invited individuals to respond to discussion questions and talk about their experiences with culture shock. A lively and interesting conversation ensued.

Evaluation: We distributed a survey to our audience consisting of these three questions: 1) Did you find the workshop information useful? 2) Are there topics or information that you feel could be included in future programs? and 3) Would you recommend this program to a friend or a colleague?

The results of the surveys were overwhelmingly positive. Here is a sampling of responses:

“It brought awareness to a situation that is not normally discussed on a college wide level.”

“It will make me more sensitive to how international students and how our students feel.”

“Great job, Hopefully, this program will be continued in future International Weeks.”

“ESL students were very excited and could relate to the film. Sharing their experiences with the students created a bond of understanding. Excellent program.”

“It’s useful because I saw myself and my experience in that tape.”

“It is useful. I know that culture shock is a natural thing that could happen to anyone.”

“I liked this program. And I think that it helped me to feel more comfortable.”

“I like the fact that it was with people from a lot of different countries. I really enjoyed it!!!!!!”

In addition, some participants approached members of our team days later to let us know how valuable they found the program. One instructor used the film as the basis of a writing assignment. A Liberian student expressed how closely she related to the issues by saying that it was “my story that I am going to write one day.”

The future: We are donating our copy of *Culture Shock: International Students in the United States* to the library so that it is available to anyone wishing to view and use it.

We hope that this project has increased student success by making international students feel more welcome and able to cope with the difficult feelings of culture shock. We also hope that it will enable study abroad students to adapt and make the most of their overseas experience. We are grateful to all of our colleagues who guided and informed us throughout this process, and thank the Leadership Institute for the opportunity to formulate and execute this project.