Co-op Challenges

Helping International Students Succeed

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Overview

- Work experience and industry connections key motivators for the more than one million international students who come to the US (Chao, 2016; Hegarty, 2014)

- International students can struggle to land and succeed in co-op positions because of language barriers, cultural differences, etc.

- Few international students who graduate without experiential learning opportunities secure full-time employment after graduation (Nunes and Arthur, 2012)

Significance

- International students and the professionals who work with them

- Administrators at institutions with large international student populations – implications for recruitment, reputation

- Co-op programs and employer partners – increased opportunities for companies and students

Identifying Challenges

- Support must be tailored to particular needs

- Acknowledge that obstacles exist

- Focus on strategizing ways to overcome challenges

What are some of the challenges international students face?

- Cultural expectations and differences
  - Stress of acculturation, separation from family/friends/familiar surroundings can lead to lack of confidence and motivation
  - Pressure to succeed
  - Financial difficulties

- Communication
- Interviewing (eye contact, handshakes, self-promotion, competition)
- Being in the workplace: punctuality, gender roles, hygiene
- Discrimination: assumptions about sponsorship, fear of communication difficulties

- Language barriers
  - Technically and psychologically challenging
  - Can impact academic performance

- Gap between required TOEFL/IELTS scores and ability to communicate in practice

- Impact of accents

- Coping mechanism of self-segregation (Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood, 2013)

Overcoming Challenges

- Focus on empowerment and practice

  - Ongoing language support (opportunities to practice, writing centers)

  - Workshops specifically targeting professional communication, LinkedIn, career fairs, networking, navigating cultural differences in the workplace, etc.

  - Peer mentorship

- Create environment in which international students feel fully supported but know that they must take responsibility for their own success and use the resources available to them (Akanwa, 2015)

- Globalization of higher education

- Individualization of support: avoid generalizations

Theoretical Foundation

- Pascarella's General Model for Assessing Change (1985): student characteristics and institutional factors together influence the student experience

  - Five primary elements: structural/organizational characteristics of institutions, student background/pre-college traits, interactions with agents of socialization, institutional environment, and quality of student effort (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004)

- Critical Mass Theory

- Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1999)

Leveraging Co-op Experiences

- Job search process can help students transition from feeling like outsiders to developing awareness of their own strengths and capabilities (Sangganjanavanich, Lenz, & Cavazos, 2011)

- Refine career plan and decisions

- Increased engagement in academics (Esters & Retallick, 2013)

- Ask about individual career goals – stay in US, return home, etc.

- Sponsorship: language proficiency, connections, high level skills and experience

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