Increasing Cultural Understanding, Communication, and Career Skills Among International Students
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Executive Summary

Our proposal idea to improve the University of Oregon is to increase international student interest in American culture immersion and career skill development.

Situation Description

In the past few years, international student enrollment has nearly doubled. Our research suggests that students want the UO to do more to help them find a job while in college. We have identified that cultural differences, difficulty finding useful information, and lacking confidence in language abilities are obstacles that must be overcome by international students as they look for work while at the UO.

Solution

A program will be implemented to improve both international students’ immersion into American culture and career skills. Both of these are necessary when finding a job at the UO and anywhere else in the United States.

The program will function year-round, assisting in developing skills and hosting events designed to introduce students to cultural and work environments they can expect to experience. It will be a constantly evolving program, which will rely on student feedback to assess needs and implement improvements to further our mission of helping international students transition into life and work during their time at the university.

Benefits

The goals of the program are that it will:

• Increase the amount of international students who apply for jobs at the UO
• Increase interest in American Culture amongst international students
• Provide a better understanding of jobs and other offerings at the UO to international students
• Educate international students about the benefits of working in a foreign country

Costs and Timeline

The proposed program will be self-sufficient, offsetting its costs through introduction and monthly member fees. One term will be needed for thorough planning of the program and event scheduling. The next term, the program will be fully launched and be an ongoing, constantly improving part of the University of Oregon.
Introduction
The ASUO has requested ideas that will support the advancement of social justice through the empowerment of marginalized communities. Due to its rapidly growing population at the University of Oregon, as well as various other colleges in the United States, we are proposing an idea to improve the international community on campus. We found through a survey that students want the University of Oregon to do more to help students find a job in college (Appendix A).

Our proposed solution is to increase interest and information about job opportunities amongst international students by creating an extracurricular program to allow students to become better acquainted with American culture and opportunities offered at the University of Oregon. This low cost program will build confidence in international students as they adapt to cultural differences and job opportunities.

Situation Analysis
International students are special assets to all universities and can enhance any environment. Yet, many barriers stop them from getting a job in campus. To improve their situation, we have interviewed fifteen international students from different countries such as China, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Korea to find specific types of problems they notice when coming to the UO (Appendix B).

Cultural differences, difficulty finding useful information, and lacking confidence in language abilities are a few contributing factors as to why international students have more trouble pursuing jobs on campus than domestic students. Making sure those students have the same opportunities as domestic students for getting a job on campus is an issue that could be improved upon.

Cultural Differences
Differences between cultures can influence whether or not students attempt to apply for a job. For international students, having a job here is not just about earning money, but also engaging in the American culture. However, we found that some international students do not prepare for or consider fully immersing themselves in American culture, due to a number of reasons such as level of comfort, level of confidence and lack of available information.

As we noticed through surveys and interviews, international culture and American culture are different in many areas. We found that international students are less likely than Americans to speak out about their concerns unless asked about them directly. For example, when compared to American students, Asian students may come off as shy, not very talkative, and not as open to express themselves. Because of this, they may not take the initiative to apply for jobs on campus.
The University of Oregon brings in students from around the world with diverse backgrounds, which affect their experiences here. International students bring to the university a completely different cultural background that they have been used to for much of their life. For example, there are a lot of Japanese and Korean exchange students here, and some were able to give us get an in-depth understanding of their opinions on jobs. To start, they believe their time here is too short to get work experience comparable to what they will find in their home country. They are afraid that they won’t be able to understand what their boss and fellow employees want them to do. Also, ways in which they were raised may have taught them to be very cautious to avoid mistakes in their work, which can add to the pressure of working in a foreign environment. It would be beneficial for international students to learn to take a more proactive approach when applying for jobs.

**Difficulty in Finding Information**

Knowing what jobs are actually out there can be a problem for anyone, especially for international students without a work visa who have a more limited selection of jobs in the United States.

Looking around the campus, we rarely saw any posters or advertising for on-campus jobs. International students, because their visa limits the types of jobs they can get in the United States, can only work on campus or a major-related job off campus, compared to domestic students who have a much wider selection. Therefore, they rely much more on advertised jobs that can be found on campus. One interviewed Chinese student said, “I want a job on campus to help my living expenses in the United States, but I do not know who to ask and what jobs are available.”

After searching the Career Center’s website, we found it did not provide much specific information about work requirements for international students or how the Center can help the students become more accustomed to working here. Freshmen and sophomore students who recently enrolled at the UO are even less likely to know what the Career Center is or how to go about finding what is available to them at their experience and skill level.

There are also no formal job fairs targeted toward international students. The school holds a job fair in the EMU once per term for students so that students can find jobs while they are still in school. However, some international students who attended that fair told us most of the companies there do not accept international students. This gives them the impression that international students are not expected to try to find a job while at the UO.

Domestic students may be more familiar with how they should go about finding information about jobs, whereas many international students will have more difficulties. For those who came to the UO without any previous job experience in their home countries, it can be confusing to know where to start, sometimes to the point where students will be too intimidated to try. The combination of being new to the job hunting experience and being in an unfamiliar foreign environment is a situation that can be improved upon.
Language Barrier
Many international students don’t feel confident in their language skills during their time at the UO. They find it difficult getting used to using English as their main language and feel nervous speaking in public or talking with native speakers. Doubting their abilities makes it more difficult for students to get a job in UO campus because they cannot communicate with people in the way they would like to and are not so familiar with the culture-specific vocabulary in the United States.

Based on what we found in interviews, international students feel more comfortable starting off with work that focuses more on technical skills. For example, many said they would like a tutoring job that was related to their major, something they are comfortable with. It gives them a chance to become familiar with working in an English-speaking environment while improving their language abilities. Another large benefit is the work experience gained, as many students stated that they had little or no work experience before coming to the UO.

Nevertheless, language barriers become more problematic in areas such as service jobs that the student may not be as familiar with. One international student who worked at the school’s café explained her situation to us. She felt it hard to work at because she was not familiar with Western food names, which made it hard for her to take people’s order and caused her to make a lot of mistakes. Her confusion sometimes upset the customers, and she felt bad that she made the customer wait. The language barrier stands very clearly here.

Another example of that, for international students, is when they get a phone interview or answer phone calls. Often it is not easy for them to understand everything clearly by listening, and since it is not a face-to-face conversation it causes misunderstandings. Language barriers issue turns out a lot more significant at this point so far.

Although improving over time, students may still have difficulty getting past their self-doubt about their language skills. International students should understand that coming to the UO to study is a perfect opportunity to gradually improve upon their language skills and get comfortable communicating with other people without being nervous.

Objectives
Surveyed students expressed that they would like the UO to do more to help them find a job. One could argue that there are many resources available to students, and this is true. Resources such as the Career Center already provide great services to students, but to help international students we need to make improvements. Our major goals are the following:

- Increase the amount of international students who apply for jobs at the UO
- Increase interest in American Culture amongst international students
- Provide a better understanding of jobs and other offerings at the UO to international students
- Educate international students about the benefits of working in a foreign country
Proposed Solution
Becoming familiar with a new country and its culture can be very difficult for any international student. To work at a place where no one speaks your language is even harder. So our program will be targeted for international students to help them get familiar with the American culture. It will not only build their confidence, but also provide better cross-cultural communication. If this program is advertised to all new incoming international students and continued throughout their freshman year if not longer, it will be a huge success. The best and most important part of the program would be the fact that they will get to interact with American students to learn about the culture as it is. They will also get the chance to converse with employers on campus about what they are looking for in an eligible candidate.

In order to increase interest amongst international students about jobs and other offerings at the University of Oregon, we plan to implement a sustainable program that offers various skills such as resume and cover letter writing skills, job application tips, and general facts about Eugene and surrounding areas. This program will be used to get international students better acquainted with not only the University of Oregon, but American culture as well. It will be advertised through the LCB career center website, as well as during IntroDUCKtion in order to raise awareness amongst first year international students. The program will be extracurricular and meet once a week during the school year. Events will be offered such as “mock interviews” and outings (such as baseball games) where international students are able to get a better feel for what makes up the American culture.

The most costly aspect of this program is the introduction and monthly fee that students will pay individually. The start-up fee will be $50 and the monthly fee will be $20, in order to fund monthly outings. This is a cost-effective way of immersing international students in American culture and getting students better acquainted with what the University of Oregon has to offer.

By implementing this program, international students are not only being educated about the country they chose to study in, but they should also feel much more comfortable and confident in pursuing any job opportunity or challenge that arises. Our goal with implementing this cost-effective program is to build confidence in new international students to utilize any opportunities that the University of Oregon has to offer, despite any language barriers, lack of motivation, or cultural differences.

Risk Analysis
There would be a few risks related to our proposed solution.

Fees Limit Program Participation
Some students may not take advantage of the program due to the fee requirement. If we find this to be the case after observing the program, fees can be adjusted after careful planning to compensate for the reduced amount of money the program brings in from students.
**Difficulty Developing Events**

It can be difficult deciding on events the majority of students enjoy participating in. When planning events, care should be taken to get feedback from students about what kind of events they would like to see in the program.

**Limited Staff Availability**

At times, there will be a lack of availability of companies and college staff to conduct mock interviews and resume workshops. Program staff needs to carefully manage schedules to be sure there are not large time gaps between these events.

The discussed risks are able to be reduced in time and are outweighed by the benefits. International students will gain a greater understanding of American culture while at the UO, increase their confidence in career searching, and feel more comfortable communicating with their English-speaking peers.

**Technical Plan**

**Fall 2012**
- Develop program schedule and plan events
- Recruit proper amount of staff
- Plan program advertisements for Career Center and IntroDUCKtion
- Conduct survey to ensure fee amount is appropriate and within reason
- Plan monthly email newsletter to inform students of program highlights

**Winter 2013**
- Open program to students
- Collect feedback for desired improvements
- Develop plan to implement improvements
- Recruit peer officers to help manage program
- Begin monthly newsletters to program members

**Spring 2013**
- Continue constant feedback/implementation system to reflect student needs
- Rotate in new peer officers each term

**Summer 2013**
- Conduct analysis of budget of program benefit to students

**Fall 2013**
- Continue program with modifications as needed
Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yearly Program Budget</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Revenue from Fees*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertisements</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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*Assuming 120 ongoing members, 20 new members, and 20 lost members per year
** Assuming 60 attending members at a cost of $20 each

Conclusion
As the population of international students at the University of Oregon continues to grow, so does the need for equal opportunities. The issue we are addressing is the lack of interest amongst international students to immerse themselves in American culture and job opportunities. We found that these issues arose due to language barriers, cultural differences and lack of information available to international students.

By implementing a low cost program that allows international students to immerse themselves in local and cultural trends, students will become better acquainted and therefore more comfortable with the American culture. Furthermore, as students become more comfortable with their surroundings, we hope to introduce job and internship opportunities that may not have been explored without this program. We hope to further our efforts in accomplishing this goal, and ask for your support throughout the process.
## Appendix A

Job survey questions and results

1. **Are you an International student or domestic? If international, where are you from?**
   - Domestic: 45.2% (14 students)
   - International: 54.80% (17 students)

2. **Why did you choose to study at UO? (pick the answer you feel most strongly about)**
   - It's close to home: 32.30% (10 students)
   - It was the best school for my major: 38.70% (12 students)
   - I wanted to experience the Pacific Northwest culture: 41.90% (13 students)

3. **If you had to choose, would you prefer to work on campus or off campus in Eugene?**
   - On campus: 67.70% (21 students)
   - Off campus: 48.40% (15 students)

4. **Do you feel that the University of Oregon offers a fair amount of jobs to students?**
   - Yes: 64.50% (20 students)
   - No: 35.50% (11 students)

5. **When you first came to the UO, were job opportunities introduced to you?**
   - Yes, but not many: 25.80% (8 students)
   - Yes, more than enough: 19.40% (6 students)
   - No, not enough: 54.80% (17 students)

6. **Do you think the UO should do more to help students find a job while in college?**
   - Yes: 82.80% (24 students)
   - No: 17.20% (5 students)

7. **What is your opinion about campus job?**
   - The pay rate is too low: 27.60% (8 students)
   - I think it is fine the way it is: 31.00% (9 students)
   - There are not enough jobs offered: 34.50% (10 students)
   - I don't know where I can find a job: 24.10% (7 students)

8. **Do you have a job on campus? (please say if you are domestic student or international student) and what is your job, is that a job related to language requirements?**
   - Yes: 25.80% (8 students)
   - No: 74.20% (23 students)

9. **Do you think international students get equal job opportunities as domestic students? Think about language barriers? Stereotypes?**
   - Yes: 31.00% (9 students)
   - No: 72.40% (21 students)
Appendix B
Interview questions

1. Do you have a job on campus?
   If yes: What issues or barriers did you experience when looking for a job and when you got the job?

   If no: Do you want a job on campus? Have you ever tried applying? What barriers affected your job search, cultural or otherwise?

2. Do you feel you have the same opportunities as American students when seeking work?
   If yes: Think of a time you didn’t feel equal compared to American students. How did you overcome those inequalities? If you still feel unequal, how can the UO improve that?

   If no: Explain why you feel you don’t get the same opportunities. How does this affect your search for work? How can the UO improve this?

3. Do you feel comfortable applying for jobs that require good English skills?

4. If you get turned down for a job, why do you think you weren’t hired?

5. If you and an American student have equal skills and apply for the same job, do you feel you both have an equal chance to be hired?

   If no: Explain why you think this.