

Chapter 92

Guest Students: Faculty Expectations of Japanese International Students

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions welcome international students because of their status as resources for fostering intercultural competencies among college students and because of financial benefits the institutions receive. The author in this ethnographic case study investigated the level of academic expectations undergraduate international students from Japan received from faculty members in a U.S. teacher education program. Findings reveal that the program's faculty members had low expectations of these international students. Their expectations were reflected in the participants' receiving good grades, praise, and advice which told them not to worry, but failed to address their academic weaknesses. It appears that the faculty members' niceness ironically contributed to a trajectory of academic inequity and produced negative educational outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

In the academic year 2013-2014, the number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States increased by 8% to 886,052 (Institute of International Education, 2014) reaching a record-high enrollment of international students in U.S. history. Colleges and universities wholeheartedly welcome international students mainly for two reasons. First, international students bring higher education institutions economic benefits. In 2014, international students contributed \$27 billion to the U.S. economy (Ortiz, Chang, & Fang, 2015).

Second, in the era of valuing diversity, intercultural/multicultural education is widely perceived as desirable, thus international students are increasingly perceived as a resource for fostering intercultural competencies (Breuning, 2007) among college students. Cushner (1998) advocates a role of international students as an educative function for American students. Lindsey (2005) states, "For many students who

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cannot study abroad, it is possible that interaction with students from a different country may, in and of itself, provide valuable learning opportunities for personal and professional development” (p. 247). The more visible presence of international students, therefore, is a promising factor for American college students’ development of global cultural competence.

Although the effort to achieve greater diversity by internationalizing their student body is commendable, research findings on faculty members’ perceptions of international students are not promising. Robertson, et al. (2000) found that international students were perceived by faculty members as lacking good writing and critical thinking skills and not expected to perform at the same level as native speakers. Beoku-Betts (2004), in her qualitative study of African female scientists who had been graduate students in Western universities, reports of white professors questioning their ability to do the work, asking them to take remedial classes and criticizing their accents. Devos (2003) documented that the general public conflated the alleged decline in academic standards with the internationalization of higher education, and in particular, with the presence of international students on Australian campuses.

The faculty’s expectations towards international students translate into how they treat these students. In Lobnibe’s (2009)’ study, an Asian international student was ignored by a professor in class, only for a white student to state the same point shortly afterwards and receive positive compliments by the professor. Hanassab (2006) found that many Asian international students reported that professors looked down on them, ignored them, and did not consider their opinions seriously. DiAngelo (2006) observed that a professor allowed white students to dominate Asian international graduate students during a class discussion time.

The discrepancy between institutions’ effort for diversity and faculty members’ low expectations of international students especially pose a threat to teacher education programs. Teacher education programs strive to produce culturally competent teacher candidates who can effectively teach students from diverse backgrounds in a globalized world. If students from diverse backgrounds, including international students, do not feel that they are treated equally, teacher education programs defeat their purpose. Studies of faculty members’ perceptions and expectations towards international students tend to focus on graduate international students. The expectations undergraduate international students receive from the faculty members in general, and in teacher education programs in particular, are rarely known.

The purpose of this study is to investigate what kinds of expectations undergraduate international students received from faculty members in a U.S. teacher education program. The study asked the following questions: 1) What kinds of academic expectations did the international students from Japan receive from faculty members? 2) How did the international students respond to the expectations of their teachers at the university?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of East Asian international students’ experiences can be divided into three themes: adjustment, language difficulties, and experiences of prejudice and discrimination. This section of the chapter will report each theme in the same order, and will be accompanied by a synthesis of studies regarding international students from Japan.

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