

Not Just Cash Cows

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Many people who work at colleges and universities have expressed concern about the new administration's executive orders and policies regarding immigration, as well as the reactions of international students and scholars to it. However, more fundamental issues related to the internationalization of higher education that should not be ignored have been emerging for some time.

In this age of global connectivity, internationalization in academe has become an increasingly normal practice. That has proven to be profitable for institutions and beneficial for the career prospects of international students. But even before the recent political turmoil and upheaval, not all has been as good as it may have seemed. Those directly involved in the process -- domestic students, international students and professors -- have been voicing dissatisfaction.

For example, during my time as an undergraduate at the University of Oregon, as well as when I was abroad at Waseda University in Tokyo, in passing conversations I would hear domestic students complain about international students. Many of the complaints stemmed from their view that their college or university only cared about the money its international programs brought in, rather than the domestic students themselves and their education. At that time and since then, I've also heard comments from domestic students about feelings of inferiority, especially in America, where they view international students as having more money than they do, as evidenced by their expensive cars and clothes.

Domestic students can also tend to feel unequal to the international students because their grades are not as good, especially in science and math, as those of Asian students. Such issues have caused many domestic students to feel jealous of the international students, and as a result, they have shut out international students -- making no effort to create relationships with them academically or socially.

But perhaps the biggest challenge in relationships between domestic and international students, both inside and outside the classroom, is the language barrier. Domestic students may have had little to no exposure to outside cultures and accents, so they tend to be unable to understand international students at the most basic level. However, instead of attempting to reach out and learn, they often become frustrated and angry at the international students' language ability -- causing them to make fun of those students or further exclude them from their social or academic circles.

Turning to international students, I have found that many harbored negative views about their experience at new colleges and universities. During casual discussions with my international-student peers at Waseda University, who represented various institutions from around the globe, many expressed feelings of homesickness and loneliness due, in part, to a lack of interaction with domestic students. When I returned back home to the University of Oregon, I had similar casual discussions with international students and heard the same thing. In fact, my international friends often told me that they are aware of the complaints from the domestic students and know why they are being shut out. This exclusion has made them feel unwanted and unappreciated, so they have feel they have no reason to stay in the country.

For most international students, the main reason to go abroad is not only for the curriculum but to meet people in a different culture and make new connections. Given the lack of welcome they've often received, their initial excitement on arriving at a college or university in a new area can quickly fade away, and many international students decide to go home much earlier than planned -- sometimes with the intent to never go abroad again.

The international students who do stay often feel increased stress and unease in classes that are especially difficult for them because of the language barrier. With no domestic peers to ask for help, and with most professors unable

to fully understand them, they just struggle as best as they can, spending countless hours in the library studying to keep up, lacking any kind of social life and even neglecting to sleep.

International students have also complained to me about a lack of institutional support outside the classroom. They wish they had more go-to administrators who could help them in such matters as setting up bank accounts or finding other services. Many international students can also tend to run into financial problems -- for example, in America, some companies use the language barrier to their advantage to sell students on services they don't need or refuse them service altogether. Such circumstances can build upon one another, invoking a sense of worthlessness among international students, who start to feel as though their institutions value them solely as cash cows.

Research findings support my experiences and those of the students with whom I've spoken. [Jan Bamford](#) of London Metropolitan University investigated the issues that international students had acclimating to the culture in Great Britain and found that those students voiced challenges similar to what I was told during my conversations. [Ciarán Dunn](#) and [Jae-Eun Jon](#) conducted separate research in different locations and found that the domestic students in Ireland as well as South Korea held some of the same reservations as the students at my university in America, showing that this pattern is not an isolated circumstance.

In addition, professors tend to be overlooked in their experiences and concerns with the internationalization of education. I have spoken with many faculty members who have confided in me about the difficulties they have in preparing curricula for international students. Quite often, they have mentioned having minimal to no cultural training or study-abroad experience and no real knowledge of how to relate to the international students coming into their classroom.

Another issue is the curriculum itself. In most cases, the curriculum has been created for a domestic audience. While professors say they try to find ways to tie in articles or topics that are relatable to the international students, the lack of training can often make this difficult. Some professors have told me that they feel the curriculum at their institution is not easily adapted for international students.

Not surprisingly, however, the biggest issue for professors, like students, is the language barrier. The inability to understand international students, especially from Asian countries, frustrates faculty members, who feel they can't effectively and fairly evaluate or grade international students. I experienced this firsthand in some of my classes at the University of Oregon, as professors would ask me to repeat or explain what an international student said or meant in their responses to them. Such faculty members knew that I have Japanese language proficiency, along with many international friends across the globe, and can understand most accents without much difficulty. They would rely on me as the intermediary since I am an American but have more international experience than they do.

Again, research results confirm what I've heard about language barriers and the need for updated curricula. [Patricia Dewey and Stephen Duff](#) performed a study at the University of Oregon that found that professors felt limited in training and desired a more relevant curriculum and greater opportunities to study and travel abroad. Based on conversations I've had and the research I have seen, I do not feel it would be far-fetched to say that professors feel institutions should address these challenges if they plan to continue to pursue internationalization. I also do not feel it is a stretch to say that faculty members currently have a less-than-stellar view of the globalization process and dislike the new stress factors added to their jobs.

Higher education institutions must, unquestionably, do more when it comes to international students. The fact is that, regardless of the Trump administration's practices, internationalization will most likely increase, in some form or fashion, as the world becomes more interconnected. Most people in higher education herald such internationalization as a good thing. But if the main groups that are a part of the process experience such discontent, how true can that be? Can we only measure success by the money that international students bring to colleges and universities? I do not think we can.

The solution, while difficult to put into practice immediately, is a simple one. Institutions must spend more time with

international students, as well as the domestic students and professors who interact with them, and focus on their needs. Domestic students need to be taught about cultures other than their own -- preferably through mandatory classes taken during their first year -- so they can be more accepting of international students. International students need more designated administrators who can help them get settled in a new country.

Colleges and universities should also invest in the training and education of professors. Faculty members should have the chance to spend time abroad and learn about new cultures and languages. And institutions must find better ways to get various student groups -- both domestic and international -- to interact outside of culture festivals once a year.

As colleges pursue such activities and continue to monitor and improve the internationalization process, they will help ensure that everyone involved gains a better understanding of one another and views the process in a positive light. That will, in turn, encourage other people to participate and ultimately help create a stronger learning environment -- as well as a more globally connected world.