

# 2020 DENNIS H. MAY CONFERENCE ON DIVERSITY ISSUES AND THE ROLE OF COUNSELING CENTERS

## Supporting International Students and Staff In The Midst of Multiple Pandemics

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### Summary and additional take-away from the discussion

1. Impact of COVID on international student communities:
  - Multiple layers and complexity within the community
  - Threats to international students' health and safety
  - Worries and guilt about being away from family and loved ones in home countries (concern for their wellbeing; feeling unable to help; imposter syndrome)
  - Not being able to come to the US on schedule and having to defer admissions (COVID compounds previous/existing travel bans) -- grief and loss
  - Difficult decisions and logistics around staying or returning home
  - Xenophobia at personal, social and legislative levels, and uncertainty about their current and future prospects in U.S.
  - Double discrimination due to COVID -- being seen as carriers in the US but also when returning home
  - Financial and logistic difficulties: funding, food insecurity, health insurance and access to health care
  - 15-20% of international students are university funded or PELL grant supported
  - Many students may be returning to poverty, violence, limited health care in home countries
  - Studied mentioned: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6pqHA75wlkgAZL7XSAVK\\_g](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6pqHA75wlkgAZL7XSAVK_g)
2. Acknowledge the toll it takes to go through such experiences and how international students may be affected (anger, fear, depression, helplessness, invisibility, uncertainty)
  - Supporting staff are also faced with feeling of helplessness and unpreparedness

3. What could support look like? Any successful programming experiences? How folks are addressing that challenge of remote support?

- Increase visibility through campus-wide solidarity statements, offer counter-messages of welcome and support to the international student community
- Cross-unit collaboration and joint programming: collaboration and communication among CAPS, international office, insurance office, health service, career service, faculty/departments
- Virtual resource libraries:
  - Close captioned videos on various topics for students outside state or US jurisdictions
- Virtual gathering spaces:
  - Community building, resource sharing, connecting through shared experiences

3. Explore how international students may go through racialization as an important component of their cultural adjustment process (they absorb the dominant racist discourse from global and local media and people around them)

- There are numerous publications/articles documenting this process among different international student communities.
- Below are a few:
  - <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/03/international-students-and-experiences-with-race-in-the-united-states>
  - <https://www.ojed.org/index.php/jis/article/view/965>
  - <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1043292>
  - <https://www.umass.edu/cie/news/international-students-confront-us-conceptions-race-and-racial-identity>

4. Recognize that for some international students, growing up in relatively homogeneous communities with dominant/majority identities, understanding the reality and the nuances of race and racism in the U.S. may feel confusing and disorienting.

5. International students would benefit from support in examining their internalization of colonial and white supremacy ideologies, and the resulting complicity and participation in anti-Blackness racism within their communities.

6. Important to acknowledge the diverse experiences within international student communities and that their experience of race and racism are very different (e.g., white students from European countries v.s. Asian students v.s. students from African countries)

7. How to get “buy-in” from the international community to engage in social justice dialogue?

- The racialization process directly impacts international students, though each person's experience would differ. It's essential to the well-being and success of international students to better understand how that racial dynamics and history impact the interaction between themselves and the world around them.
8. How the journey towards racial literacy and activism, towards understanding the systems that oppressed would look for international students and how they can work towards dismantling it for all people.
9. Explore/Generate tools and strategies that mental health professionals and educators could use to better support and help our international students as they navigate their experience with race and racism in the United States -- their own and theirs toward BIPOC
- Particularly, the writer finds that students appreciate learning about the historical practices of violence and dehumanization against BIPOC, and then connect them with current modern practices that may be more subtle yet a continuing form of oppression and exploitation.
  - Filling in the gaps around terminology also seems to be helpful
  - Young's 5 Faces of Oppression may be a good conceptual basis
  - In order for international students to engage and participate in the process, educators need to acquire the knowledge and curiosity about how colonialism and white supremacy operate globally, and engage students in reflecting what it may look like in their home countries or upbringing.
  - Mental health professionals may also need to hold space for open and curiosity-based exploration of the racialization process of international students and its impact on their attitudes, and behaviors regarding race and racism in the US. Examine the impact of their own identities and knowledge backgrounds on such discussions.
  - Important to acknowledge the "confusion" that international students face in terms of their place in the US culture(s)
10. Recognize the energy and resources that international students will likely need for either journey – managing the impact of racism and xenophobia; engaging in the exploration of internalized racism.

#### Additional participant contributions

#### Difficulties/Challenges:

From G Wei Ng (she/her/hers) : I have had a few international students struggling with finances because of the currency exchange rate and having to resort to setting up Go Fund Me to raise money. Connecting students to resources available on/off-campus, such as emergency fund, food, etc. can be helpful.

From Amanda Ramirez (She/Her) : Fears regarding visa status, wanting to go back home to feel safer re: racism in the U.S. and COVID. Questioning why they came to the U.S., uncertainty for the future regarding national policies, not being able to come back, getting home (finding a flight, questions regarding being able to come back)

From Beth Sheehan : I think the common feelings of homesickness are also amplified for some who weren't able to visit home during summer as they normally would, or had family visits to the US cancelled.

From Bobbi-Jo Molokken : I've been hearing about extra worry for family member's health back home coupled with not being able to return home for visits due to restrictions/uncertainty

#### Social Justice and Advocacy:

From Deidre Ann Weathersby : Our international student outreach team invited SANKOFA (Black student outreach team) to collaborate with students on historical trauma and racisms in the US. It will be in a dialogue space already well established through ISSS and our Asian American Cultural House. Looking forward to this collab.

From Rebecca Schlesinger, PhD (she/her/hers) : A model, I find to be helpful is Young's 5 Faces of Oppression. It offers some core tenants that are true of all forms of systemic oppression and can be a useful way in helping folks understand how their experiences of marginalization may be both similar and different with respect to other group's struggles. This perspective taking piece I think can be helpful to cultivate critical consciousness.

From Paola Hernandez Barón (Ella/She/Her) : This is a bit of a side step- But as we talked about international students and families back home... I wanted to mention this is also very true for many in the Latinx communities. While the student may not be international they may have majority if of their family in another country. And this community also has many issues/concerns related to immigration

Please share additional resources below!

Recommended website:

Recommended readings:

Recommended media (other):