

# International Student Success: A Guide to Thrive in and Out of the Classroom

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*An orientation program with explicit guidance on expected academic, professional, and cultural practices can provide better support for international students during their study abroad experience. Drawing from previous studies that have highlighted the stressors of international students studying in the U.S., the authors describe the creation and implementation of a comprehensive International Student Seminar (ISS) program. Keywords: international students, international student orientation, international programs*

Historically, the College of Business and Technology (CBAT) has been home to nearly half of all international students studying at a regional state university in the Southeast. From 2012-2022, international students enrolled in programs within CBAT were from 86 different countries and studied in Management and Marketing, Engineering, Engineering Technology, and Surveying, Accounting, Economics and Finance, and Computing programs. The university offered a brief international student orientation focused primarily on visa compliance. As international student enrollment grew in CBAT, there were additional student needs that the College could meet through a more comprehensive orientation. The purpose of this study is to provide readers with detailed information for the creation and implementation of a comprehensive international student orientation program that could be implemented at other universities.

## Curriculum Design and Implementation

Living and studying in a foreign country requires many psychological, sociocultural, and academic adjustments (Schartner & Young, 2016). The curriculum for this program was created in response to the stressors of international students highlighted in existing literature (Chen, 1999; Shartner & Young, 2016; Yao et al., 2019; Zalaznick, 2014).

Beginning in the fall of 2018, the International Student Seminar (ISS) was created for new international students studying in CBAT. The ISS program was configured as four one-credit-hour pass/fail courses and became a requirement for all international undergraduate and graduate students. In contrast to short, compressed orientations conducted soon after students arrived on campus, the ISS program was delivered over an extended period of time. International students must successfully complete each course before proceeding to the next in their first four semesters on campus.

The four ISS courses had a common format, and each class meeting covered an academic module, a cultural module, and a professionalism module. The pedagogical methods were strategically created to enhance the international student experience. Methods employed include group work and team assignments, games and competitions, self-assessments, discussion boards, private journal posts, and course assessments. Many module assignments (e.g., resume writing, interviewing skills, LinkedIn profiles) spanned multiple semesters to advance students' hard and soft skills over time. The goals of the ISS program are presented in Appendix A. Learning objectives for the first and last semesters are presented in Appendix B.

## ***APPENDIX A***

The ISS program was designed to meet a range of goals:

1. to orient, develop, and educate international students;
2. to aid international students' assimilation and acculturation and to enhance their academic performance;
3. to improve international students' knowledge and skills to enhance their academic performance;
4. to clarify U.S. higher education expectations for academic tasks and professional behavior for international students;
5. to address challenges unique to international students and
6. to build a strong and inclusive international student community within the College.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **First Semester ISS Learning Objectives:**

- Familiarize students with support services on campus and how to utilize them.
- Explain what specific actions constitute academic misconduct, why they are problematic, and the consequences.
- Examine faculty expectations, articulate how they differ from home culture, and formulate a personal strategy for meeting new/different expectations.
- Examine teamwork expectations, articulate how they differ from home culture, and formulate a personal strategy for operating as an effective teammate.
- Diagnose communication strengths and weaknesses and develop an enhancement plan.
- Evaluate cultural intelligence quotient (CQ), identify areas for improvement, and devise approaches for enhancing CQ.
- Assess cross-cultural competency (CCC), identify areas for improvement, and complete exercises/experiences to augment CCC.

### **Fourth Semester ISS Learning Objectives:**

- Become familiar with job search techniques and develop a plan to conduct a personalized job search plan.
- Understand networking fundamentals to aid in a job search.
- Devise a strategy to capitalize upon study abroad experience in the job search process.
- Create a professional resume to be utilized during mock interviews and job searches.
- Expand and polish LinkedIn profile for utilization during a job search.
- Understand reverse culture shock and issues that can accompany re-acculturation and return to home culture and devise a strategy to facilitate the transition back home.
- Utilizing the portfolio of assignments collected across all semesters of the International Student Seminar, complete reflective assignments identifying and discussing personal growth in the areas of cultural intelligence and cross-cultural competencies.

In the academic modules, students learned about academic integrity and misconduct, public speaking skills, professional writing, and classroom conduct. Examples of academic module assignments included writing elevator speeches, delivering poster presentations, and establishing LinkedIn profiles.

In the cultural modules, students learned about American culture, culture shock, cultural awareness, incorporating the study abroad experience into student's job search and interviewing, and reverse culture shock. Cultural module assignments included quizzes related to different cultures, Hofstede's country comparison, and cultural poster design.

In the professionalism modules, students learned about American etiquette, managing online presence, resume writing, interviewing skills, and practical training for international students seeking employment while studying abroad. Examples of professionalism assignments included creating a cover letter and resume, participating in mock interviews, networking via LinkedIn, and working in teams.

Based upon student feedback and to accommodate student schedules, the ISS course met for six hours on three Saturdays each semester, which ensured the 15 contact hour requirement was achieved for each course. The College provided lunch for each class meeting, which presented an opportunity for building relationships and community among the CBAT international students and faculty.

To properly develop and deliver the courses, resources were required; thus, a course fee of \$150 per semester was attached to each course to cover costs associated with the program (e.g., meals, supplies, events). The most significant commitment of resources was personnel: a program coordinator and faculty to teach each of the courses. The program coordinator was responsible for preparing materials and assignments, logistics and administrative matters, and management of the course Learning Management System (LMS) site. Faculty were recruited to teach the ISS courses based on their experience and interest in working with international students.

## Conclusion

Universities have a significant opportunity to implement a more strategic orientation program to effectively host international students. This study describes how CBAT at one university created and launched a comprehensive international student seminar program to provide a more effective study abroad experience for visiting students. The ISS courses were created for in-person delivery and were offered in person beginning in the fall of 2018; however, courses were moved online in the spring of 2020 through

the spring of 2022 due to the pandemic. The ISS courses have been offered in person again since the fall of 2022. The pivot to online learning reduced the program coordinator's ability to effectively assess student outcomes in the ISS courses; however, students provided feedback through the university-administered course evaluations. Student feedback from these course evaluations was overwhelmingly positive. Below are student comments, which indicated that the ISS program met the needs of international students in areas where the literature noted stressors (Chen, 1999; Shartner & Young, 2016; Yao et al., 2019; Zalaznick, 2014).

- “This course helps me understand American culture more”
- “This course has increased my confidence in public speaking significantly”
- “This course contains high levels of interaction between the professor and students”
- “In this course, I am practicing oral English”

Student feedback on ISS course assessments has enabled continuous improvement in the courses. For example, the pandemic revealed that a number of assignments could be shifted outside of class time, which allowed more team interactions to occur in the class setting. In addition, the practical training for international students seeking employment was shifted from the fourth semester to the second semester because students indicated that they needed the information earlier in their program. Collecting additional targeted student feedback will enable the authors to identify the changing needs of international students. Assessing the success of the international student seminar program is an area for future research and a focus for the current academic year.

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