

Social Segregation or Acceptance Within The Capstone International?

Capstone Seminar: Spring, 2013

Mackenzie Montgomery Wanagel



of the classroom and I was able to communicate with them. I developed a questionnaire with seven qualitative questions that would assist me to have a better understanding of how these international students are adjusting to the American lifestyle. These questions consisted of the following:

1. Are you an American citizen? If you are not, what is your home country?
2. If English is not your primary language, what is your native language? If English is not your primary language, how often do you attempt to speak English?
3. What is your major study here at the University?
5. Do you have difficulty communicating with other students not of the same ethnicity?
6. Do you enjoy going out and socializing with others or do you prefer to stay close to home?
7. Do you have any special cultural meals that you prepare or celebrations that you go out to enjoy?

By utilizing this survey I was able to ascertain the social aspect and social impact that these international students endure from the university students. The purpose of my conducted research was to find a commonplace for these barriers of segregation to be broken down. Being in direct contact with these international students helped me obtain personal, factual information that significantly validated my conducted research question: Are these international students accepted among others at the university or do these visiting students tend to segregate themselves from the surrounding public? In addition to observing several social situations (classrooms, study groups, sports activities), I conducted one-on-one interviews with ten students from varying Asian ethnic backgrounds. I came up with a significant range of conclusions:

1. None of the students were American citizens and all interviewees were of Asian descent studying here under a student visa.
2. Some students were shy and introverted which made it difficult to start the communication process; however, after a few minutes of conversation and interaction between us, they seemed to “warm up” and become more social and accepting of what I was trying to ascertain. Several students actually ran away from me.
3. Students who traveled here from southern China to study found it difficult to communicate with me as they struggled to understand exactly what I was asking them and then asking them to reply in English. Their newly learned English language was prohibiting communication between us. Where as students from Japan were more willing to attempt to understand and to speak English.
4. I found it profoundly true that these students from partnering international schools seem to stick with one another rather than going out of their social network to communicate with American students.
5. During my interactions with these students, I discovered they try to hold onto their personal and cultural life as much as possible. At home, they continue to use chopsticks to eat their food and they primarily stick with their normal diet of fish, vegetables, and rice.
6. What is their normal diet? After speaking to a girl from Kanagwa, Japan, she told me her

favorite thing to eat was Umeboshi, which are pickled plums . . . and Ishi Yakiim, which is similar to our sweet potato.

7. After asking if they preferred American food or Japanese food, the results came back and proved that Japanese food is far more intriguing and appetizing for these students.
8. I ascertained that a great deal of their food is considerably similar to our food only it contains more salt and vegetables.
9. As these students from Asian countries try to assimilate in with their surrounding peers, it is evident they want to keep their own personal and cultural identity as untouched as possible. Many took advantage of offered celebrations presented by the University.
10. Pertaining to their academic life, I learned that when these students arrived in America they solely relied upon an English translator; however, after attending numerous English classes, they have learned to use and somewhat understand the English language. All attempted to learn proper English and to utilize this knowledge.
11. When asked if they spoke English outside of the classroom, they all primarily responded with a resounding "no". Some individuals did say they try to use English as much as possible so that they can improve their understanding of what others are saying around them.
12. One Japanese girl stated that she has a roommate that actually helps her with her English and

basic fundamentals. In turn, she reciprocates by teaching her roommate Japanese.

13. Several individuals that I spoke with did not have the same positive, giving outlook. These individuals found it more comfortable to communicate and develop relationships with other students of the same ethnicity.
14. Biology, business, economics, engineering, and social work were the majors being studied while attending The University.
15. The majority of interviewees tended to socialize within their own ethnic background and consequently preferred to entertain at their residence by preparing their homeland foods.
16. All students avail themselves of programs offered by the university to assist with transition from their home country to their host country.

In a study concluded by the "Journal of International and Intercultural Communication", it is evident that international students are disappointed and dissatisfied with their relationship with other U.S. students (Marklein). Author and professor, Elisabeth Gareis, discovered that 38% of 454 international students attending ten public universities had reported not having any strong friendships with U.S. students and another 27% were not satisfied with the quality of the friends they made (Gareis). Students from China and East Asia were noted as being the most likely to be unhappy with relationships (Marklein). In order to effectively communicate and interact with these visiting international students, along with making them feel comfortable and