



Fields of Opportunity

Innovative Programming for Developing Multicultural
Communities at a Rural Midwest University

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Through this session participants will:

- identify the components necessary for developing a sense of community and its impact on international students at a university setting.
- review programming of a small, rural university designed to help international students develop a better understanding of American culture and the educational system utilized in American higher education.
- explore unutilized/underutilized resources available within their own settings which can enhance their own institution's ability to serve international students.

Background

- Despite challenges to provide multicultural settings, smaller, rural IHEs often struggle to attract, serve (academically/socially) and retain international students. This session shares the innovative programming and utilization of local resources of a small, rural university to provide enhanced experiences and develop a greater sense of community for all stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

- Being a part of a community helps individuals identify values and a sense of belonging as well as for safety and survival (DaDeppo, 2009).
- Social integration is defined as the bi-directional interaction between the student and the campus system, which includes peers, faculty, staff, and extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1975).
- This sense of belonging, mattering and having one's needs met through membership in a group is important to all people, including those with disabilities (Herbert et al., 2014).
- Sense of community has four major factors: membership, reinforcement of needs, bi-directional influence and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

A snapshot of our institution

- *Small*
- *Small community*
- *Isolated location*
- *Agriculture surrounds us*
- *Traditional setting and institutional focus*

Purpose of our Program

- *Expand students' world*
- *Expose individuals to new cultures and ideas*
- *Enrich our campus*

Telling it like it is

- Small, rural institutions don't have “star” appeal
- Small institutions are often unknown
- Traditional approach for recruiting
- Low budget for recruiting and programming
- Differing needs for support

Flipping the coin

- Strong sense of community
- Safe community
- Faculty who welcome students and focus on teaching
- Iowa Nice – welcoming, friendly people
- Looking at our uniqueness
- Wanting to go beyond landmarks and socialization

Making it happen

- Determining a theoretical focus
- Complimenting academics with student life
- Thinking about needs
- Scheduling challenges
- Recognizing one class is not enough
- Getting others involved

How it works – a 4 prong approach

- Exposure to culture – class and field experiences
- Academic – finding classes that enhance
- Intense language focus – formal and informal
- Student life – going beyond

Making the most of the situation

- Identifying what is available
- En Loco Parentis
- Highlighting the community
- Training local people
- Establishing a pattern of experience
- The power of a “note”

Can we get some real examples?

- In town
- Local history
- Peculiarities
- Festivals
- Contact with real people





Does all this pay off?

- Stronger connection to the University
- Students help with recruiting future students
- High rate of extending time or return for degree completion
- Change within students
- Continued communication

Any Questions, Thoughts, Experiences to Share?

Language and culture are the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality.

Lev Vygotsky, 1968

Thank You!!

*Culture is the widening
of the mind
and the spirit.*

Jawaharlal Nehru

Resources

- DaDeppo, L. M. W. (2009). Integration factors related to the academic success and intent to persist of college students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 24(3), 122-131.
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- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.