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About CSIE

Case Studies in International Education (CSIE) is an open access, online, peer-reviewed publication that utilizes case studies for the development and advancement of the field. CSIE seeks to promote further professional development through engaging case study discussion. We offer publication opportunities for scholar-practitioners, including working professionals, faculty, and graduate students at CSIEpub.org. Each case study provides an opportunity to integrate theory and practice through interdisciplinary analysis/insight for the benefit of the field's future growth.

International education is defined by Punteney (2019) as "the profession of designing, managing, and facilitating programs and activities that help participants to appropriately, effectively, and ethically engage in interactions with culturally diverse people and ideas, often across national borders."

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In Appreciation

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When Messages Get Murky:

Managing Expectations at Study Abroad Fairs

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Tags

Education Abroad; Partnerships; Personnel Management; University/Higher Education

Setting

“PAC” is a mid-size, private, four-year college located in the suburbs of a large southeastern U.S. city. The institution’s enrollment is approximately 10,000 undergraduate students. There is an international programs office on campus which manages study abroad opportunities for PAC students, including 50+ direct enrollment options, faculty-led group options, and several programs offered by third-party provider organizations.

The PAC international programs office is led by a director with a recently downsized staff of two full-time advisors and two part-time student employees. The students report to the advisors, while the advisors report to the director. The office downsizing was due to financial cuts across campus. A relatively new campus Provost does not place international study as a top priority but prefers a focus on incoming international students. PAC does not employ a Senior International Officer (SIO) or higher-level administrators related to international education. The director, Marcus, reports to the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education.

Despite varying levels of support from campus administration over the years, the international programs office has a tradition of organizing a study abroad fair each fall semester. The fair is a festive event with free food, music, and at least ten tables set up outside in a large, open, centrally located area on the campus. The invited participants each have a table assigned to them and include relevant campus offices and staff, such as financial aid and academic advising, as well as international programs office staff, student alumni, and faculty.

The office's main goal for the fair is to recruit students for the college's partnership direct-enroll programs, faculty-led programs, and partner third-party provider organization programs (in that order of priority). In a good year, the office recruits 200 students to study abroad across programs. Since the 2020 COVID pandemic, the office has seen on average 100 students per year study abroad (a 50% decrease) despite ongoing outreach and recruiting.

Case

On a cloudy, hot, humid day in mid-September, PAC hosted a fair which included campus staff and three provider organizations with whom PAC has signed non-exclusive collaboration agreements. It was estimated that over 250 students stopped by the fair (based on how much free pizza was distributed). Students were asked to provide their names, email address or social media handles, but there were only 52 names collected. It is common that not all students leave their contact information at the PAC fair. As a result, it is difficult for staff to gauge an accurate number of how many students attended or are genuinely interested in studying abroad.

The office regularly relies on student alumni to work part-time. At the time of the fair, there were two employed students who each worked in the office approximately 12-15 hours per week. The two students had studied abroad on PAC programs – one (Marley) on a direct enrollment semester program in Seoul, South Korea, and one (Sophia) on a third-party provider's semester program in Prague, Czech Republic. One of the providers which PAC invited to the fair also offers their own programs in both Seoul and Prague. The cost of the provider's two programs was approximately \$2,500 less than the PAC program fee for the same locations, with comparable program length, credits, and services included such as housing and health insurance.

Marcus, the PAC office director, required the two advisors and two student employees to work at the fair. They were told to promote all of PAC's programs and to share their own study abroad experiences in an effort to recruit students. While at the fair conversing with prospective students, Marley, the student employee who attended the lower-cost provider program in South Korea, mentioned the cost difference to a prospective student who was interested in the same program location.

When Marcus became aware of this, he reprimanded Marley for openly sharing the cost difference information. He said to an advisor that he was concerned with the potential damage to the reputation of the office. Marcus did not give an explanation when the student employee asked why there was a cost difference between the PAC program and the provider program. The student employee was not clear if there were factors such as institutional overhead or other campus requirements that needed to be taken into account when pricing PAC programs. This topic was not part of the onboarding when student employees were hired and was not discussed openly in the office.

At the end of the semester, Marley was not re-hired when her employment contract was up for possible renewal. She was not given a reason but accepted Marcus's decision and moved on to work in another office on campus. Marcus did not contact the program provider in question; however, he told an advisor in the office not to invite program providers with lower program fees to the next fair.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- Are study abroad fairs useful for promoting international programs and recruiting students? What are some benefits and challenges? How can institutions attract students to on-campus fairs and gather students' contact information?
- Are there ethical or other concerns about having study abroad alumni participate as staff at campus events? What sample guidelines would be helpful for alumni to receive when placed in a recruiting environment?
- What preparation and expectation-setting should be provided for participants (students, staff, invited guests such as campus offices and providers) at fairs?
- What should the training process look like for student employees? What level of transparency and level of detail should be shared with student employees?
- What dilemmas can occur if institutions offer multiple program options in the same international location – such as both “homegrown” and provider programs – especially if the programs have differing costs? How could communication, promotion, and expectation-building be managed in this case? What obligations do institutions have regarding transparency of prices?
- What factors and needs (of the campus, office, students, faculty, etc.) should institutions take into consideration when choosing partnerships with third-party provider organizations, direct enrollment options, faculty-led options, and other forms of international programming?
- If you were the principal decision-maker in the campus international programs office, and were required to downsize your program portfolio strategically, which factors would you take into consideration?

Bridging Ideological Divides: A U.S.-Cuba Study Abroad Experience

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Tags

Citizen Diplomacy/Education Diplomacy; Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Abroad; Partnerships; Program Design; Student Learning and Development; University/Higher Education

Setting

This case centers on a 2009 undergraduate business study abroad program between the Paul Merage School of Business at the University of California, Irvine, and partner institutions in Cuba. The nine-day program was conceived in the context of fragile diplomatic relations and stark economic contrasts, aiming to expose U.S. students to non-market systems and encourage reflection on global business models. It immersed 35 U.S. students in Cuba's distinctive economic environment.

U.S.–Cuba relations, consistently shaped by U.S. State Department sanctions and executive policy shifts, presented additional layers of complexity. The program coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution—a period marked by diplomatic tension. Subsequent changes under the Obama administration briefly eased some restrictions, only for them to be reimposed later. This required ongoing adaptation and resilience from program organizers.

Designing a U.S.–Cuba study abroad program meant overcoming deep-rooted skepticism on both sides. The planning process took two years of trust-building, site visits, cultural diplomacy, and behind-the-scenes negotiations to secure necessary approvals. Throughout this process, faculty from both nations engaged in dialogue with university administrators, legal experts, and government stakeholders. In many ways, the initiative became a form of *academic diplomacy*—a long-term project of mutual respect, cooperation, and pragmatic flexibility.

Case

Cultivating Institutional Support

To begin building partnerships, the School of Business faculty lead leveraged long-standing personal and professional relationships with Cuban academic leaders. Even with strong institutional backing, skepticism remained. Some Cuban officials questioned whether the program represented cultural imperialism. Cuban officials initially viewed the program with suspicion, asking pointedly, *“Why should we allow you to come here and preach about a system that has sought to undermine our revolution for decades?”*

Conversely, some U.S. students were skeptical about the value of studying a centrally-planned economy, with one asking, *“How can learning about a non-market economy help me in my future career in corporate America?”* Yet, to the faculty lead, this stark contrast made Cuba an ideal setting to foster reflective global learning.

The U.S. university worried about student safety and legal exposure. Extensive meetings, transparency, and careful documentation were critical in overcoming these barriers. Risk management protocols were comprehensive. Contingency plans addressed political unrest, medical emergencies, and communication breakdowns. Legal teams on both sides reviewed each element of the program to ensure compliance with rapidly shifting regulations.

Ultimately, faculty worked not only as educators but also as diplomats, mediators, and translators across systems. Their persistence transformed a seemingly-risky idea into a viable program.

Curriculum Development

The curriculum was co-developed with Cuban academic partners, promoting shared ownership and mutual respect. The program included lectures, site visits, cultural excursions, and interactions with local entrepreneurs. It was designed to challenge assumptions about capitalism, entrepreneurship, and development, while fostering deeper intercultural awareness. The program's structure reflected four guiding themes:

1. Understanding Economic and Financial Issues – Students explored Cuba's dual-currency system, the structure of state-owned enterprises, and the dynamics of an emerging private sector.
2. Learning Through Immersion – Students were encouraged to engage directly with local communities.

3. Challenging Ethnocentrism – The program systematically pushed students to examine their cultural assumptions and how those shaped their interpretation of Cuban society.
4. The Importance of Cross-Cultural Communication – Emphasis was placed on adapting communication and negotiation strategies across cultural and political divides.

Pre-Departure Orientation

Before departure, the program initiated a rigorous orientation process. The faculty asked students to reflect on their expectations and document what they had heard about Cuba. These assumptions—often reflecting stereotypes from media or political rhetoric—surfaced and were openly discussed.

Students read articles from diverse U.S. media outlets alongside Cuban publications and citizen blogs. They were introduced to readings on socialism, Cuban economic history, and recent reforms. Debates around capitalism versus socialism, freedom versus stability, and growth versus equality were framed not as binary choices but as lenses through which to analyze complexity.

The faculty emphasized that Cuba's system, though unfamiliar to most students, was not without rationality or merit. They urged students to move beyond judgment and adopt a posture of critical humility.

During the Program

Each day of the program began with a briefing and ended with a structured debriefing session. The formal program included state-owned enterprise visits, guest lectures, cultural tours, and informal gatherings with local Cubans. Students were encouraged to observe, question, and document what they experienced in real time.

In one classroom session, a respected Cuban professor gave a candid lecture on U.S.–Cuban relations—while a government official sat silently at the back. Despite the obvious surveillance, the conversation was allowed to proceed, albeit within certain boundaries. As students would later describe, critique in Cuba was often cloaked in respectful tones and communicated through body language—*las miradas*, or “the glances,” became part of the learning.

The contrast between systems forced students to confront contradictions in their own assumptions. Visiting informal markets, they observed entrepreneurial behaviors that defied textbook expectations. Seeing resilience in the face of scarcity, they began to appreciate different models of productivity and value. Participating in community events and sharing meals with Cuban families, they discovered a human richness often absent in economic reports.

After the Program

Returning home, many students reported lasting changes in perspective. Some altered academic trajectories, others pursued careers in international development or comparative economics. Several maintained contact with Cuban academics or initiated further research into Cuba's evolving private sector.

Students also wrestled with the ethical responsibility of representing their experiences without oversimplifying or exoticizing Cuba's reality. Frustrated by simplistic portrayals of Cuba in the U.S., many became advocates for a more nuanced view. They spoke of their experiences in classrooms, job interviews, and policy forums, attempting to bridge the same ideological divides they had experienced abroad.

The long-term impact extended beyond individual transformation. The program itself became a model for designing meaningful exchanges in sanctioned or authoritarian environments. It demonstrated the educational power of intercultural dialogue, even under difficult circumstances.

Yet sustaining the program remained difficult. Cuba's worsening economic conditions—marked by shortages of food, gasoline, and electricity—alongside an exodus of key academic collaborators, made further iterations challenging. Still, the positive impacts of the program on the students and the faculty endure.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What is the value of supporting study abroad programs in sanctioned or authoritarian environments? What is the value of supporting study abroad programs in locations that may be experiencing mild political unrest or social tension?
- What strategies best prepare students to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with unfamiliar political and economic systems?
- What role do informal interactions play in promoting intercultural understanding, and how can programs be designed for them intentionally?
- How do national narratives and media representations shape how students and faculty perceive and engage with host-country institutions?
- What ethical considerations should guide educators when operating programs in authoritarian or politically sensitive environments?
- How can partnerships between institutions in ideologically divergent countries be structured to ensure mutual respect and shared program ownership?
- What would it take to make a program like the one in this case sustainable over time, given the demands on faculty and administrative time and the uncertainty of the political landscape?

Navigating CPT Challenges:

Institutional Policy vs. Immigration Regulations

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Tags

Education Policy; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; International Student and Scholar Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

Westwood Liberal Arts College is a prestigious institution with a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary education and intellectual exploration. As part of its academic framework, the college mandates that students wait until the spring of their sophomore year to declare a major. This policy is designed to encourage academic exploration across disciplines before committing to a specific field.

However, federal immigration regulations permit international students on F-1 visas to engage in paid off-campus internships through Curricular Practical Training (CPT) after completing one academic year. CPT must be directly connected to the students' declared major, creating a conflict for first-year international students at Westwood who fulfill the academic year requirement for CPT but are prohibited by institutional policy from declaring a major early.

Case

Ava Lin, an international student from Singapore, recently completed her first academic year at Westwood Liberal Arts College. Passionate about data science, she aspires to gain hands-on experience in the field. During her spring semester, she learns about a competitive summer internship with a financial analytics firm that aligns with her career goals.

Eager to apply, Ava consults with the college's international student office to discuss work authorization requirements. She is informed that while she meets the federal requirement of completing a full academic year,

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she cannot obtain CPT because she has not yet declared a major. Since CPT authorization must be directly linked to a student's declared field of study, Ava is unable to secure the required work authorization for the internship.

Frustrated, Ava talks to her international student friends attending two other liberal arts colleges in the U.S. with similar policies. She finds out that Hillcrest College and Northview University have responded to this policy tension in different ways. One allows international students to declare an intended major early for CPT purposes only, while the other creates exploratory CPT-aligned internship courses under general studies or "undeclared" categories to accommodate students without a declared major. These alternative models highlight the range of institutional interpretations and adaptive strategies used to bridge regulatory and educational priorities.

With this new information, Ava considers these possibilities:

- Advocate for policy changes at her institution that could provide international students with more flexibility in internship eligibility.
- Request an exemption from the institutional policy to declare her major early, which could allow her to qualify for CPT.
- Explore alternative professional development opportunities that do not require CPT, such as unpaid research, virtual internships, or work in her home country.

Ava brings these options to her advisor, who commits to working with the International Student and Scholar Services team to explore the complexities of institutional policies and federal immigration regulations, and advocate for Ava and the equitable treatment of students in academic and professional development settings.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How does the institutional policy of delaying major declaration align with the mission of liberal arts education?
- What are the implications—legal, ethical, and institutional—of allowing international students to declare their majors earlier than their domestic peers?
- What steps can institutions take to ensure that policies do not inadvertently disadvantage international students, particularly in the context of experiential learning?
- What role do career services, faculty, and international student offices play in shaping adaptive solutions and supporting students like Ava?
- What risks, such as equity concerns or inconsistent decision-making, arise from implementing case-by-case exceptions to policy?
- In what ways does this case reflect broader institutional priorities such as internationalization, DEI, and student-centered success?

Beyond the Ranking: The Hidden Cost of Internationalization

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Tags

International Enrollment Management; International Student and Scholar Services; Internationalization and Global Learning; Student Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

Global university rankings have shaped the intense competition among institutions, particularly in non-English-speaking countries. Within these rankings, the internationalization component, which includes metrics such as international faculty and student ratios, has gained significance, even though it accounts for only 10% of the total score in certain ranking systems. Therefore, many institutions have prioritized increasing their international student and faculty numbers to improve their global standing.

The admissions office at a research-intensive university in South Korea enrolls a student population of approximately 10,000. Recently, the university president established a new institutional vision proposing various innovative strategies across education, research, and internationalization. As a result, the administration strongly emphasizes internationalization efforts, primarily by seeking international student enrollments.

The university ranks within the top 100 universities globally, known for its strong academic reputation, competitive admissions process, and English-medium instruction for all courses. Despite these strengths, the university struggles to attract international students because of its location in a non-English-speaking

environment. Compared to leading institutions in the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Canada, international students perceive the university as less desirable due to language barriers, limited opportunities for English language and cultural immersion, and few post-graduation employment prospects within South Korea. Further, there is a notable absence of comprehensive support systems to facilitate international students' academic and social integration into campus life.

Case

On the day a well-regarded set of global university rankings is released, Jiyoona, an international admissions officer at the university, learns that the institution's ranking has dropped from the previous year. The "internationalization" metric, which considers international student and faculty numbers as key ranking factors, is identified as the main factor contributing to the decline in the university's global ranking. In response, Jiyoona's university leadership expresses concern over the university's international recruitment efforts and requests an improved plan to increase international student admissions.

For Jiyoona, this request is not surprising. Recruiting international students has long been framed as a numbers game rather than a commitment to student experience. While increasing international student enrollment is a priority in her communication with university leadership, expectations for international students' post-admission success remain high among both leadership and faculty members. The performance of the admissions team is evaluated not only based on recruitment numbers but also on how well international students adjust academically and culturally at the university, including their academic progress, engagement in campus life, and overall satisfaction.

At the same time, the university's global office frequently expresses concern that the admissions team recruits more international students than the global office can effectively support. At times, the admissions team finds itself receiving criticism from academic departments or individual faculty members, who express concerns about whether some international students are fully prepared academically or linguistically for the demands of the university.

These tensions are exacerbated by the internal culture of the university, which is not structured to support a growing international student body. Although English is the official language of instruction, many administrative staff members, and even some faculty, have limited English proficiency. The human resources department offers English tutoring and other language-related professional development programs for staff and faculty members, but these initiatives are limited in scope and participation remains voluntary. The language issue creates significant barriers to essential student services, leaving international students without adequate support in both learning and campus life. Instead of being addressed at the departmental level, international students' concerns are often redirected back to the global office or the international admissions officers, reinforcing a cycle of inefficiency.

The consequences of these tensions fall on international students, as becomes evident in focus group interviews conducted by Jiyoona and other international admissions officers. During these focus groups, several international students express their struggles on campus. One student shares that Korean students often prefer collaborating exclusively with other Korean students in group projects because it is easier to communicate in Korean, making it difficult for international students to integrate academically and to develop a sense of belonging among their peers and the campus community. Others share that the university's services are designed with domestic

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students in mind and lack structured support programs to help international students transition successfully into academic and social life at the university.

As such, despite efforts to attract more international students with the goal of “internationalization” and improving global rankings, dedicated resources to support the long-term success of international students remain limited. The administration continues to be primarily focused on metrics, particularly enrollment numbers, rather than the lived experiences of those students on campus. As a result, Jiyeon finds herself spending much of her time planning and managing recruitment cycles aimed at boosting international enrollment to elevate the university’s global standing. In light of the recent ranking drop, she is now tasked with preparing a five-year analysis of international student trends and proposing strategies to further increase enrollment—raising the question: at what cost?

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are the benefits and detriments of the emphasis on global rankings in higher education?
- What actions should Jiyeon take in response to the administration’s request for an improved plan?
- How can Jiyeon and her department work to change the university culture so that every department takes responsibility for international student success?
- How should universities balance enrollment demands with meaningful student support systems?
- How can all of the different units within a university come together to create a shared vision and strategy for internationalization?
- How can institutions better train faculty, staff, and domestic students to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for international students?

Empowering Student Entrepreneurs: An International Collaborative Network

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Tags

Experiential Education; Internationalization and Global Learning; Leadership and Strategy; Partnerships; Program Design; Professional Training; Technology; University/Higher Education

Setting

Africa's youth population—over 60% under age 25—represents immense potential amid challenges of unemployment and limited resources. In Rwanda's developing economy, young entrepreneurs face limited access to capital, mentorship, and global networks. Situated in a fast-growing city, TechBridge University of Rwanda (TUR) has established itself as a beacon of technological education in Africa. Students from over twenty nations of the continent come to its modern campus, drawn by promises of world-class training in engineering, artificial intelligence, and technology entrepreneurship.

Yet despite gleaming labs and international faculty, a palpable frustration existed among its ambitious students. While classroom learning excelled at theory, the university offered no structured pathway for students to

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transform their innovative ideas into real businesses. It was against this backdrop that students from diverse African backgrounds found each other in early 2023. Audu, Tunde and Amaka from Nigeria, Kamikazi from Rwanda, and Kimani from Kenya shared a vision that transcended their national differences. They began designing what would become the Africa Innovators Club (AIC), a student-led structure that would challenge traditional educational boundaries by connecting local entrepreneurial talent with global opportunities, all while navigating the complex realities of an emerging economy.

Case

Recognizing universities' crucial role in equipping students with entrepreneurial tools, Audu, Tunde, Amaka, Kamikazi, and Kimani decided to found the Africa Innovators Club. "We lacked spaces to experiment with our ideas," explained Audu. Their vision: create a laboratory where students could develop ventures addressing real-world challenges despite resource constraints.

"When we researched entrepreneurship clubs globally, we found models that didn't fit our reality," Amaka explained. The founders spent weeks analyzing successful programs from Leland to Temasek, but realized adaptation was essential. Their diverse backgrounds became their first asset—Audu, Tunde and Amaka brought Nigeria's resourceful startup mindset and business acumen, Kamikazi offered deep knowledge of Rwanda's post-genocide economic policies, and Kimani shared insights from Kenya's mature tech ecosystem. This multicultural foundation helped them develop an approach that was globally-informed yet locally relevant.

Unlike Western models with abundant venture capital or Asian programs with strong government backing, AIC designed a framework for resource-constrained environments. Where Leland's StartX leveraged Silicon Valley networks and Temasek's Enterprise program tapped government funding, AIC created an autonomous, resilient structure that provided three critical elements: a safe environment for experimentation without financial pressure, access to international mentorship otherwise unavailable to students, and a platform for cross-cultural collaboration that brought diverse perspectives to local challenges. This approach positioned AIC as a distinctly African innovation—drawing global knowledge while addressing continental realities.

One of AIC's most distinguishing features became its emphasis on international connections. "From day one, we knew that students in Rwanda needed exposure to global markets and mentors," explained Kimani. "We couldn't just focus locally if we wanted to build truly competitive ventures."

The team established a "Global Mentors Network" by reaching out to the Rwandan diaspora and international professionals with ties to Africa. This virtual community of advisors connected student entrepreneurs with experienced mentors across five continents, providing monthly video sessions and ongoing guidance.

"Our international partnerships became our competitive advantage," noted Amaka. "While other student groups focused only on local connections, we created pathways for our members to think globally from inception." This approach provided access to educational resources beyond national boundaries and created opportunities for knowledge exchange that transcended geographic limitations.

AIC developed a particularly strong relationship with University College London's African Innovation Network. This partnership led to a virtual exchange program where students from both institutions collaborated on

entrepreneurial projects addressing cross-continental challenges. "Working with peers from different cultural contexts forced us to question our assumptions and develop more robust business models," Audu explained.

AIC faced four critical challenges. First, attracting student engagement amidst academic pressures required high-profile events with tangible outcomes. Second, funding constraints required creative solutions as international grants posed bureaucratic hurdles. Third, female membership was initially low. Finally, leadership turnover threatened continuity until AIC implemented three-month transitions and knowledge repositories. "Creating systems that outlast individuals became essential," noted leadership successor James Rwigyema. These challenges reinforced adaptability, building AIC's resilience within complex institutional environments.

Within two years, AIC catalyzed remarkable transformation. Five student startups launched, including LearnSphere's EdTech platform. Partnerships connected 200+ members across seven universities, creating a regional innovation network. Skills programs in AI and rapid prototyping equipped emerging entrepreneurs and international partnerships secured funding and global market access. Women-focused programming ultimately achieved 45% female membership while leadership pipelines ensured sustainable gender-balanced growth.

AIC demonstrated how student entrepreneurship catalyzes broader transformation. Generated ventures created three jobs per startup, building ecosystems that connect Rwandan innovators internationally while preserving local leadership. Through AI and technology programs, students developed globally competitive skills addressing African challenges with culturally relevant solutions.

Approaching graduation in 2025, the founders gathered in AIC's bustling innovation space, now home to over 200 members. "From our first conversation to this regional network spanning five continents—look at what we've built," Audu marveled, watching students collaborate across workstations. An email notification interrupted—Ghanaian students seeking guidance for their own initiative. As they crafted their response, they reflected on essential lessons while envisioning a pan-African network of student innovators. "Whatever advice we give must emphasize how student entrepreneurship connects local innovation with global perspective," Audu concluded. "That's been our foundation for everything."

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- The AIC program is currently engaging students from universities across Rwanda. What would be the pros and cons of extending AIC to welcome students from other countries? What would be the next steps in doing so?
- How might the AIC program develop students' global competence?
- In what ways can extracurricular programs such as AIC contribute to campus internationalization?
- How does the cultural diversity of AIC's leadership team contribute to its effectiveness in developing globally-minded entrepreneurs?
- What types of international experiences would be most valuable for student entrepreneurs in emerging economies, and how might these be funded sustainably?

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Beyond the Classroom: Neo-racist Incidents and the Chinese Student Experience in the U.S.

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Tags

Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; International Student and Scholar Services; Leadership and Strategy; University/Higher Education

Setting

Over the past two decades, the number of Chinese students studying abroad, particularly in the U.S., has significantly increased, driven by China's economic growth and the desire for a better education (Ma, 2020). As Chinese students embark on their academic journeys in U.S. universities, they quickly encounter a reality that is as unfamiliar as it is unsettling. From the moment they step onto campus, they are immediately racialized, categorized, and often stereotyped based on their race, ethnicity, and nationality. This phenomenon highlights a critical intersection in international student experiences: Chinese students are not just "international students" from a foreign land but are often symbolic figures within the larger narrative of Western society: technological rivals, intellectual threats, and cultural anomalies.

Since Donald Trump's election in 2016, the United States has experienced a rise in conservative populism and sociopolitical upheaval. The neo-nationalism and nativism that emerged from Trumpism have continued to reshape Western democracies, particularly in terms of immigration and higher education policies. In the midst of these challenges, Chinese students and scholars have frequently found themselves at the center of contentious political debates, facing increasing scrutiny, racial profiling, and restrictions on their mobility (Lee & Li, 2021). Now, with the return of Trump to the presidency in 2025, anti-China rhetoric in political discourse is likely to further exacerbate the racism Chinese students face, contributing to an unwelcoming environment that affects both their academic and social experiences in the U.S.

Traditional racism is based on biological differences in skin color, but culture and ethnic origin serves as a proxy or a politically correct code for discrimination in neo-racism (Lee, 2007, 2015, 2017). This shift doesn't mean that

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race, as a social construct, has disappeared from U.S. society. Rather, it has been obscured, often marked by a system that promotes exclusion and marginalization based on a hierarchy of countries and cultures where some are favored more than others. Compared to the broader concept of xenophobia, neo-racism targets specific countries and ethnicities of the world (e.g., the Muslim travel ban, Cuba sanctions). Chinese students, as the racially minoritized group, are particularly vulnerable, subject to a barrage of stereotypes and possible discriminations tied to cultural attributes of their homeland.

There are two main forms of neo-racism targeting Chinese students in the higher education context: linguistic and moralistic judgments. Specifically, Chinese students are often discriminated against for their language proficiency and unfairly accused of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. These forms of discrimination manifest in everyday interactions, including classrooms, research collaborations, and faculty-student relationships, where these mechanisms play out in subtle but impactful ways.

Against the backdrop of an already unwelcoming environment, neo-racist incidents targeting Chinese students have unfolded across U.S. campuses. In one instance, a professor openly warned Chinese students against speaking their native language (CNN, 2019). In another, a faculty member bluntly declared, "All Chinese students cheat" (Inside Higher Ed, 2019). Despite the gravity of these incidents, institutional responses have been disappointingly predictable. As Cole and Harper (2017) noted, U.S. institutions typically have two common responses to issues of race and racism. One response is to not address the issue at all; the other response is to address the issue indirectly, attributing the problem to the individual initiator involved rather than connecting it to "larger issues of systematic and institutional oppression" (Cole and Harper, 2017, p. 9). While some professors have stepped down after facing public allegations of discrimination against Chinese students, these actions are rarely accompanied by concrete efforts by the university to deal with ongoing, systemic, structural, institutional problems. Consequently, racialized incidents continue to happen in U.S. universities (Stein, 2018). Additionally, institutions often lack concrete policies or effective interventions to address such discrimination. International students have resorted to informal support networks, student organizations, and advocacy efforts to combat these challenges, though these efforts are often insufficient in the face of institutional neglect.

Case

A recent neo-racist incident targeting Chinese students occurred at a top AI conference in 2024. A professor (who is a white, middle-aged woman) from an elite research university was invited to offer the opening day keynote address. The audience, filled with scholars, researchers, and graduate students from around the world, listened attentively. In the midst of the presentation, the speaker included a slide that read:

"I did it to make my paper results look better. Nobody at my school taught us morals or values."

This statement was allegedly from a Chinese student who had been expelled from the professor's institution, but the context of the incident was not explained during the presentation. The speaker used this quote to highlight ethical concerns in academic research and discuss issues of academic integrity. However, by mentioning the student's nationality, this professor presented a harmful stereotype that Chinese scholars inherently lack morals or values, perpetuating the damaging notion that ethics are not part of the educational system in China.

The presentation immediately sparked outrage and backlash from Chinese students, faculty, and the broader community, with critics condemning the incident as racially-charged and offensive. They expressed deep

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concern about such explicit discrimination, arguing that the remark reinforced racialized stereotypes and unfairly positioned Chinese students and scholars as morally dishonest or unethical. The lack of context further fueled the perception that such behavior was not an individual act but a cultural trait. To fully understand neo-racism as a system of discrimination rooted in nationality and cultural background, we must move beyond viewing it as isolated prejudice or bias. Instead, we must recognize the broader, systemic forces that perpetuate these narratives. This incident is not just a single case of discrimination, but it reflects a recurring pattern of neo-racism that continues to impact Chinese students and scholars in academic spaces, where isolated incidents are unjustly generalized to an entire nationality or ethnicity, reinforcing racialized scrutiny and exclusion.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- In what ways have you observed Chinese students facing neo-racism in the U.S. (or in your country)? What other groups are targeted, and in what ways?
- How do racialized incidents like this professional conference contribute to the broader context of neo-racism against Chinese students and scholars in the U.S. context?
- What role do universities play in either addressing or reinforcing discrimination on campuses? What concrete policy changes could universities implement to proactively address discrimination, beyond just reactive measures?
- How can we make sure that neo-racist incidents are not just addressed as isolated incidents but recognized as part of broader systemic issues in higher education? How can faculty, administrators, and students collaboratively shift institutional narratives around minoritized students?

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Leading Across Borders: Navigating Cultural Challenges in a STEM Lab

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Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; International Student and Scholar Services; Personnel Management; University/Higher Education

Setting

Dr. Emily Carter is an early-career researcher and lab manager at a prestigious STEM institute that hosts researchers and students from around the world. She recently transitioned into this role after completing her postdoctoral studies. Emily's research team comprises graduate students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including individuals from East Asia, South Asia, Europe, and North America. While Emily is passionate about fostering innovation and collaboration, she finds herself navigating complex interpersonal and cultural dynamics that challenge her leadership and communication skills.

Case Study

Dr. Emily Carter joined a newly-established research lab focused on developing innovative technologies for sustainable energy. As a leader, she was tasked with building the lab infrastructure and defining a shared vision for her team. The team's members brought diverse technical expertise but varied significantly in their communication styles, work ethics, and cultural norms regarding authority. Early in her tenure, a significant incident occurred. A graduate student, Jai, from India, accidentally damaged a newly-acquired piece of lab equipment while conducting an experiment. The equipment was critical to the team's ongoing research, and its loss delayed their progress by a week. Initially frustrated, Emily left the lab for the day to process her emotions. The next morning, she convened a team meeting to discuss the incident calmly and professionally. Privately,

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Emily spoke to Jai, emphasizing the importance of seeking guidance when unsure about a task. She reassured him by saying, “Mistakes happen, but let’s make sure we learn from them. Please don’t hesitate to ask for help in the future.”

Over the next few days, Emily noticed that Jai continued to remain reserved during team discussions. During a routine check-in, she gently asked Jai if he felt comfortable raising concerns in the group setting. Jai hesitated, then shared that in his academic experience back home in India, it was considered inappropriate to question or directly approach professors or senior researchers. This insight helped Emily realize that his hesitation stemmed not from lack of initiative but from deeply-ingrained cultural norms shaped by hierarchical structures. She also observed broader patterns: students like Marta from Spain were comfortable openly voicing opinions during meetings, while others, such as Ahmed from Egypt, preferred one-on-one conversations. These varied preferences made it clear to Emily that a single communication style wouldn’t work for the whole team.

To bridge these differences, Emily adopted a systems-thinking approach, considering the range of factors that could influence her team members’ behaviors. Recognizing that individuals would thrive in different communication contexts, she introduced structured team discussions that allowed everyone to participate in ways that matched their comfort levels—such as anonymous suggestion boxes, rotation-based presentations, and smaller group discussions. She emphasized a shared leadership model, stating, “I might be the principal investigator, but this lab succeeds because of each of you. Your ideas and expertise are crucial.”

Understanding that inclusive leadership requires continuous learning, Emily also took proactive steps to strengthen her own cultural competence. She reached out to the university’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion to seek guidance on navigating cultural dynamics in international teams. She also consulted with a senior colleague who had extensive experience managing multicultural research groups. These conversations helped her refine her communication strategies and implement new norms to encourage psychological safety, so that team members felt their opinions and questions were welcomed.

One of Emily’s most impactful initiatives was introducing bi-weekly team meetings dedicated to both technical and interpersonal issues. These sessions included reflection prompts on collaboration and communication styles, discussions on ongoing research, and space to celebrate achievements. The meetings gradually built trust and reduced cultural misunderstandings, fostering an inclusive environment where all voices were heard and valued.

Later, Emily was able to apply this skill set in her broader professional context. For example, Emily faced challenges in establishing her authority with external collaborators from different cultural backgrounds. She observed that her proposals were sometimes met with skepticism unless she provided extensive context or framed ideas in culturally resonant ways. Emily learned to adapt her messaging by aligning her proposals with values and priorities that resonated with her audience. She also made it a point to attend cultural competency workshops and build informal relationships with stakeholders to strengthen trust and rapport. Being able to apply her previous knowledge in new settings emphasized for Emily the cumulative benefits of ongoing intercultural competence development.

Discussion Questions

- How does Dr. Emily Carter's response to Jai's mistake highlight the role of emotional intelligence in leadership? What lessons can you draw from her approach to managing team conflicts in culturally diverse settings?
- In addressing cultural communication barriers, Emily used systems thinking and inclusive strategies. How might these approaches be adapted to foster collaboration in other international or cross-cultural teams?
- Emily's team members had varying communication preferences shaped by their cultural backgrounds. How can leaders balance these differences while ensuring equitable participation in team discussions? What risks might arise if a leader over-accommodates individual preferences at the expense of team cohesion?
- Emily faced challenges in presenting her ideas to external stakeholders from diverse cultural contexts. How can leaders effectively navigate such scenarios to build credibility and trust?
- Reflecting on Emily's bi-weekly team meetings, how can structured reflections and discussions contribute to building trust and intercultural competence within diverse teams? Can you think of other strategies that might achieve similar results?
- How might Emily's experiences inform professional development programs for international education professionals, particularly those supporting culturally diverse academic or research teams?

Sanctuary Campuses and International Students: The Legal and Institutional Tensions of Immigration Protection in Higher Education

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Tags

Education Policy; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; International Student and Scholar Services; Leadership and Strategy; Management and Operations; University/Higher Education

Setting

In recent years, the concept of “sanctuary campuses” has gained traction as institutions of higher education navigate an increasingly complex and politicized immigration landscape. While not formally defined, in the U.S., the term “sanctuary campus” generally refers to a policy of non-cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, in order to protect undocumented students and employees from deportation.

International students in the U.S. must adhere to strict regulations, governed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and enforced by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). In order to maintain their ability to enroll international students, universities have legal obligations to monitor and report on the addresses, enrollment, employment, and study of international students. Additionally, government personnel have rights to review international student records.

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At Lincoln State University (LSU), a mid-sized private institution in the northeastern United States, advocacy efforts from faculty and student groups have called on the administration to adopt a sanctuary campus designation. Their proposal seeks to protect vulnerable student populations and resist participation in federal immigration enforcement activities.

Unfortunately, there is potential for the sanctuary policies to come into conflict with international student regulations. University officials—including international education professionals, legal counsel, and risk managers—face the challenge of aligning the sanctuary policy ideals with binding federal obligations under the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). With increased scrutiny from ICE and DHS, institutions must delicately balance legal compliance with ethical commitments to student welfare.

Case

In December 2023, LSU's Faculty Senate passed a resolution urging the university to declare itself a sanctuary campus. Provisions included:

- Denying federal agents access to campus without a judicial warrant.
- Preventing campus police from acting on behalf of ICE.
- Expanding legal and mental health services for students affected by immigration concerns.
- Refusing to voluntarily share student information with immigration authorities unless legally required.

The Faculty Senate resolution primarily focused on undocumented students. However, the language used in the resolution was unclear about how the policy would apply to international students. Concerns were quickly raised by LSU's Office of International Student Services (OISS). Dr. Caroline Mendez, Director of OISS, was acutely aware of the tension between this community expectation and LSU's legal obligation, as an SEVP-certified institution to:

- Report international student data—including enrollment and address changes—through SEVIS.
- Ensure F-1 and J-1 students meet visa conditions, such as maintaining full-time enrollment.
- Cooperate with federal authorities in cases of status violations.

Dr. Mendez consulted with General Counsel, Mr. James Holloway, and the Risk Management Office to assess the implications. Holloway noted that while domestic sanctuary policies could lawfully apply to undocumented students, international students were actively monitored by federal agencies and subject to removal proceedings for even technical noncompliance. He cautioned that shielding international students from federal enforcement could endanger LSU's SEVP certification—potentially compromising its ability to enroll any international students in the future.

Matters came to a head in early 2024, when a graduate student from Nigeria on an F-1 visa was contacted by ICE regarding an alleged status violation. Due to a departmental error, the student had dropped below the required credit load without authorization. Fearing immediate consequences, he sought refuge in student housing and requested legal assistance under LSU's sanctuary resolution.

This triggered a campus-wide dilemma:

- Shielding the student risked obstructing federal immigration enforcement.
- Reporting him would undermine the university's sanctuary stance and potentially damage community trust.

Dr. Mendez convened with the university provost, student affairs leadership, legal counsel, and faculty senate representatives to weigh options. Some proposed excluding international students from the sanctuary designation. Others called for broader protections tailored to the unique legal vulnerability of visa-holding students—such as emergency funding, academic grace periods, or expanded legal counsel.

As tensions mounted, LSU leadership faced a critical question: Could the university uphold its values while remaining in compliance with federal law? And how should it communicate these tensions transparently without alienating key stakeholders?

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are the implications of writing distinct sanctuary policies for different student groups, including undocumented students and international students? How might such distinctions impact trust among international students and their confidence in institutional protections?
- What are the potential consequences for universities that resist cooperation with DHS mandates? How can institutions mitigate the risk of losing their ability to enroll international students?
- What alternative protections could institutions provide for international students beyond sanctuary declarations? How can faculty advocacy for international student protections align with legal realities?
- If you were Director of International Student Services, how would you communicate institutional limitations around sanctuary policies while preserving transparency, trust, and institutional credibility? How can institutions be more transparent about what they promise to international students?
- What resources should universities consider cultivating (e.g., outside immigration counsel, partnerships with local nonprofits) to ensure international students receive appropriate support during crises?
- How should university leadership respond to faculty and student advocacy efforts when legal obligations limit the scope of available actions?

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