

CASE STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

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CSIE

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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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Middlebury Institute of
International Studies at Monterey

Students of Color and International Education: Addressing Host Country Unethical Behavior While Abroad

Melquin Ramos

Director, *TOCA Online*, Teens of Color Abroad, Santiago, Chile
Email: melquin@teensofcolorabroad.org

Lamar Shambley

Founder and Executive Director, Teens of Color Abroad, Brooklyn, New York, USA
Email: lamar@teensofcolorabroad.org

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Abroad; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; Internationalization and Global Learning; Language Education; Primary and Secondary Education

Setting

This case takes place during a two-week study abroad program for United States (U.S.) rising high school juniors and seniors. A third-party provider partnered with a language school in Seville, Spain where students studied Spanish and engaged in cultural immersion activities. During their time in Seville, the language school provided vetted homestay lodging for students. Two to three students lodged per homestay family.

The program consisted of 12 students, 10 identify as Black/African-American and two identify as Hispanic/Latinx, two group leaders and one chaperone, all three of whom identify as Black. For all students, this was the first time they studied abroad, and for most of them this was the first time they had been outside of the U.S. Prior to the start of the program, the group leaders and chaperone participated in training on duty of care, incident response, and COVID-19 facilitated by a skilled risk and safety manager.

The students participated in pre-departure workshops that covered health and safety, benefits of studying abroad, and cultural differences between the U.S. and Spain, but did not focus on an understanding of race/ethnicity in each context. The program leaders/chaperones were aware that racially motivated incidents

may occur during the program, but this was not explicitly stated to students prior to traveling. Students participated in a range of activities (i.e. kayaking, flamenco dancing, cultural tours, etc.). Students received daily, three-hour Spanish language and cultural study classes. The program organizers sought to immerse students into the culture by intentionally planning activities that offered cultural, historical, and linguistic awareness.

Case

On the tenth day of the program, the group and one representative from the partner language school were on their way to tour the Plaza de España. Students were excited and talking amongst themselves as they approached the plaza. Suddenly, two strangers, a man and a woman, approached the group. The man walked up to one of the students, Michael, as he spoke in Spanish to the woman and handed her his phone. As he handed over his phone, he said, “Saca una foto de nosotros. ¡Siempre quería verme como un rasta!” (“Take a photo of us. I’ve always wanted to look like a rasta!”). Michael, along with his brother who was also a participant, have long dreadlocks. The man then proceeded to reach for Michael’s hair to place it over his head. Michael and his brother have never had haircuts. When the program leader later spoke to Michael’s mother about the incident, she shared that for their family and culture hair is very important.

As the man was posing for the photo, a group leader jumped in to stop the photo. He exclaimed, “Absolutely not!” The group leader was assertive and moved Michael aside, leaving the man behind. As the group leader gathered the group to move along and walk away, the man seemed agitated and confused as to why his behavior was unacceptable. The man became defensive and yelled, “No dije nada racista, ni los llame monos ni algo así!” (“I didn’t say anything racist and didn’t call them monkeys or anything like that!”). As this was happening, the students had no idea what was going on. The man continued trying to justify his actions and the group leader stopped the man from speaking and said, “Quieres seguir hablando, o quieres que yo te lo explique?” (translation: “Do you want to continue talking, or do you want me to explain it to you?”).

The group leader explained to the man that 1) Michael is a minor and touching a minor is unacceptable and 2) there is a cultural misunderstanding - one should never unsolicitedly reach out to touch a Black person’s hair. The man’s response was as a flamenco dancer, people always want to take photos with him unexpectedly. The group leader clarified that Michael was not working and that he was simply walking down the street. Eventually the man seemed to understand and invited the group to attend one of his flamenco shows. The group leader shook his hand and said, “Adios.” (“Bye.”).

The group leader recognized that he had a responsibility of modeling the correct behavior. He modeled 1) assertiveness so the other party understood the inappropriateness of the action and 2) advocating for personal space and setting boundaries, especially as a Black traveler. After the man left, the group leader gathered the group and shared with them the full extent of the exchange. The group leader expressed that these types of situations are not uncommon and the importance of advocating for personal space and communicating boundaries. He reassured them that his role as a group leader was to ensure their safety and security was at the forefront of the adults’ minds. This allowed an opportunity for the students to recognize how they were being supported during their program experience.

After the incident, Michael was confused about what had just occurred. He reached out to his mother and briefly shared what had happened. The group leader did not communicate the incident to Michael's mother during their time in Spain. When the group returned to the U.S., the group leader reached out to Michael's mother to recount the incident that occurred in Seville. Michael's mother was appreciative of the group leader's response and at this moment shared about the importance that hair has for their culture.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- Given the fact that Michael is a minor, do you think the group leader handled the incident correctly? Why or why not? How would you support Michael and the other students?
- Should have the group leader reached out to Michael's mother immediately after the incident to notify her of the situation? Why or why not?
- Did the group leader respond adequately to the man who reached for Michael? Why or why not?
- How can the third-party provider and language school prepare students, group leaders, and chaperones before, during, and after to address similar incidents?
- Should the language school have been involved in the response to the incident? Why or why not?
- Should this incident be reported to the Spanish authorities? Why or why not?
- How should follow up with students be conducted when the group returns to their home country?

No Ethnographers Needed: When Whiteness Affects Community-Based Research

Sheena M. Harris

Ph.D. Candidate, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA

Email: harr2204@umn.edu

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Abroad; Experiential Education; Student Learning and Development

Setting

The College of Kansas is a small, Christian college in Louistown, Kansas with about 2000 students, most of whom are White and of the Christian faith. At The College of Kansas, Dr. Heddy Jameson runs a summer study abroad program for three months in Laos, a small country in Southeast Asia. In this program, students studying anthropology at The College of Kansas can learn ethnographic research methods and conduct a small research project while also being immersed in a new culture and country. As part of the program, the students complete two courses—Ethnographic Research Methods and History and Culture of Laos. They also receive basic introductory Laotian language lessons with a native speaker for a few weeks at the start of the program. A Laotian buddy was also assigned to help them both with navigating the capital city, Vientiane, and conducting their small research projects in local villages.

Case

Morton is a White male-identifying American second-year student at The College of Kansas where he is studying for a bachelor's degree in Anthropology. Morton, having never been outside the United States, was excited to hear about Dr. Jameson's study abroad program from his academic advisor and a graduating senior who visited his advisor's Introduction to Cultural Anthropology course to talk about her experience studying abroad in Laos. The student who visited the class spoke positively about her experience, although she also mentioned that the transition from the United States to Laos was difficult in the beginning because of "culture

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shock” and some foodborne illness. She also mentioned that she met many local people who had not yet interacted with Americans before. Morton was especially excited to hear about her experience conducting research related to the Buddhist religion in Laos because he wanted to learn about how different the religion was in other countries from what he had grown up learning at home. He applied and was accepted with a scholarship to help him pay for his tuition, hotel stays, food, and airfare.

At the start of the program, Morton and his fellow students received a basic introduction to fieldwork and some readings on interviewing, observation, surveying people and writing good field notes. Although Morton and the other students learned basic Laotian in the short language lessons, it was not enough to conduct interviews. One week into the program, Morton met Pin, a Laotian male-identifying student who would help Morton with interviews in the local village that he was assigned to visit during his program.

For the first several weeks of fieldwork, Morton and Pin went to a local temple close to Morton’s assigned village where Morton learned about Buddhist religious practices in Laos and interviewed local clergy officials. Pin helped with translating during the interviews. Morton became fascinated with the monks at the temple, one of whom had spent a year abroad learning English. He also noticed that some people would stare at him silently but thought nothing of it. Morton slowly became acclimated to Laos and Laotian culture during these first few weeks of conducting research and wrote in his field journal that “sitting in the shade under a Banyan tree with fresh papaya during my lunch break, while watching locals in the rice fields, I could not imagine myself anywhere else in the world”. At that moment, Morton was sure that he wanted to study anthropology beyond his bachelor’s degree.

In the second and third month of the program, Morton and Pin were to go into the local village to interview villagers about their Buddhist practices. A few weeks into interviewing people in the village, Morton and Pin went to one home to interview a couple who were about 35 years old. The husband and wife were happy to be interviewed and told Pin they could talk for hours about their religious beliefs and practices. Morton found it interesting that they were not reluctant to talk with him as he had observed with other people earlier. They even set out fresh papaya and other fruits for Morton and Pin to eat and made fresh coffee and tea. About 30 minutes into conducting and recording the interview, a much older man of about 80 or 90 years old came over and sat down near Morton. He kept touching Morton’s left shoe while saying something that Pin said made no sense. Morton and Pin tried to ignore the old man while continuing to talk to the couple, who also ignored him. After about 5 minutes, the old man stood up and walked away slowly, his back hunched over. Morton and Pin continued talking to the couple, but suddenly, the old man came back to sit at Morton’s feet again, holding a kitchen knife. Morton was immediately frightened and turned to Pin and asked him, “Should we leave?” The husband got up and took the knife away from the older man and begged Morton and Pin to stay, but they were both scared and decided to leave. Morton told Pin that he felt “unwelcome” in the village and unsure why he was the target of this unusual situation.

Later, Morton and Pin reported the incident to Dr. Jameson who said that the old man was not dangerous. “He might have been afraid of you, Morton,” said Dr. Jameson. “Many of the older people here are afraid of White people because they think they are missionaries,” she said. Morton, now thinking more about the old man than himself, was left with disbelief that he had had this kind of impact on another person, and he wondered why the program did not prepare him for this aspect of his time in Laos. He also wondered if he could have done

anything differently so that the old man would not have been frightened by his presence in the village. He did not finish his small research project, but he managed to turn in a paper based on what he and Pin had done in the field.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What impacts might this fieldwork-based education abroad program have had on Morton's learning and development?
- What pre-departure and on-site measures could the study abroad program have taken to better prepare Morton and the other students studying and conducting research in Laos during their time abroad? What support should faculty and staff give to students like Morton who have never been abroad before, particularly with navigating unexpected situations?
- In what ways could colleges and universities make exchange programs beneficial to local communities? How could they prepare them for encounters with students studying abroad and doing research in their communities?
- How could this situation impact the relationship that The College of Kansas has with the Laotian community in which Morton did research? What responsibility does Morton's college have toward the Laotian community and its people?
- How could Dr. Jameson discuss Whiteness and the Christian religion with students on the program? How should she approach providing future students with information about community engagement in Laos?
- What responsibility does Dr. Jameson have for Morton's and Pin's physical and psychological safety in the program?

Avoiding Deficit Thinking: Facilitating Global Learning Through Faculty Professional Development

Vaishali V. Raval

Professor, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA

Email: ravalvv@miamioh.edu

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Abroad; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; Internationalization and Global Learning; Professional Training; University/Higher Education

Setting

The setting for this case is a mid-sized public university in Southwestern Ohio. The university received federal funding for a faculty development program that focuses on integrating global perspectives in the general curriculum. A key component of the program is an opportunity for faculty to participate in an immersive program in India. India provides a rich context to learn about diverse worldviews, practices and lifestyle preferences through its diverse subcultures formed by intersecting influences of language, religion, region, gender, and socio-economic class, among others, making it highly relevant for courses in humanities and social sciences.

In particular, the faculty development program focuses on recognizing colonial roots of higher education with the aim of faculty participants incorporating decolonial approaches in their teaching and curricula as a result of their participation. The program includes a preparatory phase, travel abroad to India, followed by the faculty members revising their courses.

The faculty members participating in the program represent a variety of disciplines ranging from social sciences to humanities and bring a wealth of interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise about history, politics,

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economics, media, and communication. Some faculty members have specific disciplinary expertise about India, teach courses that include content related to India, and a few have travelled to India before. Participating faculty also represent diverse social identities based on age, gender, race and ethnicity, nationality, and other dimensions.

Case

During the preparatory phase, participating faculty engaged in reading scholarly articles from a variety of disciplines and discussed them, while also sharing discipline-specific resources that focused on current events, issues, and perspectives within India. During these exchanges, one resource shared was a webinar on a book titled “India is Broken¹.” The intention was simply to share a resource. However, the impact may vary depending on the individuals’ social identities and the extent of familiarity with India. This led to a thoughtful discussion about the power of language, and that without context, a statement such as this could promote negative stereotyping and deficit-based views of a country and a group of people. For example, an individual of Indian origin may feel frustrated, sad, or disheartened. In contrast, an individual who has limited familiarity with India may form an initial impression about the country as broken that may serve as a lens through which they process any further information about India and/or its people.

One group member highlighted the human tendency to accept such one-size-fits-all descriptions that could be true of any group of individuals as valid². For example, one could put any country name (e.g., “USA is broken” or “UK is broken”) because it is possible to think of ways in which each country can be conceived as “broken.” However, as another group member indicated, terms like broken are particularly problematic for Global South countries (those located in Africa, Asia, and Latin America) because historically these countries have been viewed as “less developed” relative to the Global North (Australia, North America, Europe), and thus, the notion that these countries are broken tends to be more accessible in individuals’ memory.

Looking more closely, a statement such as USA is broken may carry less weight because of the global view of USA as the world’s superpower and a highly advanced country. As the Nigerian Novelist Chimamanda Adichie mentions in her Ted Talk, the *Danger of a Single Story*, “because of America’s cultural and economic power,” people have multiple stories about the USA. In contrast, not only is there substantially less diversity in the stories we consume about Global South countries from the media, literature, and scholarly discourses, these stories focus on problems and deficits. A third group member added that for some individuals who have traveled to Global South countries, their experience in the country becomes the single story about the country. For example, if their experiences are primarily with women at domestic violence shelter for a project, the single story formed may be “Indian women are victims of restrictive gender roles.” Such a single story does not allow for the diversity of stories of the many women educators, women entrepreneurs, women scientists, women writers, and women in the business and non-profit sectors. In the same way, describing a Global South country as broken ignores all of that country’s strengths.

¹ Written by an Indian economic historian, this book traces India’s economy from independence to today. See Mody, A. (2023). *India Is Broken: A people betrayed, Independence to Today*. Stanford University Press.

² Social psychologists refer to these one-size-fit-all descriptions as Barnum statements, and the human tendency to accept them as valid as the Barnum effect. See Dickson, D. H. & Keyy, I. H. (1985). The ‘Barnum Effect’ in Personality Assessment: A Review of the Literature. *Psychological Reports*, 57 (2), 367-382.

The group also engaged in a conversation about how to discuss content related to India in the classroom, in particular how we might frame and contextualize resources such as “India is Broken” for students who have varying levels of familiarity with India. Also considered was the importance of highlighting the distinction between state and people (e.g., a critique of a country’s government is not a critique of its people). In addition, there was a discussion about how to sensitively engage in conversations with colleagues in India who may not share our group members’ individual perspectives about India’s economy, political system, or social issues. Woven throughout these conversations was an ongoing reflection of how our social identities based on age, gender, race and ethnicity, nationality, along with disciplinary expertise and rank contribute to the way in which others receive and experience what we say.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are some ways in which faculty teaching at North American universities can talk about challenges in Global South countries without promoting deficit views and “single” stories?
- How might we ensure that our students have multiple stories, including stories of assets and strengths about Global South countries?
- How might faculty members be reflective about their own social identities and how they contribute to their interactions with students and colleagues?
- In the classroom, how might faculty members be sensitive to students of different backgrounds (e.g., how students of Indian origin receive and experience content about India)?
- As a faculty member at a North American university, what do you do when your perspectives about a country conflict with the perspectives of colleagues in that country?
- As a faculty member, how might we reconcile years of expertise and disciplinary knowledge with learning from the diverse experiences of those in other countries?

Starting From Scratch: Supporting International Students' Engagement on Campus

Dr. Gunjan M. Sanjeev

Vice President- Amity Education Group & Director - International Affairs, Amity University, Gurugram (Manesar), Haryana, India

Gunjmit@hotmail.com

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Policy; International Student and Scholar Services; Internationalization and Global Learning; University/Higher Education

Setting

This case focuses on a situation that the founding head of the Office of International Affairs at a large private university in India experienced in dealing with their international students. At this university, the total number of students is around five thousand, out of which one hundred are international students. India is one of the fastest growing economies and can boast of a large diverse population in terms of cultures, religions and languages being spoken across the country. However, the number of international students is still low in comparison to local students moving out of India to pursue their higher education abroad.

International students bring vibrance and diversity to the educational institutions. Thus, it is of immense importance to understand issues related to creating a rich experience for them to enhance their learning experience while they are studying at foreign institutions, away from their home.

Internationalization of higher education is a relatively new endeavor in India. Consequently, the system for international affairs related activities is still evolving. There are numerous universities that did not have a dedicated office to deal with international student issues for many years. However, with the recent

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announcement of the National Education Policy 2020¹, there is a directive to have such dedicated offices in every university.

This case study elucidates how international students can have better engagement at university campuses through different initiatives. This case study also reflects how a successful model evolved to take care of the various needs and aspirations of international students.

Case

It was Smriti Gupta's first day at work. She had joined as the founding head of the Office of International Affairs that was instituted to cater to the needs of international students along with other internationalization activities. She was a versatile academician and had a dynamic personality. On the first day, she set up a meeting with international students at the campus. As she stepped into the room, she was pleasantly surprised to find a good mix of students from over thirty nations.

She checked in with them regarding their wellbeing and how they felt about joining the university. Further, she asked them if there were any issues that needed attention. Most of them preferred not to speak much but Smriti could sense that they wanted to speak and certainly had issues that needed more support. A young man hailing from Turkey, smartly dressed, came forward and confidently introduced himself as Ali. He brought up some of the issues.

Most of the issues raised were related to the basic needs of daily life. They wanted to go out on weekends and needed institutional support towards transport as they did not feel comfortable taking public transport. Some of them felt that the spices in the university cafeteria food were too hot for them. Because they were having for all three meals at the cafeteria, they were not eating well, causing discomfort in their day-to-day activities.

These were small issues and could be sorted easily, thought Smriti. The next day Smriti joined them at lunch in the university cafeteria and tasted the food. Well, the spices were quite okay for her. In fact, she would be happy to add some more spices to make it tastier (most Indians enjoy spicy food). However, she did connect with the chef to see if a portion of food could be made less spicy to suit the tastes of the international community at the campus. Students were happy with this decision. For their weekend trips, she connected with the transport department, and it was decided that students would have access to free transport for four hours for local visits every weekend. She successfully resolved similar issues over the next few days.

The students appeared happier and more comfortable as the days progressed. They would drop into Smriti's office occasionally to chit-chat with her. Realizing that the students should be even more engaged, Smriti called for an informal brainstorming session to understand what could give them a higher sense of belonging to their institution and an opportunity to interact with the larger university community.

"Why don't we celebrate the national days for our respective countries? This will give us a chance to display our talent and culture to the rest of the campus!" exclaimed Ali.

"Why not, certainly we can," responded Smriti, with a deep smile. And the smile was reciprocated by all the students sitting around, sipping lemonade that Smriti had organized for them as a small treat.

And then the preparations began. Smriti noticed that the students were highly motivated and excited for the "International Students' National Day" as they named it. When the day arrived, it was filled with grandeur as the packed audience of students and faculty in the auditorium applauded the performances. The stage was lit up not only with lights but also with their brilliant performances. Clapping hard to celebrate their success as the

¹ Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India.
https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

function ended, Smriti was reflecting on how far she had come in facilitating deeper engagement for the international students.

The international students continued to meet her more often now and tell her stories about new friendships they had developed with Indian students.

Smriti began to wonder, “What could I do that would give them more power to be leaders at the campus?”. She had an idea that she wanted to implement. She and the students planned to have a scrap collection camp on campus. The objective of this camp was to collect unused items (therefore, the name, Scrap!) that can be recycled and then used by those who are economically disadvantaged. The plan was to send the proceeds to a nearby NGO that housed people in need, including those with disabilities, the elderly, and orphans. For this activity, she encouraged the international students to create their own action plan. They all got together and fondly called it the “We Care for You” campaign. They created beautiful posters with “We Care for You” slogans. They proudly went around the campus, met with the leadership, and asked for donations - no cash, just the scrap! They moved from class to class announcing their collection of scrap and gleefully answered queries raised by students. They put up collection boxes across the campus and watched happily as the boxes got filled with old books, toys, clothes, and anything else that could be recycled and reused by the NGO.

It was a sight as many international students took off their own jackets and dropped them into the collection boxes. They wanted them to be filled to the brim. So high was the energy. So high was the emotion. Everyone felt surreal participating in the heartwarming initiative. Soon the truck left the campus, full of over fifty such boxes and the boxes were shining with fluorescent smiley stickers all over the boxes.

The next day, there was something different in the air at the campus!

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think some of the basic issues regarding food and transportation needs went unnoticed prior to Smriti’s intervention? What other measures could be taken to address the concerns raised?
- How did Smriti foster inclusion of international students on campus? How can more stakeholders be involved to increase inclusion of international students?
- The case highlights that Smriti was the founding head of the Office of International Affairs. What do you think were her challenges as she took this new role? How can universities support those who are setting up such offices for the first time at their institutions? How can universities enhance their readiness to welcome international students?
- There are two activities mentioned that students lead – the “International Student National Day” and the “We Care for You” campaign. Can you think of differences in the objectives of the two activities? How might these two activities have different outcomes for participating students?
- Smriti wanted to empower the international students. What do you think motivated her? How did her work change the level of international student engagement on campus? How could it impact the overall teaching and learning environment at the campus? What could she do next?
- The last line states - “The next day, there was something different...”. What differences do you think would be there in the life of international students at the campus?
- How can national education policies support international students?

Which Language?

Teaching a Bilingual Course for Overseas Students in China

Xiangchong Pan

Associate Professor, Shanghai Business School, Shanghai, China.

Email: panxchong123@163.com

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Internationalization and Global Learning; International Students and Scholars Services; Language Education; University/Higher Education

Setting

A growing number of overseas students study at Chinese universities and colleges, majoring in Business Administration, Finance, Engineering, Healthcare, and so on. Take Shanghai Business School as an example, at present, there are 229 overseas undergraduates from differing parts of the world, and the number is expected to increase. In addition, almost every university or college in Shanghai has overseas students, which demonstrates that international education cannot be neglected in China. Although overseas students choose different professional fields, they typically take one common course: Chinese. Common reasons for learning Chinese are:

1. To know the unknown. For many, China is considered to be a mysterious and dynamic country with over 5000 years of history. They learn Chinese to appease their curiosities.
2. To travel in China. China is blessed with numerous stunning landscapes, such as the Yellow Mountain, Li River, The Great Wall, and so on. Knowing Chinese helps students to navigate their travels.

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3. To seek a job opportunity. Thanks to rapid economic development and globalization, the job market has become more friendly for foreigners. Some students wish to pursue jobs in China or in partnership with Chinese organizations.

4. To gain professional knowledge and earn degrees. Depending on their major, Chinese language competency may be valuable in some students' future professions.

5. To study China. Some students have a personal interest in Chinese language and culture.

The case is set at ABC University in Shanghai. In September the English Teaching Department was assigned to teach Basic Chinese III for 30 overseas students majoring in Business Administration, Finance, and Hospitality Management. They are second-year students and have been in China for more than one year. The course objectives are to enlarge vocabulary; learn grammar; build speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills; and learn about Chinese culture

Case

The College of International Education was newly established at ABC university. Because the university prioritizes international education, they asked a reputable teacher with rich experience from the English Teaching Department to teach Basic Chinese III for overseas students. With 60 teaching hours, the course would run through one semester, lasting 15 weeks.

The teacher was told by the supervisor of College of International Education, who is in charge of teaching quality, that those overseas students had learnt Basic Chinese I & II for one year and had been in China for more than one year. In other words, their Chinese proficiency was medium or medium high. He was also told that he would teach Chinese and explain Chinese meaning to overseas students in English, and teach them how to use Chinese as well as introduce Chinese culture to them in English.

After having carefully prepared the course based on the instructions given by the supervisor and the textbook suggested by the supervisor, the teacher started the first lesson full of confidence. He spoke both English and Chinese fluently. He thought all his students spoke and understood English. He thought he could use English as the means to teach students Chinese. The first class went smoothly. Then, in the several minutes before class was over, the teacher gave students the assignments. The sample of assignments was shown below:

Make sentences with — 就..... (Note: — 就..... means as soon as)

1. to finish class / to go for a lunch

2. to take exams / to be nervous

Suddenly, some overseas students spoke loudly in English after the assignments were given: "Teacher, we didn't know the English words. How could we get those assignments done?" At that moment, the voice of the students surprised him a lot. The reality was quite different from what he had in his head. After personally talking to the students and surveying them, he found that English is not the first language for the majority of overseas students in his class. Only a few of them spoke and understood English well. He also found out that some of them could speak and read a little bit of Chinese, some of them could speak and read some Chinese, some of them could neither speak nor read Chinese, and none of them could write Chinese characters. He was bewildered by his findings, not knowing how to teach this bilingual course. Moreover, he was wondering whether he should still use English to help his students to understand Chinese. He reported to his supervisor about his findings and his puzzlement.

Discussion Questions:

As you consider this case imagine that you were the teacher or his supervisor, discuss:

- What kinds of teaching methods would you employ?
- How would you support a multi-national, multilingual class?
- How would you help the students learn from and build supportive relationships with each other?
- What responsibility does ABC University have to overseas students?
- What steps could the university have taken to prevent this case from happening?

Opening the Closet Door: A Queer International Student's Decisions at Graduation

Marissa Ruhno, Quintessence Townsend, and Anne Campbell

Middlebury Institute of International Studies, Monterey, California, U.S.A.

mruhno@middlebury.edu

qtownsend@middlebury.edu

accampbell@middlebury.edu

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; International Student and Scholar Services; Partnerships; University/Higher Education

Setting

More than 60 countries either criminalize homosexuality or do not have laws protecting LGBTQ+ rights. Many international students come to the U.S. and face a number of barriers, including those who are just learning to navigate their queer identities. In the case being analyzed, Mohammed is an international student from Bangladesh, a country where homosexuality is outlawed.

Mohammed is attending a large, public four-year university on the west coast of the U.S. that has strong protections for LGBTQ+ rights and codified same-sex marriage. The institute is known for its dedication to diversity, equity and inclusion, and is currently working on increasing enrollment numbers and scholarship opportunities for BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and international students.

As an international student advisor, Mohammed comes to you and expresses his concerns about his future trajectories. He is preoccupied about navigating his queer identity and his path following graduation. Your

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university has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the company that is sponsoring Mohammed's scholarship, which states that Mohammed will return to work for the company for two years after finishing his studies in the U.S. Your university and the company have a mutually beneficial partnership that sponsors three students every academic year. However, during your conversation with Mohammed, he shares that he is unsure if he wants to return to Bangladesh upon graduation.

Case

Mohammed (he/him) is in his final year of a two-year master's degree in chemical engineering at your university. An international student from Bangladesh, Mohammed came to your university on a F-1 visa. He is sponsored by a large, international chemical company and has signed a contract with the company to return to his home country of Bangladesh and work for the national corporate office when he finishes his degree in May.

Mohammed has been a star student during his studies. He is earning a high GPA, has been an international student ambassador for your office, and is the secretary of the university's South Asian Students Organization. Mohammed has also developed a relationship with an American classmate, Steven. While you consider yourself friendly with Mohammed, you were not aware of Mohammed's sexual orientation. Moreover, it seems to you that Mohammed and Steven have kept their relationship fairly private.

One day in March – two months before Mohammed's intended graduation date – he comes to an appointment with you and shares that he'd like advice on how to stay in the United States after graduation. He says he's been applying for U.S. jobs and has had a few interviews with two different companies in the area. He intends to pay his company back for the price of his scholarship over time. He begins by asking for visa advice on what to expect if he does not get employment before graduation.

As you talk, you realize that Mohammed is also concerned about what will happen to his relationship with Steven if he returns home to Bangladesh. He confides that he has never spoken with his parents about his queer identity. Moreover, while he has told his parents that he's in a relationship with an American, he has not given Steven's name or specified Steven's gender. He admits that he's uncertain how his parents will react when he shares that he is in a same-sex relationship.

He also confides that he has been researching his chances of getting married in the U.S. He said he's heard from another international student about a Supreme Court case (*Obergefell vs. Hodges*) which recognizes same sex marriages. He is wondering if he could marry Steven and stay in the U.S. He believes that if he proposed, Steven would say yes and want a big wedding. Mohammed is worried about whether he will be able to invite his family or other members of the South Asian diaspora community in your university's city, how he will inform his family about the marriage, and how he will manage this information about his wedding on social media.

He said that he's thought about whether he and Steven could move together to Bangladesh. He noted that it's likely not possible for him and Steven to be in a public relationship in Bangladesh given the government's lack of recognition or protection of LGBTQ+ rights. Mohammed recalls a time in Bangladesh in 2016 during the

Bengali New Year, when four members of the LGBTQ+ community were arrested due to participating in a pride celebration. Their request for this celebration had been previously denied by local authorities and resulted in all participants being arrested, although they were later released¹. Homosexuality is a crime that can lead to a maximum life term in prison, and Mohammed isn't sure he wants to go back and risk his chance of living openly queer with his partner.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What cross-cultural skills would you use in order to address Mohammed's concerns?
- As an international student advisor, how would you navigate this conversation? From a professional perspective, do you feel equipped to advise on personal topics?
- Based on the information provided in the case study, what questions would you have for Mohammed? What are the next steps you would advise Mohammed to take with regard to his immigration status?
- Would you need to take action to preserve the relationship with the company sponsoring Mohammed's degree? If so, what would those actions be?

¹ "Four revelers held after Bangladesh bans 'rainbow rally'", Daily Mail, 14 April 2016.

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