

Student Success Team
International Student Co-Curricular Experiences Committee
FINAL REPORT

Submitted by: Lee Seedorff and Nellie Hermanson
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Background

The University of Iowa is committed to educating students for success in a diverse world. Our campus community benefits from the diversity that comes from having a significant number of international undergraduate students enrolled. However, our processes and systems have not always adapted to support international undergraduates in successful transition to Iowa. In addition, our domestic students do not always reap the benefits of this rich environment unless we provide needed structure to facilitate interaction and global learning. Based on the recommendations from the Climate Subcommittee of the International Student Committee, reexamination and, in some cases, restructuring of our co-curricular experiences is warranted.

Charge

Using the Climate Subcommittee report as a foundation, the action committee will:

1. Recommend a process to incentivize student organizations to welcome and integrate international students. Recommend ways to scale the currently successful "Get to Know Us" initiative to reach larger numbers of students.
2. Recommend processes to connect more international students with citizens of Iowa City.
3. Identify workable models for a College of Liberal Arts & Sciences buddy program. Friends without Borders may be a good model to consider. Emphasis should be on connecting students based on academic interests/major if possible.
4. Recommend processes to enhance current programs such as On Iowa and Living-Learning Communities by incorporating more deliberate international-domestic student interaction.

Committee Members:

Lee Seedorff, *International Programs, Co-Chair*

Nellie Hermanson, *CSIL, Co-Chair*

Sarah Andrews, *Hardin Library for the Health Sciences*

Angela Charsha-Harney, *Recreational Services*

Ashley Jennings, *Student*

Amy Baumgartner, *University Housing & Dining*

Beth Ripperger, *Health & Wellness*

Tiffany Leschke, *CSIL*

Becca Don, *Health & Wellness*

Shannon Marlow, *Academic Support & Retention*

Yuhao Chen, *Student*

Process:

The Committee met and divided into subcommittee groups based around each of the four charge areas. Each subcommittee held meetings with the group and outside constituents and experts to determine areas of possible growth, current barriers to growth or success, and what a “perfect world” would look like within the context of that charge area. After reviewing each area and conducting fact-finding and informational meetings, the subcommittees agreed on recommended areas of growth, implementation, or necessary change in order for the charge to come to fruition.

This report will structure recommendations based around each of the four areas of the committee charge, with discussion and process included in each area.

Charge 1: *Recommend a process to incentivize student organizations to welcome and integrate international students. Recommend ways to scale the currently successful “Get to Know Us” initiative to reach larger numbers of students.*

Discussion (part 1):

The committee discussed the process of incentivizing student organizations to welcome and integrate international students in depth. At the onset, the committee was concerned that simply incentivizing the inclusion of international students could potentially “tokenize” international students in a problematic way, causing more isolation and not creating genuine connection between the international and domestic students. Instead the committee wanted to incentivize the education and development for diverse perspectives and cultural differences for student organizations.

Recommendations (part 1):

1. Utilize the current CSIL Leadership Development Series to include domestic/international student development opportunities.
 - a. This would be in addition to the current Leadership Development series programming, so would be an increase to the current offering, not a replacement of current topics.
 - b. Incentives for attendance could be provided in the form of funding for events or for the organization in general.
2. CSIL student organization staff should be present at International Student Orientation program to introduce campus involvement opportunities, give context for the benefits of involvement, and provide an in-person resource for students to connect with later.
3. Translate student organization and CSIL involvement materials into top languages of international student populations at Iowa.

Discussion (part 2):

The UISG Get to Know Us program is in its second year, and has seen great success in the quality of interactions as the program progresses. There are some major barriers to scaling this program, however, including the lack of transition process between the exiting and incoming UISG Diversity Liaison (who currently facilitates this program), as well as the amount of time it takes to run the program in a valuable way. The committee met with Kyra Seay, the outgoing UISG Diversity Liaison, to discuss these barriers, as well as possibility to determine what it would take to facilitate this program on a larger scale.

Recommendations (part 2):

1. Market outside of UISG (this is how the program has been marketed in the past – students involved in UISG AND in other organizations in turn get their other organizations involved.)
2. Recommend financial programming assistance from UISG for participating groups, so this is not a barrier in completing the program requirements (planning a program between the two organizations can be limiting to some smaller groups with limited resources.)
3. Open up access to all student organizations, not just international and Fraternity/Sorority groups, but utilize the framework of cultural identity based groups and non-cultural identity based groups.
4. Host the program in Fall AND Spring semesters (currently only hosted in Spring).
5. Dedicated staff advisor for the UISG Diversity Liaison to maintain consistency, history, and transition between students. This is important and should be a focal point if this program should scale much larger.
6. Ensure assessment of the program is being completed to gather longitudinal data on successes/improvements as well as measure impact.
7. Recognize the organizations participating at the Hawkeye Awards.

Charge 2: *Recommend processes to connect more international students with citizens of the Iowa City area.*

Discussion:

In trying to discuss ways to better connect international students with the Iowa City area community, it quickly became apparent that we cannot (and should not) come up with ideas in a vacuum. And that while it may be easy to suggest ideas, nothing practical can come of it without direct community involvement in the brainstorming and discussion process.

Nevertheless the committee did come up with specific ideas:

- Consider ways that International Women’s Club and Friends of International Students can grow
- Work with organizations such as city council, ICAD, Visitor’s Bureau
- Connect with community through volunteering. Example was given of Residence Hall programs 1x/month to get students volunteering. Herky Cares, social justice projects are other examples. Unfortunately the campus office promoting experiential learning closed when the director retired, so currently no similar program exists, which would have really facilitated this.
- Focus on breaks, something for students who remain here to do. Holiday connections, a group event for community, home dinners (some cautions about liability issues and how to verify safety)
- Volunteering with organizations for kids (Dream Center)
- Community Conversation Partners – model similar to ESL programs Campus Conversation Partners.
- Summer of the Arts – partner with them, involve international students, diversify more
- Connect international students with other groups – example of struggles Native American Student Association had last year unable to maintain Pow Wow, can international students volunteer to help with some administration and other work

Recommendations:

1. **Back Up a Step** – Following the struggles the committee had to come up with concrete plans (not to mention difficulties ISSS has had trying to address this on our own for the past year) we took a step back to look more broadly at the issues involved. It became apparent that there may already be some pockets of programs directed to international students out there that are created or being considered, but one key thing to address first is ensuring the community has a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding of international students and their issues. Often community members receive information that is inaccurate, or have impressions that are vague or incomplete. The correct way to begin building connections is to ensure everyone has accurate and comprehensive information.
2. **Program for Community** – In light of the above, ISSS created two events in April, Building Our Global Community (titled after our certificate series for staff/faculty) where we held a two-hour workshop covering demographics/statistics, what information our students receive before arrival and during orientation, the programs and services available on campus, and an overview of the immigration regulations including employment regs. A diverse segment of community leaders were invited to attend either the April 6 or April 30 event, including county supervisors, mayors and council members from Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty, representatives from the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, law enforcement and fire department, public libraries, Iowa City Area Development Group, etc. The programs ended with discussion of the issues members were seeing in their respective areas.
At this point in time even the ideas community members had dealt more with their respective areas of work/organization: public safety awareness, housing, employment, etc. And they are all things we at ISSS want to follow up on. But no one seemed quite ready to step up and create a program. The impression of ISSS is this is the first step, and that holding another such workshop in the fall would be beneficial. Then after that point begin discussions in earnest about what suggestions the community members and officials may have about creating those community links. ISSS would continue to broker communication between the campus and community, also involving international students in the discussion and decision making process. (Members of the International Student Advisory Board were consulted and invited, but I think they were overwhelmed with their first year and were not able to participate or contribute.)
3. **Supporting Friends of International Students** – FIS leadership has changed and ISSS has been impressed with the new leaders, who attended both community sessions so that awareness of their organization could be shared. They have informed ISSS that this year they had trouble finding enough local families to match with the international students who signed up to join their program. Sitting down with the new leaders to brainstorm ways ISSS can help think of ways for them to increase membership may be in order. (The same recommendation can apply to the International Women's Club; however, they were invited to the community sessions and never responded or attended, so we don't know what to make of that.)

Charge 3: *Recommend workable model(s) for a CLAS international/domestic student buddy program, including recommendations on training, program requirements, and how the program should be assessed.*

Suggested Models

The ISSS friend matching program, Friends Without Borders, was suggested as a possible model by the Student Success Team. Started in Fall 2014, the program grew out of an older pen-pal program run by ISSS and the Center for Diversity and Enrichment. FWB matches new international undergrads from any major/college with current domestic students from any major/college. A kickoff event was held at the start of fall and spring semesters, with currently around 100 students participating. Students may earn points via a “menu” system of suggested activities to choose from, and be eligible to win prizes along the way based on point earnings. Students do not receive any credit nor is there any tie-in with a class curriculum. An ISSS staff member advertises across campus to domestic students, and coordinates applications from them as well as from incoming new international students, matches students, organizes and runs a welcome/kick-off event at the start of each semester, purchases rewards, and monitors points earned throughout the year.

Another potential model is the Tippie College of Business international buddies program, which is geared specifically for business and pre-business majors. A question came up during our meeting whether there was a tie-in to any TCOB class or credit, and we received this information from Jennifer Blair, the coordinator:

In our first semester last spring, the buddy program was tied to our prep course for our global interns (CCP:1070). This is a one-credit hour course in the spring that prepares students for the global internship in the summer. All students in that class were required to be buddies. I was very grateful to have that connection in the first semester, because it gave us a ready-made population of (largely) American students (about 40). However, there were a couple of drawbacks to that: (1) Not all of the American students were excited to be buddies as a requirement of the course. I didn't get any overt push-back about it, but there were quite a few lackluster pairings. (2) My objectives for the buddy program and the course objectives didn't always align (with those of the instructor/course curriculum). Since then, we have not tied the program to any course, and I think it has worked better.

The College of Engineering does not currently have a buddy program, so their students may or may not choose to participate through the FWB program.

Discussion:

Some points considered by the subcommittee:

1. **Curricular Tie-In** – We discussed whether it would be desirable to connect a buddy program to a class component or requirement. Given the experience of the Tippie program relayed above, requiring participation in a buddy matching program can backfire when a student (either domestic or international) is reluctant or unwilling to be matched, or otherwise not equipped with the skillset to handle intercultural difference. But an optional tie-in to CLAS courses could boost participation and bring practical learning experiences to students enrolled in classes that are more theoretical in nature.
 - (We also separately discussed the need to incorporate more hands-on learning opportunities for exploring and learning about the spectrum of cultural differences, including domestic diversity, in the classroom setting; as that is not directly part of our charge we do not include it but still wish to emphasize that the committee feels this is an important consideration for both our international and domestic students – learning to deal

with difference and having practical, experiential learning opportunities is crucial for becoming a well-rounded and more effective citizen and employee.)

2. **Name** - Consideration should be given to the name of the program, ensuring it is not open to misinterpretation – that it is not a mentor program that places domestic students “above” or as “helpers” to the international students, that it doesn’t overlap with existing programs (Friends Without Borders, Global Buddies, International Buddies at Tippie). Or could be a “Friends Without Borders – CLAS” title.
3. **Inclusion of New Domestic Students?** - Consideration was given to the fact that the current model excludes new domestic students. While there is some potential benefit for helping new domestic students gain experiential learning regarding intercultural communication and diversity, there was also concern it may end up being less beneficial for two new individuals to be matched up – while this is not meant to be a mentor program, new international students still gain insight into how the campus culture works, expectations, and how to “do” things. But an argument can also be made that two “new” students going through this together will learn together, and potentially develop a bond as members of a cohort to progress through the next few years together.
 - Note: The more ISSS has considered restructuring the program to include new domestic students, the more we like the idea. While both arrangements (new vs. current students) each carry positives, we think matching new to new students could have particular benefits.
 - We also discussed integrating ways to teach new domestic students how to prepare to deal with the many forms of diversity they will encounter, and what university expectations are, possibly during the orientation period, but again that falls outside the scope of this directive.
4. **Domestic Participation** - How do we ensure that we do not “run out” of interested domestic students? In the past year we have generally had more domestic volunteers for things like the matching program or our Global@Iowa mentorship class, but that is not the norm; we usually are hard pressed to find enough domestic students. What can be done to ensure there is a sufficient supply of domestic students to be matched with international students? The committee believes this will in part be alleviated by having a college, or possibly major-specific friendship matching program. It could also be an added benefit if there is a tie-in to a course curriculum somewhere.
5. Are there specific areas of friction in CLAS where we may want to particularly target promoting this program, such as specific majors or Gen Ed courses?

Recommendations:

1. **Staffing and Oversight** – We recommend working with ISSS to adapt the Friends Without Borders program to CLAS –
 - Unlike Tippie and Engineering, CLAS does not have a Global Services coordinator to run college-specific programming. ISSS has the staff, the experience, and the existing program that would be less cost to adapt for CLAS so that CLAS would not necessarily have to hire a new position to oversee this.
 - However, someone in CLAS would have to be involved as a liaison to work with ISSS, to take on recruiting CLAS students, advertising to their programs, helping with group events, and developing/tracking college-specific incentives for students to participate. Funding for special events/rewards would be part of that as well, depending on how the program is structured.
 - An added benefit is this could be adapted by other colleges such as engineering, nursing, etc. or possibly even a “health sciences” buddy program due to smaller numbers in programs such as public health, pharmacy, etc. ISSS would still coordinate the application and advertising for the new international students, work with CLAS to match them, take the lead on coordinating a kick-off event in collaboration with the CLAS liaison. A CLAS liaison

- would also need to monitor or co-monitor (with ISSS) social media such as a special Facebook page used by each year's cohort.
- An additional role of the CLAS liaison would be to communicate awareness of this program to college faculty and staff.
 - CLAS may consider whether to have the buddy program as a college-wide program, or further tailor it to subsets such as "humanities," "social sciences," etc. Do note the Tippie buddy program permits pre-business students to participate, so will include CLAS students; we want to be careful not to "double dip."
2. **Curricular Tie-In** - We recommend CLAS consider ways that participation can be tied to curriculum in one or more courses – perhaps not mandatory, in order to avoid the problems mentioned by Tippie – but as an option, possibly for extra credit, encouraging college faculty to include this or find creative ways to link their students to the program. Or if making it required, make it clear in the course description.
 3. **Assessment** – We suggest doing this in CLAS if they have the resources/staff, or working possibly with the VP for Student Life staff to create an assessment plan. Gathering longitudinal feedback from participants would be beneficial – assessing expectations before the program starts, then how those expectations were/were not met immediately after the program ends, and also checking in a year etc. later to see if the pairs are still engaged in activities together, whether it has made it easier to make friends from different backgrounds.

Charge 4: *Recommend processes to enhance current programs such as On Iowa and Living-Learning Communities by incorporating more deliberate international-domestic student interaction.*

Discussion:

In the current On Iowa and Living-Learning Community models, there is work currently being done to increase intentional international-domestic student interaction. In discussing with staff in both areas, it was clear that minor tweaks and recommendations could impact the levels of actual engagement that both international and domestic students experience due to the measures put in place, but should be built upon the current staffing and models that are being implemented now. The committee discussed in some depth the fact that the majority of international students who live on campus end up living in Mayflower and have limited choice in LLC topic area simply due to the admission status and timeline that is not congruent with the domestic student process. It would be ideal to recommend this be changed, but because of the bigger implications, it is not included.

Recommendations:

1. Living-Learning Communities Recommendations:
 - a. University Housing and Dining Assistant Director for Social Justice in Residence Education should serve in an advisory capacity to the International Advisory Board (a board housed in UISG), or have another type of formal relationship with the board if advisement is not appropriate or available
 - b. Integrate staff from University Housing & Dining into International Student Orientation program (through ISSS) so the incoming international students understand how to get involved with their LLC as well as the benefits of doing so.
 - c. Intentionally engage student organizations at LLC "partners" (i.e. OASIS) to create intentional connections for the student groups to the residents living in the halls, both international and domestic.

- d. Actively recruit international RA candidates through outreach, modified language specifically inviting international students to apply, and hosting information sessions specifically for international students.
 - e. Look at the possibility of adding other resource-type programs outside of LLC programming (i.e. mentoring, buddies, physical resources, etc.)
2. On Iowa Recommendations:
- a. Translate On Iowa materials into top languages for international students at Iowa, with a commitment to funding this project.
 - b. Create and implement specialized/targeted marketing materials and strategies to recruit international student leadership.
 - i. Utilize language specifically inviting international student participation (i.e. "International Students are welcome/invited to apply!")
 - ii. Reach out to specific constituency groups or organizations who might have a listserv to reach a group of students.
 - iii. Place marketing in physical spaces in which international students spend frequent time (on and off-campus).
 - c. Partner specifically with international student organizations for optional programming. (This invite was sent out to all student organizations this year, but could be more intentionally targeted toward international student groups.)
 - d. Have an On Iowa staff member present at the International Student Orientation program (through ISSS) to discuss the program and areas in which they may be excited about getting involved. This could help contextualize the program for them prior to its beginning, and give the students something to look forward to, even though they tend to be fatigued by the time On Iowa begins.
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Summary:

The above recommendations are a combination of those that might require more time to plan and implement correctly and fully along with those that could be implemented in Fall 2015 with a bit of coordination and collaboration. It is our hope that these recommendations will impact the experiences and campus life of both international and domestic students, providing an active campus laboratory of diverse and global learning experiences in many ways outside of the classroom.