



Culture Shock and Adjustment Issues of International Students at Oklahoma State University

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ABSTRACT

“Culture shock is a psychological reaction to a change in cultural environment” (McKinley, Pattison & Gross, 1996: 379). Every semester at OSU, international students come from nations all across the globe to pursue higher education. India and China rank first and second respectively in the number of international students on the OSU campus.

Spring 2015 statistics	
India	482
China	391

In spite of many supportive measures provided by OSU, after arriving on campus, international students must adjust to their new social and cultural environment.

My study compares the experiences of students from two countries to investigate how specific variables impact students’ adjustment. I compare the experiences of Chinese and Indian males and females to investigate how nationality and gender influence adjustment experiences.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To identify significant variables in the adjustment experiences of international students at OSU
- To recognize key adjustment issues that international student organizations and university administrators should recognize in evaluating their orientation programs.

METHODOLOGY

Approval for interviews granted by OSU’s IRB

- 19 OSU students agreed to participate:
 - 5 males & 5 females from India
 - 5 males & 4 females from China
- Semi-structured interview schedule employed
- Student respondents described personal background, adjustment issues relative to practices, transportation, food, religion, education and other issues
- Recorded using a digital recorder
- Transcriptions of interviews created
- Qualitative content analysis used



HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE CLOTHING CHOICES OF STUDENTS ATTENDING CLASSES AT OSU?

- For Indians, girls wearing shorts in the summer was a huge shock for them.

“It is a bit more forward than what we see in India.”
- For Chinese, OSU students dressed more casually than in China when going to class.

“I think Chinese students will dress more fashion. We have different ways. We think if you wear more gorgeous, more beautiful, it’ll be good. Americans are more casual and they don’t care much. You can wear flip-flops, t-shirt and jeans and you can come to class.”



DO YOU FEEL INTEGRATED IN THE SOCIAL LIFE OF AMERICAN STUDENTS AT OSU?

- Indians seem slightly more integrated than Chinese students. However, this percentage is solely based on my small sample.

Indians	70%
Chinese	56%
- More male Chinese students felt integrated than female Chinese students
- Language constituted a major barrier for Chinese students
- Integration depended on individual initiative in participating in American activities, e.g., “Humans vs Zombies” or joining Greek life

“Not many people invite me to party. I can’t get into that deep relationship because of language barrier.”

HOW DO STUDENT-PROFESSOR RELATIONSHIPS DIFFER FROM THOSE IN YOUR COUNTRY?

- ### Indians
- As opposed to India, students might be on a first-name basis with professors at OSU
 - In India, lecturers are intimidating and distant
 - Interaction with professors at OSU is much easier

“...in case there is any need for me to discuss my family situation or I have to immediately go to India, or I have to talk about my financial needs to my advisor, he is open to discuss it with me.”
- ### Chinese
- Can talk with professors about non-academic topics
 - Less hierarchy exists at OSU between professors and students

“I think here relationship is better since in the class, he is professor and you are student. But outside, you two are friends – older friend and younger friend.”

DO PLACES OF WORSHIP EXIST IN STILLWATER?

- Indians indicated no place of worship exists in Stillwater, but can be found in Oklahoma City and Tulsa.
- Most Chinese respondents had no religion.
- Those Chinese answering “yes” said they were Christian
- Implications:** A place of worship in Stillwater for Indian students would probably help them adjust easily
- All students interviewed said they had ample scope to celebrate festivals of their religion at OSU. OSU scores big in this area.**



DO OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO PARTICIPATE IN CHRISTIAN EVENTS/FESTIVALS IN STILLWATER?

- All interviewees said there were enough opportunities to get invited
- Dinners organized by Wesley Foundation were mentioned
- Americans invite international students once they become really good friends

““If you are open to different kind of things, you will get involved, you will be affected by the atmosphere. You will spontaneously get in different kind of activities.””

WHO MOST HELPED YOU TO ADJUST?

- Indian and Chinese girls called on people from their respective countries: an example of **informal networking**
- Most girls already knew people at OSU prior to arrival: a possible indication of **chain migration**
- Indian and Chinese males utilized a lot of resources – self – learning, international students, American students, students from their respective countries
- Results varied mainly across genders, not across nationalities

“It was mostly Indian friends because there were a couple of friends who had come a year earlier. They kind of nurtured me and helped me grow as an individual.”

“The Chinese? My seniors – they always give me a ride to the supermarket. Tell me how to make appointment, how to use the facilities here. Every time I have a problem, I just approach them and ask.”

CONCLUSION

WHAT ADDITIONS OR CHANGES COULD THE OSU COMMUNITY MAKE TO ASSIST INCOMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?

- Conduct more events where international students can interact with American students
- Break up long orientation session into smaller sessions during first semester so students don’t lose concentration
- The International Students and Scholars office might arrange for housing and food during the first few days after arrival
- Encourage Americans to attend events conducted by international student organizations from different countries
- International students should be encouraged to attend events organized by student organizations other than their own countries
- Make public transportation more student-friendly by arranging for bus service on the weekends and holidays and arranging for off campus buses to run more frequently

FUTURE WORK

- Due to the small sample population, conclusions about the entire Indian and Chinese population at OSU are difficult to make
- Future studies with a larger sample population will help researchers arrive at more specific conclusions

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