

International Students' Emotional Wellness

Creating Community and Effective Strategies

A dark blue diagonal graphic that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right corner, creating a triangular shape in the bottom right of the slide.

Presenters

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Agenda

- Current climate
- Recent data and trends
- Strategies to deal with stressors
- Exploring interactive and engaging programming
- What's working
- Resources

It's been a rollercoaster ride...

- March 2020 - Universities shut down in-person learning, international students told to leave campus
- November 2020 - Presidential election and the impact on immigration
- January 2021 - Capital Hill Riots

Psychological Consequences of COVID-19

Strain on mental health:

- Immigration/Visas
- Finances
- Housing
- Online learning
- Making and maintaining friends
- Discrimination



Increase levels of:

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Loneliness
- Depression
- Post-traumatic stress
- Worry

Understanding Mental Health Data & Challenges

The New York Times

Opinion | CONTRIBUTING OP-ED WRITER

Chinese, Studying in America, and Struggling

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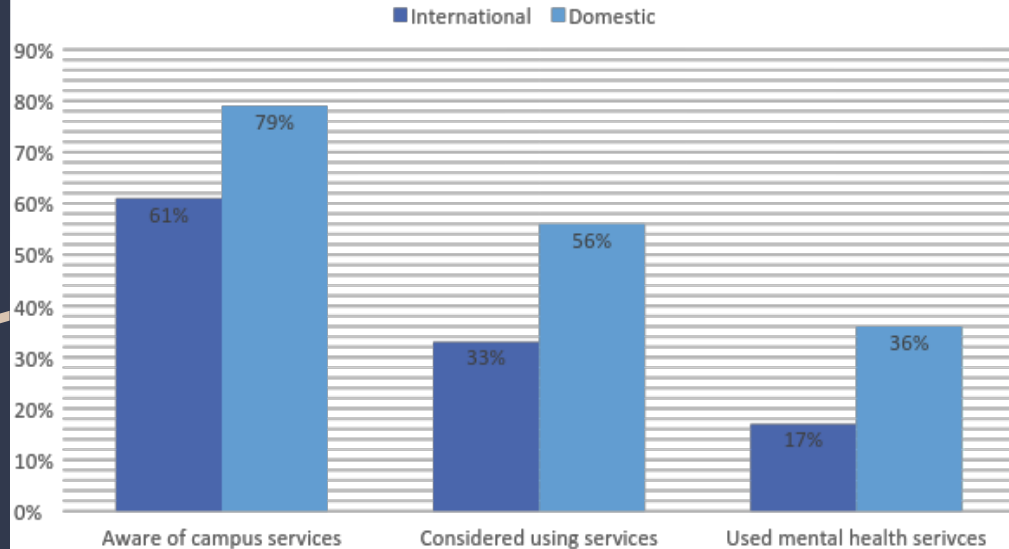
By HELEN GAO DEC. 12, 2017



Matt Chase

Mental Health Care – Underutilized

Mental Health Need,
Awareness, and Use of Counseling
Services Among International Graduate
Students,
Journal of American College Health



Source: Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lusting, 2010

International Student Mental Health Prior to COVID-19

- Quantitative study of 42,428 domestic students and 2,423 international students from Spring 2017 ACHA National College Health Assessment

Table 2. International student status correlates of mental health diagnoses and symptoms of ACHA-NCHA IIC, Spring 2017.

	International	
	OR	95% CI
Mental health diagnoses		
Depression diagnosis	0.84	0.66–1.06
Anxiety diagnosis	0.47***	0.38–0.58
Depression and anxiety diagnosis	0.58***	0.50–0.67
Other diagnosis	0.72**	0.59–0.87
Mental health symptoms		
Ever felt so depressed that it was difficult to function	1.10*	1.01–1.19
Ever felt overwhelming anxiety	0.69***	0.63–0.74
Ever intentionally cut, burned, bruised, or otherwise injured yourself	0.96	0.83–1.12
Ever seriously considered suicide	0.83**	0.72–0.95
Ever attempted suicide	1.37*	1.04–1.82

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Barriers to treatment

- Cost, transportation, access
- Language mismatch
- Mental health interventions poorly adapted for diverse patients
- Provider/diagnostic/systemic bias

Cultural

- Belief that these are personal weaknesses, not illnesses
- Emotional inhibition, not expression
- Stigma/shame
- Traditional role of psychiatry; low awareness of services
- Communication challenges within families



COVID-19 stressors unique to international students

- Travel and infection control logistics
 - Return to home country or stay in US?
 - Travel bans and flight cancellations
 - Quarantine in home country—fear of infection, stigma, cost
 - Visa appointment cancellations
 - Closure of testing centers for TOEFL, IELTS, GRE/GMAT
 - Must be in US to apply for OPT
- Learning environment
 - Shift to online learning
 - Lack of privacy—mental health concerns
 - Challenging family dynamics
 - Time zones (College Board)
 - Is this worth the price of admission?

Eliciting international students' COVID-19 stressors

- Qualitative study of 22 international students from 11 countries and 17 US institutions
- Recruited from larger study of 1,300 young adults' experiences during the pandemic
- Data elicited via tape-recorded semi-structured interviews
- Thematic analysis identified four main stressors, informing pragmatic suggestions for educators

Country of Origin	Gender	Student Status
Argentina	F	Undergraduate
Canada	F	Undergraduate
China (Mainland)	M	Graduate
China (Mainland)	F	Graduate
China (Mainland)	F	Graduate
China (Mainland)	F	Undergraduate
China (Mainland)	F	Graduate
Hong Kong	F	Graduate
India	F	Undergraduate
India	F	Undergraduate
India	F	Graduate
India	F	Undergraduate
India	F	Undergraduate
India	M	Graduate
Japan	F	Undergraduate
Lebanon	F	Graduate
Malaysia	F	Undergraduate
Pakistan	M	Undergraduate
South Korea	F	Graduate
South Korea	F	Graduate
South Korea	F	Graduate
Vietnam	F	Graduate

Four major themes impacting mental health

Uncertainty and anxiety induced by decisions and policies in response to COVID-19

Limited understanding by educators and school staff of international students' unique challenges

Fears regarding xenophobia

Greater awareness of racial and cultural identity

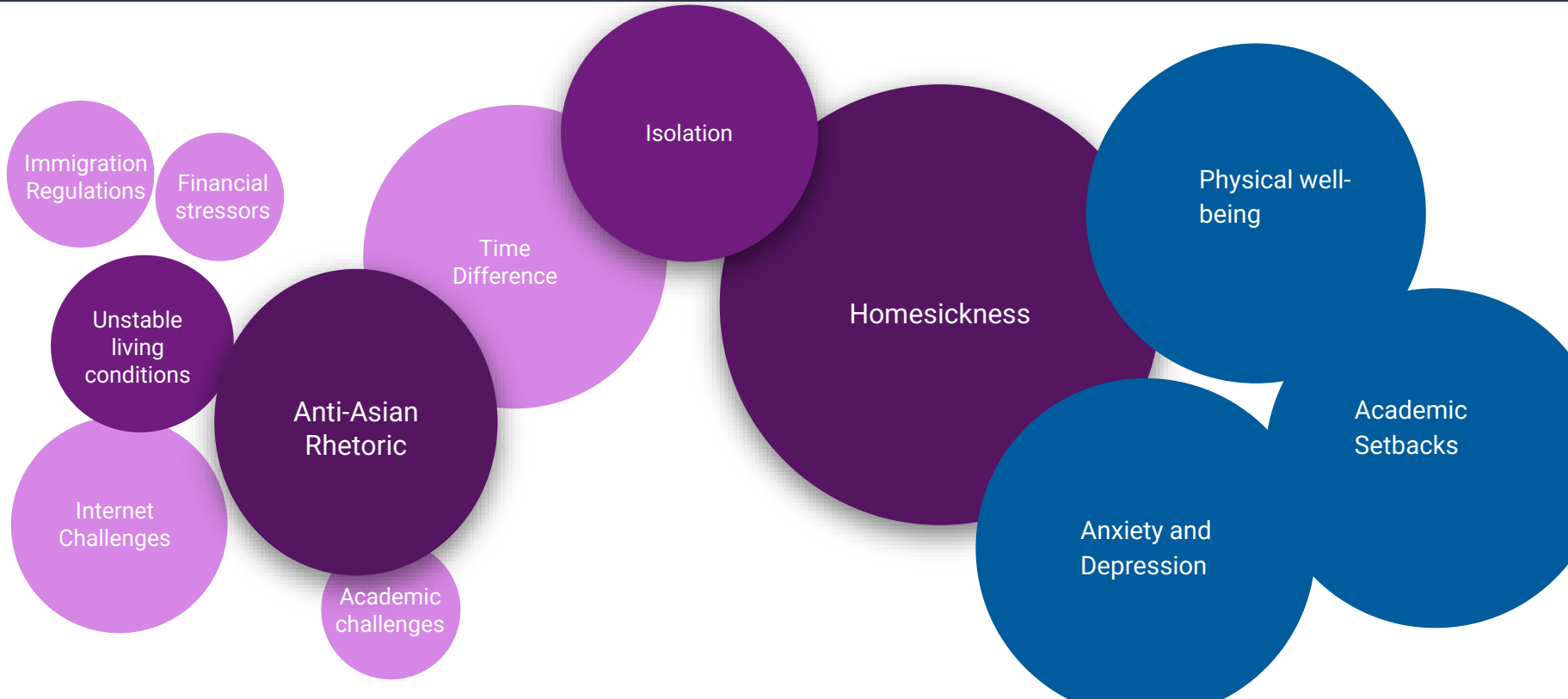
Exploring Interactive and Engaging Programming



Institutional and Student Profile:

- ❖ Small, private liberal arts institution in Columbia, Missouri
- ❖ International Student Services
 - Issuance of initial I-20s after admission
 - Immigration advising
 - Cultural, social and transition advising
 - Programming for students and campus community
- ❖ Approximately 230 international students
 - Traditional residential campus
 - Significant athlete population
 - Locations in Denver and Salt Lake City
- ❖ Student population
 - Columbia: United Kingdom, Brazil, Spain
 - Denver: Nepal, Vietnam, Mongolia
 - Salt Lake City: Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela

International Students' Stressors



Student Experience

I think the most concerning things for me were if the classes were going to be online, how was it going to work, what would happen with soccer, and what it is the situation to go back to my country and come back.

Switching from in-person classes to online classes due to the pandemic (for safety reasons) had a massive impact on learning and social experiences.

Since I was taking classes online from my home country, I was worried if I properly take care of the documents that I need to submit.

Self-actualization

desire to become the most that one can be

Esteem

respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom

Love and belonging

friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection

Safety needs

personal security, employment, resources, health, property

Physiological needs

air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction

Physical and Mental Health Support:

Basic Needs

- ❖ Access to shelter & food
 - Support finding a place to live
 - Grocery Gift Cards
 - Food Bank
 - Instacart deliveries
- ❖ Access to Emergency Aid
 - CARES Funding provided scholarship aid
 - Advisors and Counselor Nominations to IIE Emergency Aid
 - Faculty and Counselor Nominations to request assistance from Private Donors

Physical and Mental Health Support

- ❖ Access to Wellness, Health and Counseling Staff

Engagement and Programming during Covid

All Virtual

- ❖ Social events
 - International Coffee Hours
 - Virtual Game Night
 - Trivia
- ❖ Social media take-over
- ❖ Peer Leaders (First Year Mentors / Res Assistants)
- ❖ Town Halls
- ❖ Signature Events
 - Workshops on Employment, Optional Practical Training, Taxes, and International Health Insurance
 - Homecoming & Spirit Week
 - Student Affairs Night of Recognition
 - Graduation

In Person

- ❖ Movie Night
- ❖ Downtown Exploration

Support Strategies:

- ❖ Student Alert & Support Team (SAST)
- ❖ Consistent and clear communication
 - Monthly newsletter
 - Updates on institutional Covid plan and arrival details
- ❖ Programming initiatives
- ❖ Zoom sessions
 - Group and individual
 - Appointments available Monday through Friday
 - Accommodations made for time differences

What Did We Learn?

- ❖ Self-care for staff and students
- ❖ Students appreciated the level of communication and support
- ❖ Creating a safe space (virtually and in-person) early on
- ❖ Develop survey to gauge programming needs and emotional challenges
 - Participation = Zoom fatigue
- ❖ Educating staff and faculty on the unique challenges faced by international students
- ❖ Know how to plan for next year

Key Takeaways

- ❖ Find creative ways to collaborate with other stakeholders for virtual programming
- ❖ Empower students to be aware of their mental wellness and reach out for help during the pandemic
- ❖ Use challenges as a learning opportunity
- ❖ Create a robust virtual programming process which includes at least one to two programs each month
- ❖ Create opportunities to celebrate wins during the pandemic; opportunities for student spotlights
- ❖ Scale student support and normalize help-seeking behavior by expanding the use of peer coaches and mentors

Now What?

- ❖ In reviewing the frequency of Wellness programs at your institution, is there room to grow as far as how often you offer some of the programs?
- ❖ Consider your current campus mapping, do you have a fairly well rounded mix of existing wellness related programs that you can use as opportunities to further develop and grow international students' acceptance of mental wellness and decrease the negative connotation that is prevalent in this cohort?
- ❖ Are you using your existing technology resources to create platforms which can increase knowledge around wellness options for international students?
- ❖ Have you reached out to your international student population to find out what their stressors are during this pandemic?

Resources & Hotlines

Emotional & Mental Health Training Programs



Powerpoint Presentation

Professionally designed presentation to walk your students through the training.



Video Content

Two videos on mental health awareness and student perceptions on culture shock and stress from around the world.



Student Handout

A downloadable student guide take-away, or we can supply hard copies, to distribute to students.



Interactive Activities

Activities that encourage dialogue on many of the larger issues such as myths surround seeking help.



Proctor Guide

Complete guide to walk you or your staff through the training, including a full script and talking points.



In partnership with:



The MGH Center for
Cross-Cultural Student
Emotional Wellness



INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT
INSURANCE

<https://administrators.internationalstudentinsurance.com/resources/>

Resources

[Addressing Mental Health Issues Affecting International Students](#)

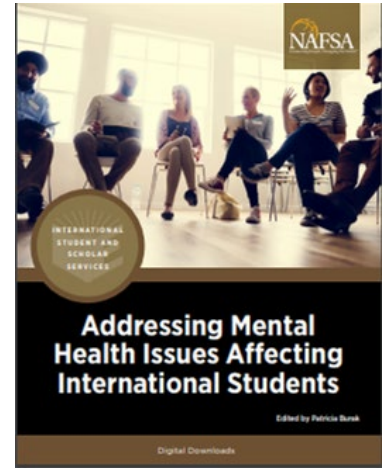
[Crisis Management in a Cross Cultural Setting: ISSS](#)

Other Resources

[Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness \(MGH CCCSEW\)](#)

[Tufts University Counseling and Mental Health Service](#)
Information for international students regarding counseling

[Emotional Wellness During the COVID-19 Outbreak for International Students](#)



Services & Hotlines

Hotlines

- National Suicide Prevention
1-800-273-TALK
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE
<http://www.thehotline.org/>
- It Gets Better Project (LGBTQ)
1-866-4-U-TREVOR
www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/get-help

Services

- Crisis Text Line
<http://www.crisistextline.org/>
Text 741-741



Thank You