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The Effectiveness of the Foreign Student Orientation

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Abstract

International students making the transition to a new cultural environment need some time and guidance to adapt. At the University of Montana, international student advisors prepare the Foreign Student Orientation to assist these new students in their adjustment process. It is shown that international students benefit from attending the Foreign Student Orientation. This study looks at how effective the orientation at the University of Montana is as perceived by international students from the fall 2016 semester.

Keywords: foreign students, orientation, international students, college, multicultural psychology

The Effectiveness of the Foreign Student Orientation for Incoming International Students

As the world becomes more global, the barriers between countries have decreased. When these barriers decrease, more international students are now eager to experience studying abroad. This is demonstrated as the numbers of international students in American universities has increased from the past (Gacel-Avila, 2005). International students face a number of challenges in adapting and adjusting to U.S culture and the experience of studying abroad (Smith, 1955). International students will have a different experience from domestic students in college. First, international students from countries where English is not the primary language or where English may not even be taught will have much to adapt to. Although the United States is culturally diverse, there will be cultural differences. For example, students from other countries, particularly the Asian and Southeast Asian countries, have difficulty with maintaining eye contact with their American peers. The reason for this is culturally linked; it is disrespectful for someone younger to stare into an older person's eyes. Returning to the topic of English as a second language, it can be tough for international students to grasp simple, everyday phrases that domestic students use. Popular phrases such as "if there's a will, there's a way" may be confusing; after all, the word "will" can be a person's name.

In addition, the United States, a country where English is the commonly-spoken language of communication between people, is a primary study abroad location for international students. As Figure 1 indicates, there was a 2.4% increase from year 2014/2015 to year

2015/2016.

NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT, 2005/06 - 2015/16												
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	% Change from 14/15
Undergraduate	61,342	63,749	68,195	82,136	79,365	84,543	90,903	102,069	109,486	112,765	119,262	5.8
Graduate	64,235	72,726	78,489	84,828	84,613	89,505	92,211	100,129	108,519	121,637	126,516	4.0
Non-Degree	17,346	20,703	26,437	33,496	38,992	40,442	45,353	48,722	52,123	59,364	54,965	-7.4
Total	142,923	157,178	173,121	200,460	202,970	214,490	228,467	250,920	270,128	293,766	300,743	2.4

Figure 1: Figure reproduced from Institute of International Education. (2016). "New International Student Enrollment, 2005/06-2015/16." *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/opendoor>

Original Study Plan

Participants

Volunteers were recruited from the fall 2016 Foreign Student Orientation at a Rocky Mountain University for this study. There were to be at least ten participants in the study.

Design

The study started as a within-subjects design, specifically an AB-design. The participants were expected to participate in both parts of the experiment. The first part took place before the Foreign Student Orientation and the second part took place after the Foreign Student Orientation. In addition, it was a mixed methods study because it involved quantitative and qualitative questions.

Materials

A computer with internet connection was used to send out the questionnaires for the participants to fill out. The surveys were digitally filled out on Google Forms. It was safe to expect the participants to have access to a computer with internet connection, since computers

are available to students in various places on campus. A demographics survey accompanied both questionnaires.

Procedure

The participants received an e-mail with a link to the first part of the study about two to three weeks before their arrival in Missoula and before they experienced the Foreign Student Orientation. Then, the next part of the experiment began after the Foreign Student Orientation. The participants did not begin that part immediately. Instead, the participants were given time to adjust to the new environment for about two weeks before they were re-contacted. Then, after compiling the data, it was time to analyze the results and come up with conclusions about what the data might represent.

What happened

Participants

The actual total number of participants was twenty-four students. The number of participants for the first part of the experiment was fourteen students, and the number of participants for the second part of the experiment was twelve students, with two of the students participating in both parts of the study. Although it was expected that the participants would be involved in both parts of the experiment, it was discovered that only these two participants responded to both the before and after versions of the questionnaires.

Designs

Although the AB-design of the experiment remained the same for these two people, there were some minor adjustments that had to be made. The study had evolved into a pretest-posttest design without repeated measurements, not the planned-for within-subjects design. Except for the two participants filling out the survey twice, there was no experimental control. The results

are presented in two parts: the data collected from the participants in the first part of the study and the data collected from the participants in the second part of the study.

Materials

A computer with internet connection was used as well as Google Forms to create the online questionnaire. In addition, e-mails were used to send the links to the participants and to recruit participants.

Procedure

The surveys were created during the semester before with the help and guidance of Dr. David Schuldberg. In addition, the demographics survey was added at of Dr. Schuldberg's suggestion; this made sense, as the different cultures, gender, age, etc. may influence a person's adaptability or response to the orientation. The University of Montana IRB approved the study.

The participants received the link to the first part of the survey about two weeks before the orientation. Initially, the demographics survey was sent separately to the participants via e-mail and received as a Word document. After submitting a minor adjustment to the study to the IRB to be approved, the demographics survey was also included in the Google form to make the survey more accessible and easier to complete. This adjustment was made for the second part of the study.

The second part of the survey was sent via e-mail about three weeks after the Foreign Student Orientation. However, due to the lack of response from the same respondents who participated the first part of the study, another e-mail was sent out. This e-mail was sent about six weeks after the orientation. The data were then processed and analyzed under the guidance of Dr. Schuldberg.

Results

The international students that participated in the study responded positively to the Foreign Student Orientation. Most of the responses for the second part of the survey showed that the participants experienced lower levels of nervousness and higher levels of confidence. For example, when asked about their readiness for beginning their education, the students after the orientation believed they were more prepared.

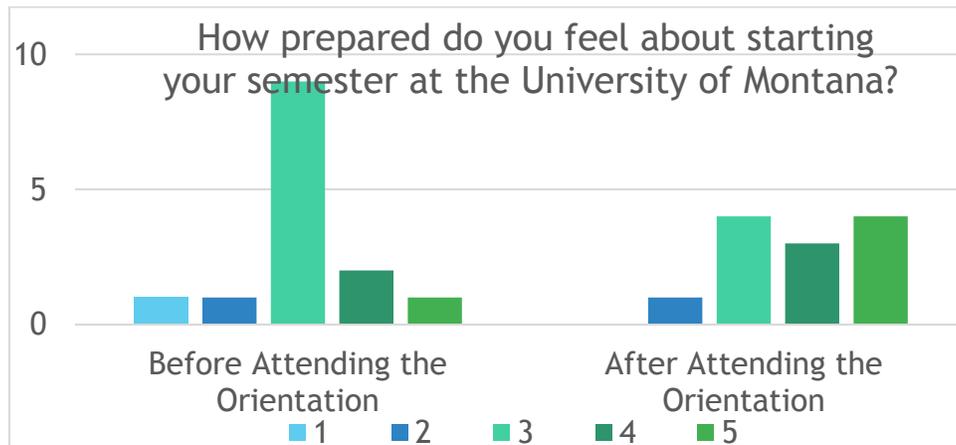


Figure 2 Comparison of how prepared international students felt before and after attending the orientation.

Adding on to the above example, the participants reported higher levels of ease in approaching people for help after attending the foreign student orientation.

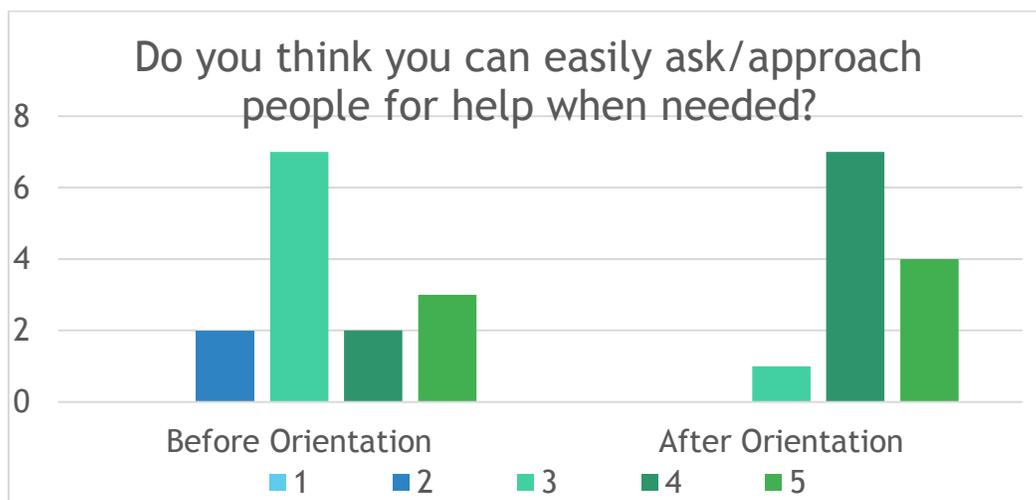


Figure 3 Comparison of international students' confidence in asking for help before and after attending the orientation.

4. How nervous do you feel when you think about starting your classes?

(14 responses)

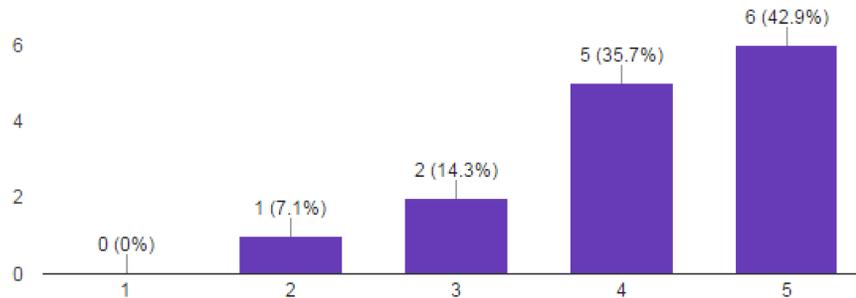


Figure 4 International Students' Nervousness Before Orientation.

How nervous did you feel when you thought about starting your class?

(12 responses)

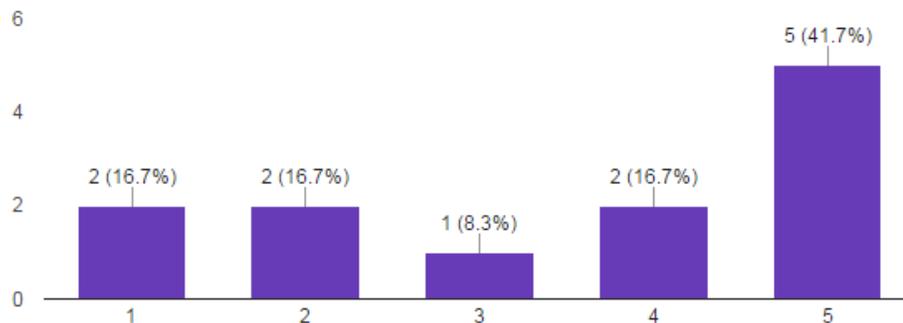


Figure 5 International Students' Nervousness After Orientation

The international students, although not consistently, reported less nervousness about the thought of starting their classes after the orientation. As shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5, the international students in the second assessment appeared to be less nervous about starting their classes at the University. However, there are lower levels of excitement for taking classes at the University of Montana. These trends are exemplified in Figure 6 and Figure 7.

3. How excited are you for your classes to begin? (14 responses)

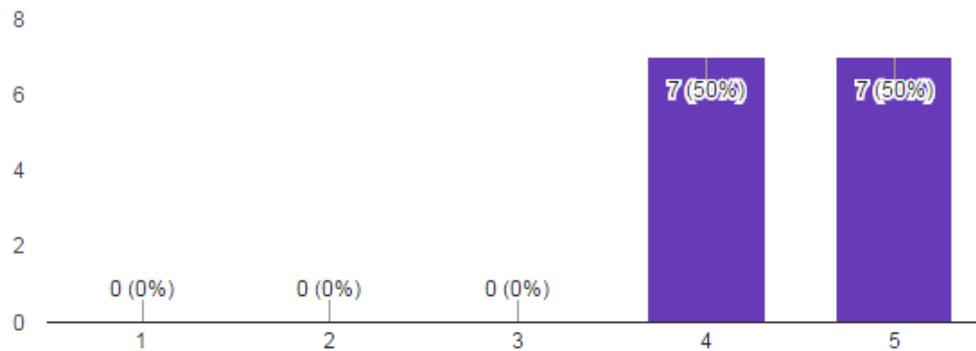


Figure 6 International Students' Excitement Before Orientation.

How excited were you for your classes to begin? (12 responses)

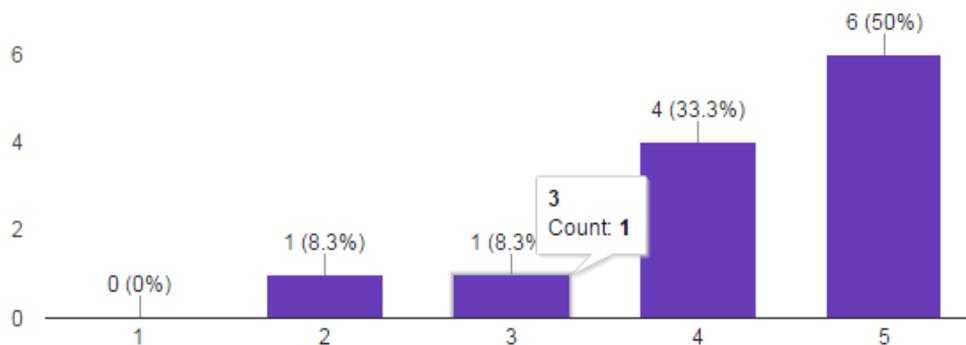


Figure 7 International Students' Excitement After Orientation.

Discussion and Conclusions

In short, this study indicates that the Foreign Student Orientation may have helped the international students at the University of Montana. As mentioned previously, it is expected that international students, especially the students coming in from a country where English is not commonly spoken, will need help to adjust to the new and exciting environment. The ability to

adapt to the environment and the support provided by others for doing so will color the student's entire experience. Hence, the presence of the Foreign Student Orientation, judging from the responses obtained in the study, can help to prepare the students and smooth the transition period for them.

Research Lessons Learned

This has been a rewarding and a learning experience. As an undergraduate student in Psychology, there is still much that must be learned, especially in the realm of conducting experiments and studies. With that being said, there are several aspects of this research that could have been done differently to improve on the research design of this study.

The first mistake was the separation of the demographics survey from the rest of the survey. Participants do not want to spend too much time on filling out surveys, and having the participants perform two separate actions to complete the survey may have discouraged future participants from wanting to fill the surveys out.

In addition, the second mistake was not informing the participants ahead of time that the survey would have two parts. Letting them know ahead of time would help to guarantee that they would be more committed to responding to the second part of the survey.

Finally, it is crucial to send the surveys out at a time when there is still a high level of excitement about studying abroad. Participants are more likely to respond to the surveys because they are excited to be more involved with the University and everything that is involved to the University.

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