



Recreation, intercultural friendship, and international students' adaptation to college by region of origin



Chris R. Glass^{a,*}, Edwin Gómez^a, Alfredo Urzua^b

^a Old Dominion University, United States

^b University of Texas at El Paso, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 11 February 2013

Received in revised form 6 May 2014

Accepted 31 May 2014

Keywords:

International students

Recreation

Leisure

Adaptation to college

Intercultural friendship

Social networks

ABSTRACT

This study examined the extent to which recreation participation, intercultural friendship, and adaptation to college in the U.S. vary by an international student's region of origin. Researchers analyzed data from a quantitative cross-sectional survey instrument ($n = 298$) using measures from the Ethnicity and Public Recreation Participation (EPRP) Model and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). Results indicate constraints to active participation in recreation and leisure activities exist, and are a prominent aspect of intercultural friendship formation and adaptation to college. As expected, constraints to recreation were negatively associated with friendships with host national peers and all measures of student adaptation to college. Constraints to recreation existed for non-European international students, and Eastern/Southeastern Asia reported more constraints than students from Southern Asia and the Middle East/North Africa. Students from non-European countries reported more friendships with co-national peers and fewer friendships with host national peers. Students from non-European countries reported less social adaptation and attachment to college than students from European countries. Results affirm that an international student's region of origin may moderate access to the informal culture of an institution through recreation participation, thus affecting patterns of intercultural friendship formation and adaptation to college. Researchers discuss implications for further research and propose interventions to enhance international students' social and academic adaptation to college.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. Recreation participation as a mechanism for adaptation to college

Increasing numbers of international students come to U.S. colleges and universities from all regions of the world (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2013), bringing with them diverse sociocultural backgrounds and varying levels of academic preparedness (American Council on Education, 2012; Bhandari, Belyavina, & Gutierrez, 2011; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). This reflects targeted recruitment efforts aimed at diversifying the international student population and enhancing the international profile of the host institution (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Choudaha, Orosz, & Chang, 2012). However, compositional diversity alone is not sufficient to achieve the educational benefits of internationalization (Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 757 683 4118; fax: +1 757 683 5083.
E-mail address: crglass@odu.edu (C.R. Glass).

2006; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007), as these benefits are only possible when international students fully participate in the campus community, engaging their peers both inside and outside the classroom (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011).

American universities do more than provide high-quality educational opportunities for international students; they are also complex sociocultural contexts that vary greatly in the extent to which they encourage students' full participation in the formal and informal social activities of the campus (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). In recent years, researchers have urged empirical work that moves beyond comparisons between international and host national students' adaptation to college and focuses instead on the mechanisms of social and academic adaptation (Morrison, Merrick, Higgs, & Le Métais, 2005; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Krommers, 2012), as well as potential differences among sub-groups of international students (Gareis, 2012; Glass, 2012; Hanassab, 2006). The basic premise of this study, therefore, is that an international student's region of origin may moderate access to the informal culture of an institution through recreation participation, thus related to patterns of intercultural friendship formation and adaptation to college. This premise is grounded in existing research that suggests such variation exists, particularly for international students from non-European countries (Al-sharideh & Goe, 1998; Gareis, 2012; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Redden, 2012). Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which recreation activities, friendship networks, and adaptation to college varies by the region of origin for international students.

Numerous studies document the importance of forming intercultural friendships in adapting to college life. International students who perceive greater constraints engaging in leisure activities may develop fewer friendships with host national and international peers and, consequently, feel less attached to their host institution (Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). However, little research exists on the role of recreation and leisure activities as facilitators of these important relationships (Leask, 2009). Whether international students tap into the informal social life of their host institution and gain access to friendship networks through participation in recreation is not only a theoretical gap, but an important practical issue.

This study aims to answer two main questions: (a) To what extent are sociolinguistic factors in recreation participation related to the formation of intercultural friendships and student adaptation to college? and (b) How do recreation participation, intercultural friendships, and adaptation to college vary by an international student's region of origin? Answers to these questions provide valuable insight into the dynamics of university social life for specific groups of international students, complementing research that has examined the academic dimensions of their college experiences (Rienties et al., 2012). Decades of research demonstrate a strong linkage of extra-curricular involvement and peer group support with student retention and persistence for college students (Braxton, 2000; Reason, 2009; Tinto, 1994, 2012), and international students specifically (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Mamiseishvili, 2012). It is critical for institutions to understand the mechanisms of academic and social adaptation that could enhance international students' decisions to persist through graduation.

Furthermore, drawing on research documenting discrimination based on country of origin rather than skin color alone (Hanassab, 2006; Jung et al., 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Redden, 2012), another important goal of this study is to examine the role of an international student's region of origin in adaptation to college. The study examines factors that may ameliorate the effects of exclusion, including cultural diversity of friendship networks (Williams & Johnson, 2011; Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2012) and individual degree of sociability (Tomich, McWhirter, & Darcy, 2003). To this end, the present study is guided by the Ethnicity and Public Recreation Participation (EPRP) Model (Gómez, 2002, 2006), which examines the role of ethnicity in recreation and leisure within public spaces.

Finally, the study also aims to contribute to the implementation of more effective institutional initiatives, which may have varying conditional effects on sub-groups of international students (Glass, 2012; Reason, 2009). If some international students appear to be consistently excluded from the social life of the university, this may provide rationale for researchers to examine possible underlying reasons. In the end, if rhetoric about U.S. universities as "open, tolerant, and cosmopolitan" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000, p. 31) institutions is to have merit, it is crucial to develop a more nuanced understanding of international student adaptation to college; rather than viewing the diversification of international student population as an end in itself (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011).

2. Theoretical grounding

2.1. Ethnicity and Public Recreation Participation (EPRP) Model and related concepts

The Ethnicity and Public Recreation Participation (EPRP) Model provides one perspective on the relational processes underlying international students' acculturation, formation of intercultural friendships or subcultural identities, and successful adaptation as manifested by use of public recreation spaces (Gómez, 2002). The EPRP Model has been empirically tested, and the items measuring the constructs were found to be valid and reliable (Gómez, 2006). Researchers have applied EPRP measures in examining the relationship between language, subcultural identity, and perceived discrimination with challenges to participation in recreation for non-English speaking students (Taylor & Doherty, 2005). The following section reviews research on international students related to the EPRP's measure of language use, perceived constraints to participation in recreation activities, and friendship network formation.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/946998>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/946998>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)