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## The International Friendly Campus Scale: Development and psychometric evaluation



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### ABSTRACT

The International Friendly Campus Scale (IFCS) was developed with a sample of 501 international students. The 18-item IFCS includes five subscales: International Center Services ( $\alpha = .85$ ), Social Engagement ( $\alpha = .70$ ), Academic Support ( $\alpha = .84$ ), Identification with Institution ( $\alpha = .86$ ), and Campus Discrimination ( $\alpha = .75$ ). The factor structure was examined and cross-validated with two randomly split samples. Moreover, multigroup confirmatory factor analyses results indicated measurement and structural invariance of the IFCS between men and women. The construct validity of the IFCS was supported by its associations with life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, social connection with mainstream society, academic stress, and two forms of discrimination (i.e., racial/national and language) in the expected directions. Moreover, the IFCS total score and four subscale scores added significant incremental variance in predicting life satisfaction over and above positive and negative affect. The initial psychometric evaluation indicates that the IFCS is a promising measure that could be further used to assess the international friendliness of university campuses.

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The number of international students studying in the United States (U.S.) has grown dramatically over the past few decades as the U.S. has undergone economic challenges. As a result, international students have been a source of financial support for U.S. higher education institutions. One admissions official at a public university described this influx of international students as “pretty much revenue-driven” because the “the domestic market is just not as large as the international market” (McMurtrie, 2011). To illustrate, international students contributed over \$24 billion through tuition and daily expenses to the U.S. economy during the 2012–2013 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2013). Therefore, many institutions have invested more heavily in recruiting international students while also developing international collaborations to increase the enrollment of international students (Rovai & Downey, 2010). In addition, the growing number of international students has contributed to the globalization of U.S. campuses and has provided a more diverse experience for U.S. students (Leask, 2009).

Despite the cultural diversity international students bring, this group faces a variety of challenges in adjustment. Misra, Crist, and Burant (2003) identified three major areas of challenges that international students encounter—academic,

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emotional and social difficulties. Other researchers have reported that international students also experience difficulties in adjusting to cultural differences, language challenges, and the U.S. educational system (Olivas & Li, 2006). Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) indicated that students' ability to adjust does not simply depend on the individual, but also the environment students are in. They suggested using an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to understand the well-being of international students and stress the responsibilities of institutions in providing resources and support.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model emphasizes on the evolving systemic process of interaction between the human and the environment. Therefore, when people transition across cultural contexts, it is important to understand how individuals with different cultures derive meaning from or make sense of their environmental contexts. Institutions of higher education need to constantly evaluate the context into which they recruit and educate international students, especially during this period of rapid increase of international student enrollment. It is insufficient to focus solely on individual concerns. Attention must be given to different aspects of the social system that foster or inhibit these students' adjustment. More specifically, a basic issue that universities should consider is the capacity with which a campus can accommodate students without compromising their experiences as well as the quality of their education. Moreover, an issue more salient than logistical considerations is the reactions of faculty, staff, and domestic students to the influx of international students. It is also imperative to consider whether campuses can foster an international friendly environment that results in positive experiences for these students. In other words, there is a need to provide a positive learning and living experience for these students beyond offering admission to study in the US.

Although most of the studies examining international students have focused on how individual characteristics (e.g., self-esteem, language proficiency, personality) are associated with their adjustment outcomes (e.g., Wang et al., 2012), acculturation and cross-national models (e.g., Berry, 1997; Heppner, Wang, & Heppner, 2012) have also highlighted the importance of environmental factors. In Berry's model, he emphasized that acculturation is a two-way process between international students and their host society. For example, social support and societal attitudes were listed among factors that moderated one's acculturation experiences in Berry's model. Heppner et al. noted the level of support or hostility of the immersion environment and relationships within the host culture as factors influencing one's development of cross-national cultural competency. In addition, other acculturation-related models [e.g., Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997), Multidimensional Individual Differences Acculturation Model (MIDA; Safdar, Lay, & Struthers, 2003), Concordance Model of Acculturation (CMA; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002), Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM; Navas et al., 2005)] have all emphasized the host society's role in the acculturation of individuals. More specifically, the IAM accentuates government's role on immigrants' acculturation process; the MIDA includes social support from out-group as a dimension, the CMA outlines four concordance outcomes (consensual, culture-problematic, contact-problematic, and conflictual), based on match or mismatch between host and migrant acculturation attitudes; and the RAEM depicts several sociocultural domains across the acculturation attitudes preferred and adopted by the host and immigrant interaction. Many of these models were developed focusing on immigrant populations, which have similarities and differences to international students. Thus, limitations may exist on their generalizability to international students, but it also highlights the need for more research addressing the international student population. In sum, the climate of campus environments cannot be overlooked when studying the adjustment of international students.

Campus climate, an important social environmental factor that has an impact on students' university experiences, has been defined broadly by scholars. Cress (2002) focused on the interpersonal interaction aspect of campus climate to distinguish it from campus culture. Rankin and Reason (2008) defined campus climate as the current attitudes, behaviors, standards, and practice that employees and students have in an institution, which are usually linked to specific social groups. Many researchers conceptualized campus climate as a multidimensional concept (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Merson, 2012; Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Hurtado et al. suggested four dimensions of campus climate, which included institutional historical legacy, structural diversity, psychological climate, and behavioral dimensions. Based on Hurtado et al's study, Hutchinson, Raymond, and Black (2008) further confirmed that a multidimensional model of campus climate consists of psychological and behavioral dimensions that apply to undergraduate and graduate students across race and gender.

Besides its multidimensionality, campus climate has also been measured by researchers with various cultural identity domains, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and religion (e.g., Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012; Park, 2012; Vaccaro, 2010). For example, a campus climate assessment instrument was developed by Rankin (1998) and further used to evaluate the campus climate perceived by students from different racial groups (Rankin & Reason, 2005). In addition, Yost and Gilmore (2011) conducted an LGBTQ campus climate survey to examine how the campus climate influenced LGBTQ students' academic performance. In their study, LGBTQ campus climate was assessed through the prejudice LGBTQ students perceived from others as well as the campus and classroom environment they experienced. Moreover, factors like education satisfaction, perception of discrimination, and racial conflict were measured by other researchers to learn more about campus climate for deaf students (Parasnis, Samar, & Fischer, 2005).

Despite the diverse campus climate studies, there is a lack of empirical data that examined campus climate for international students. Phongsuwan (1997) indicated that international students' communicative language ability contributed to their satisfaction of campus climate. However, there is little research focusing on how external factors influence the campus comfort level of international students. No published measure was found to evaluate the international friendliness of campuses.

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