Psychological Issues Affecting International Students

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- Increase in need for mental health services.
- Increase in frequency, severity, and complexity of mental health issues.
- *International students are specifically identified as particularly vulnerable to mental health problems.*
Simple math:

Bureaucratic / institutional factors
Acculturative stress
Regular academic stress

Lots of stress
Bureaucratic / institutional factors
Prior to coming to the US – tedious process

- Multiple parallel cumbersome non-friendly applications

- Financial burden
  - Visa application fee
  - Visa issuance fee
  - SEVIS fee
  - Preparation of photos & supporting documents
  - Travel to closest US Consulate, possible hotel, etc.
Law Enforcement Approach

- Fearful officers interpret errors as potential malice
- Many law enforcement officers don’t understand regulations or documents
- Sends unwelcome message
In the US: Full-Time Academic Enrollment

- International students must plan carefully; little flexibility.
- May be forced to sacrifice grades.
Restricted Employment

- Most F-1 & J-1 students restricted to —
  - On-campus employment
  - Employment related to program of study
- Dependents often not authorized to work at all!
## 2013–2014 Budgets and Costs for International Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>12 Months</th>
<th>9 Months</th>
<th>6 Months</th>
<th>3 Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tuition &amp; Fees</strong></td>
<td>$36,112</td>
<td>$36,112</td>
<td>$24,076</td>
<td>$12,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living Expenses</strong></td>
<td>$20,450</td>
<td>$15,337</td>
<td>$10,226</td>
<td>$5,113</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other: Books &amp; Supplies</strong></td>
<td>$1,601</td>
<td>$1,601</td>
<td>$1,068</td>
<td>$534</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$58,163</td>
<td>$53,050</td>
<td>$35,370</td>
<td>$17,685</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Numerous reporting & bureaucratic requirements!

I want to take a class at another school while I'm enrolled at UC San Diego.

I changed my major and want to update my I-20.

I just moved to a new home and want to update my address.

I am graduating this term, what should I do if I want to take less than 12 units during my final quarter?

My I-20 is expiring but I need more time to complete my degree requirements. How do I extend my program?

I have been accepted to a higher program level at UC San Diego and want to update my I-20.

I want to take a leave of absence.

I want to transfer to a new school.

I want to withdraw from UC San Diego.

What do I need to travel and return to the USA?

I am a current student and want to work on-campus.

I am a current student and want to work off-campus.

I am about to graduate and want to work after I'm finished with school.

I just got a job and my employer wants my Social Security Number.
Acculturative Stress
Upon Arrival

- Implicit and explicit pressures to accommodate to American cultural norms.
- May be perceived as an opportunity or challenge.
- Old patterns of coping are no longer effective and new ones are not yet available.
Separation and Loss

- Family
- Friends
- Landscape, light, temperature, colors, smells
- Language
- Habits
- Culture and customs
- Food
- Social status
Language and accent

- Not understanding
- Not being understood
- Feeling less intelligent
- Drop in performance
- Impact on self esteem
- Impact on social behavior
- More difficult when tired or stressed
- Problems for TAs (proficiency and accent)
Cognitive Distress

- Information overload
- Cognitive effort – understanding, communicating
- Depression and anxiety; more difficulty in mental processing

* Cognitive fatigue
  * Mental exhaustion
  * Burnout
  * Disorientation
Loneliness and Social Isolation

- Positive social support system is a protective factor.
- Relational stress is one of the major complaints.
- Desire for relationships with Americans, but language barriers & accents = obstacles.
- Miscommunication & misunderstanding.
- Difficulty making friends and/or maintaining friendships.
- Dissatisfaction with American friendships.

“how are you doing?”
“see you soon!”
“I will see you around”
“love ya” .... “I missed you”
“come over sometime”
“I’ll call you...”
“let’s get together soon”
Confusing Cultural Norms

- Communication
  - Gestures
  - Slang
- Relationship with authority
- Gender roles
- Dating, sexuality, intimacy
- Roommates
- Alcohol and drinking
- Work ethics: Work v. Fun
- Social Justice / “PC”
- Educational system
American educational system

- Active learning (vs. passive listening)
- Critical thinking (vs. memorization)
- Informal class participation (vs. formal)
- Egalitarian approach (vs. strict hierarchy)
- Academic conduct (vs. plagiarism)
- Multiple exams and quizzes (vs. infrequent)
Identity and values confusion

- Sense of self is not endorsed by familiar others.
- Sense of self and feeling of cultural and group identity are threatened / confused.
- May question personal values, customs and traditions.
Discrimination and Prejudice

- First experience as member of minority group.
- Emphasis on race in the USA is unfamiliar.
  - Social groups in home country are defined more by religious-geographic-ethnic membership rather than skin color.
- Heightened anxiety thus increased tendency to perceive prejudice, discrimination, or rejection by Americans.
- May be criticized for speaking in native language.
- More pronounced since 9/11; institutional factors.
Dealing with Expectations

- Family
- Country (ambassador)
- Money that was invested
- Self

Used to be at the top, but not anymore because:

- Unfamiliar with the system
- Lack of language proficiency
- Competing with excellent peers
- Depression
Reverse Culture Shock

- Is it possible to visit home?
  - Financial issues
  - Visa issues
- Criticism of home country
- Who am I? How have I changed?
- Split identity
- Hard to return to USA
Managing a Lot of Stress

- Facing all these challenges before having to deal with typical student stresses