Culture Bridge: Connecting Domestic and International Students in an Academic Library

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Background
To enhance CU Boulder Libraries’ role in a dynamic and global environment, the Libraries is expanding outreach services through strategic partnerships to embrace an evolving culture and a changing demographic.

Total enrollment
31,861 students

International student enrollment
3,079 from 100 countries

1,000 + international students since 1991
2,000 + international students since 2014

Study abroad students
1,397 students (+13% change over 5 years)

Literature Review

Friendship
“24% of [international student] participants indicated that they have no American friends at all” (Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011)

“More than a third of the [international student] respondents (38.11 percent) had no close American friends…” (Gareis, 2012)

Belonging
“The lack of leisure and relaxation…inadvertently exacerbates an international student’s sense of loneliness, depression, or stress” (Glass, & Westmont, 2014)

Acculturation
“…pioneers of acculturation research…have defined acculturation as ‘the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Smith, & Khawaja, 2011)

“…relationships between host and international students are on a continuum of social and psychological distance; the greater the distance the lower the chances of integrating into the new culture” (Renties, Heliot, & Jindal-Snape, 2013)

Results:

BE CONNECTED

Speed Friendship
Domestic and international students connect with each other in a low-pressure, fun setting.

Aims:
- To promote the library as a social environment
- To develop communicative skills
- To create lasting connections

Feedback:
- “The libraries should have more events like this.” – Survey
- “It made it comfortable to talk to the international students.” – Domestic Student
- “[I liked] The idea of having the event inside the library.” – International Student

Results:
- 3 Events
- 74 entries
- 56 participants
- 2 branch libraries
- 21 survey responses
- Cost: $400

BE BOLD

Talent Show
Students share talents highlighting cultural diversity.

Aims:
- To position the library as a hub or facilitator of community learning
- To promote intercultural appreciation
- To stimulate student engagement

Feedback:
- “It was really a pleasure to meet so many great talents and share different cultures.” – Winner
- “Great talent, amazing atmosphere, great environment!” – Survey

Results:
- 1 Talent Show
- 66 attendees
- 22 entries
- 13 performers
- 3 prizes
- 23 survey responses
- Cost: $675

BE GLOBAL

Photo Contest
International and study-abroad students use their smart devices via Instagram to capture global information landscapes.

Aims
- To explore information literacy landscapes
- To promote cultural literacy
- To inspire reflection

Feedback
- “Fun! Love the winning photos!” – CUB Faculty
- “…we were glad to be part of this important inter-cultural experience you offered to the students.” – CUB ISSS

Results:
- 1 Photo Contest
- 42 submissions
- 8 participants
- 3 prizes
- Cost: $350

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Discussion

Do we view the library as a social environment? Should we?
- “Contemporary models of acculturation emphasize the social environment…” (Rasmi, Salfdar, & Lewis 2009)

How can the library move beyond being a point of referral for international students to being a resource for social well-being?
- “…those who reported a high level of psychosocial resources (a combination of perceived out-group social support, psychological well-being, and cultural competence) initially exhibited significantly less psychological distress…” (Rasmi, et al. 2009)

Is social capital an important arena for academic libraries?
- “…it is in the best interest of academic libraries to consider social capital development as a component of their outreach” (Ramsey 2016)