

Mixing it up: International graduate students' social interactions with American students.

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## **Mixing It Up: International Graduate Students' Social Interactions With American Students**

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### Abstract

The researcher surveyed 497 graduate international students at a research university regarding their social patterns because previous research indicates that they benefit from interactions with Americans. Students who socialized with Americans the most functioned comfortably in the American culture, socialized with students from other countries, and participated in campus cultural events.

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Each year almost half a million international students enroll in American colleges and universities (Davis, 2003). Many will spend several years on a campus working toward their degree. They typically arrive with clear academic goals, but they may not have considered what their social lives will be like. Will they establish friendships primarily with others from their home country? How often will they socialize with American students? Will personal characteristics, such as nationality or gender, influence whether they befriend Americans?

These questions are important for student affairs professionals to consider because research suggests that international students' social networks with American peers are related to important benefits. First, contact with American students positively influences international students' academic experiences. In one study, those who were involved in an 8-month program that paired them with host national students had higher grades and higher retention rates than those who were not involved in the program (Westwood &

Barker, 1990). Perrucci and Hu (1995) found a relationship between international graduate students' contact with American students and satisfaction with their academic program and academic appointment. Researchers have also demonstrated a link between establishing relationships with local people and international students' overall satisfaction with both their academic and nonacademic experiences abroad (Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Lulat & Altbach, 1985).

Conversely, several researchers have found that limited social contact with host nationals is related to feelings of anxiety, depression, and alienation (Chen, 1999; Hull, 1978; Schram & Lauver, 1988). These feelings may stem from frustration with being unable to establish cross-cultural friendships as well as from the isolation that can result when these friendships do not materialize.

Limited social contact with host nationals is also related to students' perceptions of the extent to which they have been able to adjust or fit into their new environment culturally and academically. In a qualitative study of African and Southeast Asian students at a Canadian university, Heikenheimo and Shute (1986) found that those who were isolated or had little contact with Canadians were more likely to face difficulty with cultural, academic, and social adjustment. Those who were not just isolated from Canadians, but also frustrated about their isolation, expressed even greater adjustment problems. Zimmerman (1995) also found

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Mixing it up: International graduate students' social interactions with American students, upon occurrence of resonance refinancing rate scales the intellect.

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