

## Appendix 8

# International Student Forum

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Primary Investigator: Daniel Silverstein, Intern for Campus Auxiliary Services

Secondary Investigator: Mark Romig, Student Worker for International Student and Scholar Services

The purpose of this forum was to help Campus Auxiliary Services (CAS) work with international students in order to streamline intercultural learning as well as needs-driven services. The results of this study will be presented to the executives of CAS and there will be a follow-up that takes place later in the semester.

### Summary by Topic

#### **Adjusting to Campus Life**

Students appreciated the orientation program and being on campus a week before other students arrived. However, they felt that the orientation and welcome week activities brought them closer to international students but not to American students. They felt “overwhelmed” upon the arrival of the domestic students, and felt largely forgotten or isolated. The students responded well to the suggestion of a summer ESL/cultural adjustment program before their first semester. Others would have preferred an online course to brief them on the basics of culture/language. The preparedness of students to thrive at Geneseo varies based on the previous education and experiences of the individual student.

The students all agreed the best way to meet and intermingle with the rest of the student body is through clubs and student organizations. Many are involved in cultural clubs related to their country (KASA, Japanese Culture Club, etc). These clubs put on events to share their culture but struggle to find participants, regardless if they are international or American students. They were extremely enthusiastic about a unified international programming committee. The students supported the idea of CAS featuring a country or region every month. They liked the fact that they could participate in the showcasing of their country and the variety of services CAS could offer during that time; such as special dining, educational activities, cultural events, etc.

The biggest hurdle international students faced in adjusting to campus life was that they felt American students have different priorities. For them, learning the culture and practicing English is just as important as or even more important than academic performance. They feel this is untrue of American students, and find it hard to socialize with them during class or in academic settings. This is why they feel more structured and planned programming would be beneficial, as opposed to the one “Multicultural Week” sponsored by Geneseo. While this programming would not be wholly organized by CAS, there is no doubt a need for CAS services to execute the events.

#### **Residence Life**

The students in the forum represented Wayne, Steuben, and Wyoming residence halls. Those who lived in Wayne, a hall less than half the size of Steuben, were satisfied with their living situation. The smaller size hall translated to a tighter-knit community of international and American students in Wayne. Wayne residents mentioned how everyone in their hall participates in hall activities and there is positive interaction between domestic and foreign students. On the other hand, residents from Steuben criticized the hall as outdated and not up to the standard of the other modern halls. The Steuben experience was marked by separation from all other students, to the point in which they had never said a word to their neighbors. One student in the forum admitted to not approaching his roommate until a “month into the semester”. When the RIT international village complex was suggested, the students rejected it. They approve of the small size of Geneseo (one reason they chose the school), and would prefer the tight-knit community feel. They also approved of the current system in which an American student is paired up with an international roommate.

Their concerns regarding the residence facilities stemmed from a lack of housing options. Many of them stay in the residence halls over breaks, and felt restricted to their dorm. They have explored the option of using a floor or part of another residence halls over break or the summer with the I.S.S.S. They would appreciate more options to make their living experience different between years. One student exclaimed that four years in Steuben Hall would be a “much different and worse” experience than four years in Putnam (Eco-House) Hall.

### **Student Employment**

Many of the students complained about the lack of availability of on-campus employment. The jobs at the library and other service desks are generally reserved for those students eligible for work study. A small portion of the students in the forum worked for CAS, and said their experience has been generally positive. However, they want more options than food preparation and cleaning jobs. When CPT/OPT (Curricular/Optional Practical Training) was brought up, many students said they would jump at the opportunity. Not only would this allow them to gain temporary employment authorization, it would give them work experience for their resume and allow them to build their English communication skills. This idea would need to be developed but can be granted by the institution. CAS could also stand to benefit from international workers who care about their work, rather than pursuing employment simply for authorization status, causing turnover issues.

The concern of not having the opportunity to practice their English skills in a work setting was prevalent among the upperclassmen. They want to pursue on-campus opportunities in which they can work on their communication for career development. A student mentioned she held the position of “desk attendant” at her old school. Instead of being a full R.A., she would sit at the service desk of a residence hall to address the concerns of students (loaning game equipment, providing supplies, etc.). This way, she was able to practice English and meet those in her residence community, while providing a needed service. This idea would also decrease the onus put on resident advisors on night and weekend duty.

### **Dining/Vending**

Nearly all of the students complained of the financial issues of affording a full meal plan. One student moved off-campus because “she did not want to pay for the meal plan”. Their perception

was that CAS overpriced everything, and they did not receive good value from dining and shopping with them (little portion, low quality). Many felt there was a large range in the quality of their food based on the person who prepares it. The students hoped to see international foods as staples on the menu, not just as featured items. They asked for Asian food to always be available. The students were split on the idea of contributing their cooking knowledge in a cultural event to CAS. Some were enthusiastic and said they would love to show the chefs how to make a certain dish, while others said they would not take the time to do so. They liked the day in which the food trucks came to visit Geneseo, to solve the problem of repetitive meals.

They echoed the previous ISSS survey, asking for meal-replacement items in the vending machines including ramen and sandwich packs. They were excited about the possibility of the Shop24 large vending machines, and agreed they would frequently buy products provided the price was reasonable. They asked for items such as laundry detergent and other household products that are not readily available on campus.

The students also spoke multiple times about the farmers market. They loved going (when the weather was nice) to get fresh produce to supplement their on-campus dining. They appreciate the healthier, fresher options offered at the farmers market. They approved of CAS possibly getting involved to bring these types of items in throughout the entire year. A possible arrangement between the suppliers and CAS could be explored.

### **Campus Store**

When the campus store was discussed, only two students had actually bought something from the store other than textbooks. They approved of the quality of the clothing, but did not see the health and beauty products as fairly priced. The students did not indicate they were extremely satisfied or unsatisfied with the textbook portion. Many take part in the rental program, and simply go the Amazon route when they feel the prices are too high at the store. They do not feel any obstacles in getting the academic resources they need to succeed from the bookstore. They were benevolent towards the ideas of virtual textbook libraries, stating most of them purchase the digital editions to save money. Again, as with the vending machines, they would like a convenient store to sell laundry supplies or other small items and toiletries.

### **Transportation**

A large portion of time was spent on discussing transportation issues for international students. Besides a trip offered by the ISSS to the DMV every semester, international students are left on their own to get around Geneseo and the surrounding area. They are encouraged by the administration to find rides with domestic students. However, without knowing many domestic students, this method is ineffective. This is particularly true on breaks, in which the international students admitted to feeling “stuck on campus”. Although international students use the shuttle bus frequently, this does not help for larger trips or service over winter break.

A student who transferred from SUNY Oswego mentioned the use of Zipcars, a car sharing and rental program. They offer full service to universities, in which students can reserve a car to use for a specified time. The service includes gas and insurance, and has been adopted at many universities including University of Rochester and SUNY Buffalo. The service arrangement would need to be looked into, but could be a promising opportunity to improve Geneseo’s

accessibility to the surrounding area. International students also come to travel and experience American life in different places, and would be attracted to a university who can cater to this need. Other universities have attested to the program's effectiveness, as well as a reduction in congestion and car usage, which is beneficial for the environment. The sustainability initiative plays a major part in Geneseo culture, and may make Zipcars something to research further.

Zipcar Website: <http://www.zipcar.com/universities/how>