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Ewa L. Urban¹ and Louann Bierlein Palmer¹

Abstract

This study used a cross-sectional survey to examine the perceptions of undergraduate and graduate international students enrolled at a public university in the Midwest, regarding international students' perspectives on how their university engages them as cultural resources, and how such engagement might impact students' perceptions of the value they receive from U.S. higher education. The data suggest that international students are not actively engaged as cultural resources although they would like to do more to help others learn about their countries and cultures. The level of desired engagement as a cultural resource was the highest among South and Central American students, and the lowest among European students. The study identifies multiple areas of opportunities for higher education to facilitate international students' active contributions to the university's strategic goal of global engagement and internationalization while also positively impacting the manner in which international students perceive their higher education experience.

Keywords

international students, internationalization, global engagement, value of higher education

International students have a growing presence within U.S. colleges and universities with nearly 765,000 international students in 2012 (Institute of International Education, 2012). Robust international student presence on campuses has the potential for the

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internationalization of the curriculum, the development of networks for future recruitment and international relations, as well as the establishment of global economic and diplomatic relationships (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). The recruitment of international students is one of the two major strategies—along with study-abroad programs—utilized by higher education institutions to internationalize campuses and prepare all students for the globalized workforce (Ho, Bulman-Fleming, & Mitchell, 2003).

Our study examined international students' perspectives on how their university engages them as cultural resources, and how such engagement might impact students' perceptions of the value they receive from U.S. higher education.

Problem Statement and Related Literature

The future economic growth of the United States is greatly dependent on international talent (Alberts, 2007). Historically, a significant number of U.S.-educated international students have contributed to a highly skilled U.S. workforce. Coming from at least 185 countries, international students are one of the most diverse groups on U.S. campuses in regard to nationality, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, religion, political loyalties, cultural norms, and behavioral patterns (Hanassab, 2006; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). Many international students choose the United States as their destination to pursue higher education because they consider this experience to be their life-long dream (Urban & Orbe, 2007). The decision to study in the United States is primarily driven by students' expectation to improve their future career opportunities and obtain experience that will eventually lead to employment either in the United States, their home countries, or internationally (Arthur, 2008; Hazen & Alberts, 2006). Professional motivations such as getting quality education, developing a better understanding of their fields of study, and gaining practical skills and experiences also prompt international students to study abroad (Urban, 2012). In addition to career-related reasons for studying in the United States, the desire to experience a new culture is a highly motivating factor for studying abroad (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). International education is expected to allow students to "experience new ways of thinking and acting in the field of study" (Obst & Forster, 2007, p. 15); get a broader, more flexible, and more practice-oriented education than offered in the home country; develop personally and become more independent, as well as build intercultural friendships and networks (Obst & Forster, 2007).

Although the United States is still perceived as a desirable study-abroad destination, particularly among middle-class international students (McMurtrie, 2011), U.S. higher education continues to experience growing competition from countries such as Great Britain and Australia as well as the sending countries, where economic and educational conditions have been improving (Alberts, 2007). In the context of the worldwide competition, stringent U.S. immigration regulations, and some students' experiences with hostility and discrimination, studying at U.S. colleges and universities might have become less attractive to international students (Lee & Rice, 2007). While some of the factors impacting student mobility such as national visa policies, job market, or currency fluctuations cannot be controlled by higher education, many

institutions are working toward facilitating international student growth through investments in recruitment and additional staff hired to develop international collaborations (McMurtrie, 2011).

Indeed, U.S. higher education institutions greatly benefit from international students' presence and their cultural, academic, and financial contributions (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002). Annually, international students contribute over \$20 billion to the U.S. economy, largely through their tuition and living expenses (Institute of International Education, 2012). The benefits of international students' presence extend far beyond the revenue they generate (Breuning, 2007). International diversity can enrich the learning experience and social interaction of domestic students who might not have opportunities to travel or live abroad (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; McMurtrie, 2011). Robust international student presence on campuses has the potential for the internationalization of the curriculum, the development of networks for future recruitment and international relations, as well as the establishment of global economic and diplomatic relationships (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). A diverse population of international students provides abundant opportunities for colleges and universities to meet their goals of internationalization and global engagement (e.g., Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1999). They can contribute to generating opportunities for global academic cooperation and international diplomatic relationships, while creating a pipeline of potential highly skilled immigrants (Alberts, 2007). Reciprocal cultural learning and the development of intercultural competencies are prerequisites for internationalizing and diversifying U.S. higher education and helping all students effectively function in increasingly globalized societies (Peterson et al., 1999). Meaningful engagement of international students in campus life is especially valuable for the numerous U.S. American students unable to take advantage of study-abroad experiences; for them, international students can be a source of opportunities for cross-cultural communication and the enhancement of international and intercultural skills (Geelhoed, Abe, & Talbot, 2003).

As a result, an increasing number of higher education institutions are including an international/intercultural/global component into their mission statements and strategic plans (Fischer, 2012), and internationalization "has become an indicator for quality in higher education" (de Wit, 2011, p. 39). One of the performance indicators often used for global engagement or internationalization is the number of international students enrolled at the institution (de Wit, 2011; Johnson, 2012). Yet, the mere presence of many international students on campuses does not equal internationalization; for international students to add to a university's mission of global engagement, they must be integrated with domestic students both inside and outside of the classroom through meaningful collaborations (de Wit, 2011).

Internationalization is defined as an ongoing "process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2004, p. 11). According to Knight (2004), higher education leaders internationalize their campuses for economic, political, academic, and sociocultural reasons. From the economic perspective, colleges and universities need to prepare students for careers in the global economy, generate income, and

increase competitiveness. Political rationales for internationalization include increasing students' intercultural skills to help them deal with foreign policy and national security concerns. Academically, students must expand their intercultural and international knowledge to function in a diverse world, understand the international dimension of their disciplines, and build critical thinking skills. The sociocultural aspect of internationalization involves developing intercultural communication skills that can help students embrace diversity (Knight, 2004).

Because as many as 90% to 95% of U.S. college students do not have any firsthand international experiences such as study abroad, it is crucial for higher education to systematically and actively facilitate international students' contribution to campus internationalization and find ways to engage their knowledge and experience as a teaching and learning strategy (Ho et al., 2003). International students on U.S. campuses can contribute their diverse perspectives by participating in class discussions, co-designing co-curricular programs, and developing relationships with U.S. students (Breuning, 2007). Through the exposure to different cultural values, languages, and practices, domestic students, faculty, and staff can deepen their knowledge of different cultures, challenge their stereotypical assumptions and biases about people from distinct backgrounds, and increase their cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity (Geelhoed et al., 2003). Clearly, higher education can provide opportunities for cross-cultural communication and the enhancement of international and intercultural skills of all students; nevertheless, institutional support is critical if substantial and meaningful interactions between domestic and international students are to occur (Grayson, 2008). All too often international and domestic students have little contact, which constitutes a significant barrier to internationalization (Ho et al., 2003).

To date, there has been significant research involving international students, and such research has greatly contributed to our knowledge of the rewards and struggles international students undergo during their sojourn in the United States and other destination countries, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Most previous studies have focused on international students' transition into higher education and related interpersonal and intrapersonal adjustment difficulties, as well as language, academic, and social challenges (e.g., Arthur, 2008; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Singaravelu & Pope, 2007). Some research addressed international students' expectations about higher education (e.g., Chow, 2011; Kingston & Forland, 2008; Sherry, Bhat, Beaver, & Ling, 2004), and various studies have examined international students' difficulties with acculturation to the U.S. educational system and culture (e.g., Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). Some researchers also investigated the importance of, and challenges with, gaining job search skills appropriate for the U.S. workplace and obtaining relevant professional experience (e.g., Spencer-Rodgers, 2000), while others explored the factors that impact international students' career decision making (e.g., Jachowicz, 2007; Shen & Herr, 2004).

One of the challenges consistently reported in extant research is international students' difficulty with their social integration, which ultimately affects their learning and perception of success. For instance, research conducted in Canada indicates that

international students report fewer sources of social and academic support than domestic students despite the fact that international students interact with new friends as frequently as domestic students do, and they are even more involved in campus activities than their host country peers (Grayson, 2008). Many international students in the U.S. wish to have more friends among domestic students; yet, forming these friendships is often challenging due to obstacles such as lack of English fluency, unfamiliarity with slang and idioms, unstated social expectations, and cultural differences (e.g., Breuning, 2007; Urban, Orbe, Tavares, & Alvarez, 2010). International students in the U.K. also express the need for social relationships with domestic students (Briguglio, 2000). Kashima and Loh (2006), whose study was conducted in Australia, asserted that international students' ties with their co-nationals, domestic peers, and other foreign-born students positively affect their cultural adjustment and increase their identification with their host university. Montgomery and McDowell's (2009) study conducted at a university in the United Kingdom revealed that international students tend to create strong international communities on their campuses, and these international friendships are instrumental in their academic learning and personal development. At the same time, these students' relationships with domestic students tend to be rather superficial and short-lived, and they do not contribute to the development of students' international perspectives.

Bartram (2007), whose studies took place in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands found that international students expected significant social support from university staff, including help with the development of social networks through formalized peer systems and social events and trips. However, university staff, particularly instructors, perceived such expectations as exceeding their roles and believed that students should be more self-reliant in regard to building their own social networks. Similarly, Hellsten (2002) asserted that international students participating in a study in Australia expected that their host institutions would take care of them, and that a cultural and social integration into the institution would occur much more quickly, consequently allowing the students to achieve their learning outcomes faster. Sherry et al.'s (2004) study conducted in New Zealand also revealed the gap between student expectations of institutional support and their actual experiences.

Very little research exists on the manner in which international students are engaged as a valued contributor to the internationalization of campus communities. For higher education institutions to become truly international or global, international students must be actively and meaningfully engaged in the internationalization of the university community. Therefore, it is crucial for colleges and universities to understand international students' perspectives on the value they expect and receive from their higher education experience to continue attracting talented international students.

To this end, our study examined how higher education institutions involve international students' experiences to achieve their strategic goal of global engagement, and how such engagement might impact international students' perception of the value of their U.S. higher education. For the purpose of this study, the terms internationalization and global engagement are used interchangeably, which is consistent with current literature (e.g., Bissonette & Woodin, 2013; Johnson, 2012). The university where the

study was conducted uses the phrase “global engagement” as a key strategic pillar and institutional goal to internationalize the institution. Specific research questions addressed in our study include the following:

1. From international students’ perspective, (a) how has their higher education institution involved them as cultural resources in support of a strategic goal of global engagement and (b) in what ways do international students want to be involved as cultural resources at their institution?
2. How does international students’ engagement as cultural resources vary by the length of time in the United States and students’ region of origin?
3. What is the relationship between the degree to which international students are engaged as cultural resources and the perceived value they receive from higher education?

Methodology

To examine how international students are—and would like to be—involved by their university in the achievement of institutional goal of global engagement, and how such involvement might impact international students’ perception of the value of studying in the U.S., a quantitative approach was utilized, where international students’ perceptions were collected through a cross-sectional survey (Creswell, 2008). This study was limited to a convenience sample of full-time bachelor, master, and doctoral international students at one Midwestern public university which had recently expressed its commitment to global engagement through its strategic plan. The target population for the study included 1,140 international students (567 undergraduate and 573 graduate), who were pursuing degrees at a university with an enrollment of approximately 24,000. International students account for 6.4% of the student body at this university. For the purpose of this study, international students were defined as individuals who were born outside of the United States and came to the U.S. to pursue higher education.

Data for the study were gathered through an online self-administered questionnaire developed for the purpose of this study on the basis of an extensive literature review, including findings in Breuning (2007), Chow (2011), Hellsten (2002), Ho et al. (2003), the National Survey of Student Engagement (2005), Obst and Forster (2007), Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002), Sherry et al. (2004), and Urban et al. (2010).

The survey instrument included Likert-type scale questions and open-ended questions (Creswell, 2008), and collected students’ perceptions on how their higher education institution has engaged them as cultural resources in support of a strategic goal of global engagement. The survey asked in what ways international students wanted to be engaged as cultural resources at their institution. For instance, students were asked to indicate how frequently they experience or would like to experience being asked to offer their unique cultural perspective on an issue during class discussions, being part of a multicultural group to work on a class project, having international perspectives integrated into classes, having U.S. students and professors ask them about their

countries and cultures, participating in cultural events, and being invited as a guest speaker or a language tutor. Students were also asked to report their perceptions on the personal and professional benefits of studying at a U.S. higher education institution. For instance, students were asked to report the extent to which their experience at the university has helped them develop work-related knowledge and skills, get practical experience, meet professionals in the field, learn to work effectively in a cross-cultural environment, learn about different cultural points of view, learn to adjust to new social and cultural customs, understand themselves better, become more independent, and build intercultural friendships. The survey was pilot-tested to enhance its content validity, and the full instrument can be found within (Urban, 2012).

Results

Respondents

Responses were obtained from 249 undergraduate and graduate international students attending a public university in the Midwest, representing 22% of the target population. More than a half of respondents were male (52.6%), 40.6% were female, and 0.8% were transgender. Graduate students constituted 53.8% of the sample, while undergraduate students constituted 41.7%. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 62, with the mean of 25.85 ($SD = 6.14$); more than half of the participants (64.5%) were between 18 and 26 years old. Respondents reported having been in the United States between 1 and 16 years, with the mean of 2.82 ($SD = 2.19$). Most students had been in the United States for 1 to 2 years (54%), followed by 3 to 4 years (27%), and 5 to 6 years (9%). Less than 3% of participants had been in the United States for 7 to 8 years, and only 1% had been in the United States for 7 to 8 years and 9 to 10 years. Respondents' length of time at this university ranged from 1 to 10 years, with the mean of 2.35 ($SD = 1.57$). Most students (86%) had been at the university between 1 and 4 years, 8% for 5 to 6 years, and only 1% for 7 to 8 and 9 to 10 years. All these students qualified for the study because they met the definition of an international student used in this research as a non-U.S. citizen who came to the United States to pursue educational goals, and they were defined as such by the institution.

The regions of origin reflected in the sample closely represent the regions from which the target population was drawn, with 20.1% of respondents coming from South and Central America, 19.7% from East Asia, 13.3% from South and Central Asia, 12.4% from the Middle East, 11.2% from Africa, 8.4% from Southeast Asia, 5.6% from Europe, and 1.2% from North America. Participants' areas of study included engineering (29.3%), business (18.9%), sciences (14.1%), education (11.6%), humanities (8.8%), social sciences (7.6%), fine arts (2.4%), and health care (1.2%).

Engagement as Cultural Resources

The first research question investigated how higher education involves international students as cultural resources (i.e., actually engaged) in support of a strategic goal of

Table 1. Rank Ordering of Students' Actual Engagement as Cultural Resources ($n = 241$).

Question: While at this university, how often have you experienced:	1	2	3	4	5	M (SD)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
U.S. students asked me about my culture	12 (4.8)	39 (15.7)	82 (32.9)	63 (25.3)	45 (18.1)	3.37 (1.11)
Professors asked me about my culture	26 (10.4)	62 (24.9)	81 (32.5)	44 (17.7)	28 (11.2)	2.94 (1.15)
International perspectives integrated into classes	27 (10.8)	54 (21.7)	95 (38.2)	38 (15.3)	27 (10.8)	2.93 (1.13)
Americans tried to learn about me and my culture	31 (12.4)	59 (23.7)	82 (32.9)	45 (18.1)	24 (9.6)	2.88 (1.15)
Was part of multicultural group for class project	63 (25.3)	32 (12.9)	74 (29.7)	49 (19.7)	21 (8.4)	2.72 (1.29)
Participated in cultural event to share about my culture	65 (26.1)	41 (16.5)	65 (26.1)	41 (16.5)	28 (11.2)	2.69 (1.34)
Was asked to offer cultural perspective in class	42 (16.9)	68 (27.3)	79 (31.7)	27 (10.8)	25 (10.0)	2.69 (1.19)
Was asked to be a language tutor	149 (59.8)	32 (12.9)	35 (14.1)	14 (5.6)	11 (4.4)	1.78 (1.16)
Was invited as guest speaker to share aspects of my culture	144 (57.8)	43 (17.3)	32 (12.9)	12 (4.8)	10 (4.0)	1.76 (1.11)

Note. Not all respondents responded to all items. Likert scale: *never* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *occasionally* = 3, *frequently* = 4, *very frequently* = 5.

global engagement, while also examining students' desired level for involvement as cultural resources at their university. Our results indicate that students are not being extensively engaged as cultural resources (see Table 1). For nine areas of possible *actual engagement*, on the scale from 1 to 5, only one area had a mean higher than 3, that of being asked by U.S. American students about the international students' country or culture ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.11$). The areas in which international students are the least involved as cultural resources include being invited as a guest speaker to share aspects of their culture ($M = 1.76$, $SD = 1.11$) and being asked to serve as a language tutor ($M = 1.78$, $SD = 1.16$).

When asked about the ways in which international students *would like to be engaged* as cultural resources at their institution, five of the nine areas were above the rating of 3, with the highest rated: having international perspectives integrated into classes ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.15$), having U.S. Americans try to get to know the students and learn about their culture ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.16$), and having U.S. American students ask questions about their culture ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.09$). Students expressed the least interest in being invited as a guest speaker to share aspects of their culture ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.37$). Table 2 provides a complete listing of responses.

Table 2. Rank Ordering of Students' Desired Engagement as Cultural Resources ($n = 241$).

Question: To what extent would you like to be involved in each of the following?	1	2	3	4	5	M (SD)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
International perspectives integrated into classes	13 (5.2)	31 (12.4)	60 (24.1)	70 (28.1)	54 (21.7)	3.53 (1.15)
Americans try to get to know me and my culture	15 (6.0)	25 (10.0)	70 (28.1)	61 (24.5)	54 (21.7)	3.51 (1.16)
American students ask questions about culture	11 (4.4)	27 (10.8)	82 (32.9)	62 (24.9)	47 (18.9)	3.47 (1.09)
Professors ask questions about my culture	15 (6.0)	32 (12.9)	71 (28.5)	61 (24.5)	50 (20.1)	3.43 (1.16)
Part of multicultural group to work on project	16 (6.4)	35 (14.1)	68 (27.3)	68 (27.3)	43 (17.3)	3.38 (1.15)
Participate in cultural event on campus	26 (10.4)	38 (15.3)	58 (23.3)	52 (20.9)	55 (22.1)	3.31 (1.31)
Offer my unique cultural perspective in class	25 (10.0)	38 (15.3)	73 (29.3)	53 (21.3)	40 (16.1)	3.20 (1.22)
Be asked to be a language tutor	51 (20.5)	39 (15.7)	43 (17.3)	52 (20.9)	44 (17.7)	3.00 (1.43)
Invited as guest speaker to share about culture	45 (18.1)	44 (17.7)	54 (21.7)	46 (18.5)	40 (16.1)	2.97 (1.37)

Note. Not all respondents responded to all items. Likert scale: *never* = 1, *rarely* = 2, *occasionally* = 3, *frequently* = 4, *very frequently* = 5.

To compare how international students are involved by their institution (i.e., actually engaged) to internationalize the campus with international students' level of desired engagement as a cultural resource, a paired-samples *t* test was performed. As Figure 1 illustrates, all means for the items in the category *desired engagement as a cultural resource* were higher than the means for items in the *actual engagement as a cultural resource* category. All the differences, with one exception (U.S. American students asked me questions about my country and culture) were statistically significant. This analysis revealed that students want to be engaged as cultural resources to a much greater extent than they are. Data suggest that the institution is not taking

DESIRED AND ACTUAL ENGAGEMENT AS CULTURAL RESOURCES	Desired Mean ↑	Actual Mean ↓	Mean Diff.
- International perspectives integrated into classes*	3.53	2.93	-.59*
- U.S. Americans try to get to know me and my culture*	3.51	2.89	-.61*
- Professors ask questions about my country and culture*	3.43	2.93	-.49*
- Part of a multicultural group to work on a class project*	3.38	2.73	-.64*
- Participate in cultural event to share info about my culture*	3.32	2.69	-.63*
- Asked to offer unique cultural perspective during class discussions*	3.20	2.69	-.51*
- Be asked to be a language tutor*	3.00	1.77	-1.22*
- Invited as a guest speaker to share aspects of my culture*	2.97	1.76	-1.20*
- U.S. American students ask questions about my country and culture	3.47	3.38	-.08

Figure 1. Relationship between desired and actual cultural engagement.

*Difference is significant at $p < .05$.

advantage of the opportunity to involve its international students as cultural resources to the extent they could, considering students' willingness to contribute their unique cultural experiences and perspectives.

To explore the data beyond the Likert scale responses, participants shared through an open-ended question the ways in which they were *actually engaged* in helping others learn about their culture. Nearly half of the comments noted that international students have been helping others to learn about their cultures through interpersonal relationships, including informal conversations about each other's cultures, history, politics, food, and social customs. The annual international festival was also a major opportunity for a quarter of respondents to share their cultural artifacts, knowledge, and experiences with the university and the surrounding community. As students' comments indicated, the festival allowed international students to actively engage their domestic and international peers, faculty, staff, and the community in reciprocal cultural learning.

Participating in student organizations allowed several students to organize or be involved in cultural events on campus. Some international students shared information about their cultures through class discussions and academic projects. On-campus employment was another venue through which participants were able to talk to others about their cultures while serving as resident assistants and organizing programs for domestic students, working in international student services office, or as orientation leaders. Some students expressed that they do not have opportunities to educate others about their culture.

Another open-ended question encouraged participants to comment on how they would *like to be engaged* as cultural resources on their campus. Students shared that

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for *Actual Engagement* as a Cultural Resource by Region ($n = 218$).

Region of origin	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
South and Central America	26.42	7.33	49
East Asia	24.17	6.59	47
Middle East	24.16	7.75	30
Southeast Asia	23.47	6.55	21
Europe	22.69	4.81	13
South and Central Asia	22.59	8.96	32
Africa	21.23	4.76	26

they would be interested in sharing information about their countries, cultures, history, food, customs, music, and cultural beliefs through interpersonal relationships and social gatherings. Participants believed that such interactions would allow for the exchange of perspectives and helping others understand and appreciate other cultures. Several participants shared that they would like to educate others about their backgrounds through cultural events. Some students would welcome opportunities to teach their native language or give lectures about the history of their countries. Other participants would like to increase others' intercultural awareness by sharing artifacts, showing relevant films or documentaries portraying the social and political reality of their countries through activities such as dance, drama, or art exhibits. Finally, a few students would like to be engaged in class discussions and academic projects where they would share information about cultural differences.

Differences in Cultural Engagement by Variables

The second research question asked how the issues associated with international students' engagement as cultural resources vary by demographic variables, including region of origin and the length of time at the university. New collapsed variables were created, and Cronbach's alpha was used to establish reliability and internal consistency of the responses within these variables. A one-way analysis of variance between subjects (ANOVA) was then performed to examine how international students' engagement as cultural resources varies by students' region of origin and years at the university.

Table 3 displays means and standard deviations for students' scores regarding their *actual engagement*. It appears that, on average, students from South and Central America are the most engaged as cultural resources ($M = 26.42$, $SD = 7.33$), followed by students from the East Asia ($M = 24.17$, $SD = 6.59$). Actual engagement was the lowest among students from South and Central Asia ($M = 22.59$, $SD = 8.96$), and Africa ($M = 21.23$, $SD = 4.76$). However, no statistically significant differences in students' actual level of cultural engagement were found by region of origin, $F(6, 211) = 1.94$, $p = .076$.

Table 4. Means and SD for *Desired Engagement* as a Cultural Resource by Region ($n = 207$).

Region of origin	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
South and Central America	34.20	6.86	45
Africa	31.00	8.81	26
South and Central Asia	30.93	8.58	31
Middle East	28.68	9.75	29
East Asia	28.31	9.24	45
Southeast Asia	27.72	7.13	18
Europe	25.92	9.10	13

In reference to any differences in the *desired engagement* as cultural resources between students coming from various regions of origin, Table 4 displays means and standard deviations for students' scores in each of the groups. Data suggest that, on average, students from South and Central America would like to be the most engaged as cultural resources ($M = 34.20$, $SD = 6.86$), followed by students from Africa ($M = 31.00$, $SD = 8.81$). Students from Southeast Asia ($M = 27.72$, $SD = 7.13$) and Europe ($M = 25.92$, $SD = 9.10$) would like to be engaged as cultural resources the least. At an alpha of .05, the analysis of variance revealed a statistically significant difference among the groups, $F(6, 200) = 2.68$, $p = .007$. Approximately 8.4% of variance in desired engagement as a cultural resource is accounted for by students' region of origin ($\eta^2 = .084$).

Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test demonstrated statistically significant differences between students from South and Central America, students from East Asia, and students from Europe. Data suggest that, on average, South and Central American students want to be engaged as cultural resources at a higher level than East Asian students (mean difference = 5.88), and European students (mean difference = 8.27).

In reference to the *length of time* students had been at the university, there were no statistically significant differences for either *desired or actual engagement* between students by years at the university.

Cultural Engagement and Perceived Value of Higher Education

The third research question asked about the relationship between the degree to which international students are engaged as cultural resources and the perceived value they receive from higher education. First, let us look at what these students noted about the value of their U.S. education.

Table 5 contains the rank ordering of students' perceptions of the value received from U.S. higher education. The top areas included getting quality education ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .82$), becoming more independent ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 1.11$), and learning new

Table 5. Rank Ordering of Students' Perceptions of the Value of U.S. Higher Education (n = 248).

Question: To what extent have you accomplished:	1	2	3	4	5	M (SD)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
Get a good-quality education	1 (0.4)	6 (2.4)	40 (16.1)	93 (37.3)	108 (43.4)	4.21 (0.82)
Become more independent	15 (6.0)	5 (2.0)	39 (15.7)	75 (30.1)	112 (45.0)	4.07 (1.11)
Learn new ways of thinking & acting in field	1 (0.4)	15 (6.0)	43 (17.3)	96 (38.6)	92 (36.9)	4.06 (0.90)
Think critically and analytically	3 (1.2)	15 (6.0)	41 (16.5)	102 (41.0)	84 (33.7)	4.02 (.93)
Learn to work in a cross-cultural environment	2 (0.8)	18 (7.2)	50 (20.1)	97 (39.0)	80 (32.1)	3.95 (0.94)
Build intercultural friendships	10 (4.0)	12 (4.8)	49 (19.7)	87 (34.9)	88 (35.3)	3.94 (1.05)
Get practice-oriented education	6 (2.4)	19 (7.6)	56 (22.5)	75 (30.1)	90 (36.1)	3.92 (1.05)
Improve English language skills	12 (4.8)	18 (7.2)	41 (16.5)	83 (33.3)	93 (37.3)	3.92 (1.12)
Learn about different cultural points of view	8 (3.2)	23 (9.2)	40 (16.1)	94 (37.8)	79 (31.7)	3.87 (1.07)
Develop work-related knowledge and skills	6 (2.5)	19 (7.6)	58 (23.3)	88 (35.3)	76 (30.5)	3.85 (1.02)
Speak clearly and effectively	4 (1.6)	19 (7.6)	58 (23.3)	98 (39.4)	68 (27.3)	3.84 (0.97)
Adjust to new social and cultural customs	12 (4.8)	14 (5.6)	55 (22.1)	88 (35.3)	77 (30.9)	3.83 (1.08)
Meet professionals in my field	6 (2.4)	27 (10.8)	59 (23.7)	81 (32.5)	73 (29.3)	3.76 (1.07)
Write clearly and effectively	3 (1.2)	25 (10.0)	58 (23.3)	103 (41.4)	58 (23.3)	3.76 (0.96)
Understand myself better	15 (6.0)	16 (6.4)	63 (25.3)	81 (32.5)	72 (28.9)	3.72 (1.13)
Get practical experience in my field of study	12 (4.8)	34 (13.7)	46 (18.5)	83 (33.3)	73 (29.3)	3.69 (1.17)

Note. Not all respondents responded to all items. Likert scale: *not at all helped* = 1, *helped to a little extent* = 2, *helped to a moderate extent* = 3, *helped to a great extent* = 4, *helped to a very great extent* = 5.

ways of thinking and acting in their field of study ($M = 4.6, SD = .90$). The lowest rated aspects of benefiting from U.S. higher education included learning to write clearly and effectively ($M = 3.76, SD = .96$), understanding oneself better ($M = 3.72, SD = 1.13$), and getting practical experience in their field of study ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.17$).

Using the data on how international students' U.S. education has helped them, we created three new collapsed variables focused on the *overall value* of their education, and then as broken down into *value related to professional outcomes*, and *value related to their personal outcomes*. Our data suggest that the degree of international students' engagement as cultural resources is related to students' perception of the value of their U.S. education. In fact, results of stepwise multiple regression revealed that 18% of variability in overall perceived value is accounted for by students' actual engagement as cultural resources.

Further analyses were conducted, through multiple regression, to identify which specific aspects within the category of actual engagement as a cultural resource impact how international students perceive the value of higher education. The three specific predictors within the actual cultural engagement category that explain the variability in the perceived *overall value* include (1) having international perspectives integrated into classes, (2) having U.S. Americans try to get to know international students and learn about their culture, and (3) being part of a multicultural group to work on a class project.

The next level of analysis included an examination of the impact of specific aspects of students' actual engagement as cultural resources on students' professional and personal outcomes. Results indicated that 11% of variability in international students' perceived *value related to professional outcomes* can be accounted for by two areas: (1) having professors ask questions about students' country and culture, and (2) having international perspectives integrated into classes. Similarly, the three specific predictors that explain 18% of variability in international students' perceived *value related to personal outcomes* include (1) having international perspectives integrated into classes, (2) having U.S. Americans try to get to know international students and learn about their culture, and (3) being part of a multicultural group to work on a class project.

Table 6 offers an overall summary of the items related to actual cultural engagement that are predictive of international students' perceived value of U.S. higher education and personal and professional outcomes, as well as the items that were not predictive of such outcomes.

Discussion

The presence of a diverse population of international students provides multiple opportunities for colleges and universities to meet their goals of internationalization and global engagement; however, our study reveals that higher education is not taking advantage of these opportunities, at least in the context of the university where the study took place. This is in line with previous research suggesting that international students are not engaged as cultural resources (Ho et al., 2003). Although there is a

Table 6. Predictors of Perceived Higher Education Value: Overall, Personal Outcomes, and Professional Outcomes.

Category	Items predictive of outcomes	Items not predictive of outcomes
Actual cultural engagement	International perspectives integrated into classes ^{a,b,c} Americans tried to get to know me and learn about my culture ^{a,c} Was part of multicultural group for class project ^{a,c} Professors asked me about my culture ^b	U.S. students asked me about my culture Participated in cultural event Was asked to offer cultural perspective in class Was asked to be a language tutor Was invited as guest speaker to share aspects of my culture

^aPredictors of perceived value of U.S. higher education.

^bPredictors of professional outcomes.

^cPredictors of personal outcomes.

significant numerical presence of international students at the university where the study took place (6.4% of the total enrollment), these students are not systematically involved by the institution to increase internationalization. Our data indicate that the international students in the study are not being actively engaged as cultural resources, and they would like to be engaged to a much greater extent. The only area where the current level of cultural engagement is relatively high includes having U.S. students ask about international students' countries and cultures. In open-ended comments, international participants indicated that their cultural involvement is mostly demonstrated through interpersonal relations, the annual international festival, and engagement in a student organization. To contribute to the development of intercultural competence and perspectives, domestic and international peers need to be engaged in meaningful interactions (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009).

While international participants in our study would like to have international perspectives integrated into classes as an expression of being valued as an international learner, they are not particularly interested in activities such as being a guest speaker to share aspects of their culture, serving as language tutors, and offering their unique cultural perspectives during class discussions. This might be related to some international students' reluctance to speak in front of others and contribute to discussions due to the fear of not being understood (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004; Kingston & Forland, 2008). Our findings might be explained by previous research indicating that international students, especially those coming from African countries, are often disappointed with the Eurocentric focus of the U.S. educational system (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005).

Our data suggested that international students would like to be engaged as cultural resources by having U.S. Americans try to get to know them and learn about their culture, and having U.S. students ask them questions about their culture. According to open-ended comments, most students would like to be engaged as cultural resources through interpersonal relationships and some through cultural events. The data from this study corroborate Breuning's (2007) findings that many international students

welcome opportunities to serve as cultural resources for U.S. peers, and are willing to answer questions about—and help others gain insight into—their cultures and countries, particularly through activities they organize themselves.

Our participants' desire to be engaged as cultural resources differs based on students' region of origin. For instance, students from South and Central America want to be engaged to a much greater extent than students from East Asia and European students. This might be related to the high level of campus involvement among South and Central American students at the university where the study took place. Most of the students from this region come from the Dominican Republic as a result of a partnership between the university and the Dominican government. As indicated in previous research, these students stress their distinctiveness as a closely knit, very social, and cohesive community that is proud to share their culture with U.S. Americans and other international members of the campus community (Urban et al., 2010). Students from this region were the first group on campus to receive the "community of the year award," which recognized their cultural and academic contributions. Such collective pride in their culture and the desire to strengthen it on this campus might be related to the finding that this group of students demonstrates a higher level of participation in reciprocal cultural learning.

In regard to cultural engagement, the strongest predictors of perceived value of higher education were having international perspectives integrated into classes, having U.S. Americans try to get to know the international students and learn about their cultures, and being part of a multicultural group to work on a class project. The perception of international students' achievement of their professional outcomes was related to having professors ask questions about students' countries and cultures and having international perspectives integrated into classes. According to our data, 11% of variability in professional outcomes can be accounted by these two areas. The perception of the achievement of personal outcomes was related to having international perspectives integrated into classes, U.S. Americans trying to get to know the international students and their cultures, and being part of a multicultural group to work on a class project. These findings enrich existing literature about international students' professional and personal expectations and outcomes (Constantine et al., 2005) by providing specific examples of the areas in which students benefit the most and the least as well as suggesting potential areas of students' experiences that can be impacted to increase their personal and professional gains.

Conclusions

In the context of increasing interest in creating globally engaged communities, higher education leaders should emphasize the value of the presence and diverse experiences of their learners, including international students, who are willing to actively contribute to institutional internationalization. As previous research suggests (e.g., Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Breuning, 2007; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Peterson et al., 1999), international students can significantly contribute to U.S. higher education, not only financially but also culturally in terms of helping campus communities to institutionalize internationalization while facilitating the development of intercultural competencies.

Our study offers some areas of potential interventions that can help higher education leaders systematically address some contextual factors and ultimately positively impact the learning outcomes of all students. As our data suggest, adopting a more systemic approach to campus internationalization can enhance international students' perception of the value of their U.S. educational experience. This can be done by integrating intercultural perspectives into classes, purposefully creating multicultural groups and teams for class projects, and encouraging U.S. American students to get to know their international peers and learn about their countries and cultures. According to our data, these three areas of cultural engagement accounted for 18% of variability in perceived value. Part of the integration of intercultural values and perspectives into curricula might involve having professors appropriately ask all students about their unique cultural experiences and perspectives on the topic, and consequently help expand all students' knowledge about the field of study from multiple viewpoints and international perspectives.

A very important aspect of engaging international students as cultural resources is creating an environment where domestic and international students have abundant opportunities for interactions and feel comfortable sharing information about their respective backgrounds. Campus-wide cultural events are valuable; however, it is important to make such opportunities meaningful to all potential participants, not only those who might already have an interest in—or a connection to—multiple cultures. Reciprocal cultural learning is undoubtedly beneficial for both international and domestic students, but for such learning to take place, meaningful cross-cultural interactions need to be encouraged and supported by higher education institutions. Because cultural learning happens mostly through interpersonal relationships, as indicated through 42.5% of participants' comments, higher education institutions should seek multiple ways of facilitating meaningful interactions among domestic and international students. Although cross-cultural interactions occur mostly at the personal and informal level, the institutional level is the most crucial in creating the structures to facilitate increased interactions between international and domestic students. For instance, universities can facilitate the creation of curricular and co-curricular opportunities for cross-cultural interactions to encourage contact among students from different backgrounds, and provide opportunities to create friendships and interact with others with differing perspectives and experiences. According to our data 47.4% of respondents wanted to be engaged as cultural resources through interpersonal relationships.

Such changes can positively affect international students' perceptions of U.S. higher education and increase their professional and personal outcomes. Ultimately, meaningful engagement of international students as equal partners in the internationalization of U.S. campuses can contribute to the recruitment and retention of international talent to positively impact institutional internationalization efforts.

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