Ensuring Well-Being Education for International Students: A Life Skills Course

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Getting into the mindset of a new international student:

Form groups of 2-3
Identify partner(s) A & B
Establishing empathy

International students experience disproportionate rates of behavioural health difficulties

Anxiety  Drug misuse
Depression  Sexual health

(Holguin, 2011; Sa, Seo, Nelson, & Lohmann, 2013, Metusela et al., 2017)
Fraser International College

- International pathway program
- Partnered with Simon Fraser University
- Unceded Coast Salish Territories in Burnaby, BC, Canada
Integrated Learning Skills (ILS)
# ILS: Structure

- 1st semester, 1st year
- Mandatory
- Free*  
- Pass/Fail
- 2 hours once a week
- 10 weeks

- Interactive group work
- Socially focused
- Few assignments
- Relaxed environment
- Facilitation style
- Non-academic
Curriculum

1. Introduction
   - Icebreakers, academic standards

2-3. Extended Orientation
   - Getting to know the campus, resources, how to get involved

4-7. Wellness
   - How to take care of yourself

8-9. Intercultural communication
   - How to work with folks that think differently

10. Exam
   - 2-stage, group-focused exam
Curriculum: Extended Orientation
Weeks 2-3

- IT Basics
- Scam & Fraud Prevention
- UNI life scenarios
- Campus tour
- Meet FIC community members
- How to volunteer
- Group activities
Curriculum: Wellness
Weeks 4-7

- Consent, Sexual Violence Prevention, Healthy Relationships
- Safer sex, LGBTQ+101 & Allyship
- Mental Health
- Drug & Alcohol Prevention
- Housing
- Healthcare
- Nutrition
Curriculum: Intercultural Communication
Weeks 8-9

- Basics of intercultural communication
- Exploring culture, stereotyping, assumptions, media representation
- Placed in intercultural groups
- Group presentation based on learning from their classmates about their experiences
Assignments

- Self-guided resource-focused interactive campus tour
- Writing an email to instructors
- Campus engagement field trip
- Intercultural communication presentation
- Adapted 2-stage exam
Curriculum Creation

- **Theory**
  - IMB Model

- **Wellness Office**
  - Consultation with school counsellors

- **Advising**
  - Identifying key student concerns

- **Students**
  - Reflective exams & evaluations

- **Evaluation & Reflection**
Instructor Recruitment

Characteristics

- Relatable
- Flexible
- Connects with students
- Open-minded
- Comfortable with sexual health
- Askable adult

Instructors

- FIC Alum
- Semi-retired EAL teacher
- Young computing science instructor
- High school inclusion & diversity teacher
- Sexual health educator
Instructor Training

Train the Trainer
Sexual health training, mental health first aid, FIC program updates, drug & alcohol updates, etc.

Email
Weekly emails with updates, schedules, correspondence from school, addressing current issues.

Pro-D
Workshops such as supporting sexual violence survivors in the classroom, creating gender inclusive classrooms.

Resources
Extended training materials available for wellness topics (videos, websites, etc.)
Overall, did you enjoy taking ILS?

- Definitely: 77.8%
- Somewhat: 22.2%
Student Experience

Did you make any friends in your ILS class?

- 75.8%: More than 1
- 17.2%: 1
- 7.1%: None at all

Results from Fall 2019 Student Experience Survey
Student Experience

Results from Fall 2019 Student Experience Survey

Which topic was the most helpful?

- Getting to know FIC/SFU: 24.2%
- Volunteering: 20.2%
- Sexual Health: 14.1%
- Mental Health: 11.1%
- Nutrition: 20.2%
- Drugs & Alcohol: 17.2%
- Housing: 11.1%
- Healthcare: 14.1%
- Intercultural communication: 11.1%
School Benefits

- Higher numbers of students accessing resources
- More social support amongst students
- Guaranteed path of communication from school to students
- Higher number of students volunteer
- Academic instructors can spend less time teaching students how to be students and more time on their subject
- Cohort-style has proven results: .25% increase in GPA, reduction in academic misconduct
Funding

- Course leads to higher retention rates
- Cost of attrition is higher than cost of course
- International students are premium fee paying students.
  What are we providing that justifies this fee?
- Ethics of internationalization
Application to various educational contexts

Lessons learned

Adapt to student needs
Be prepared to change the course each semester

Work closely with campus partners
Create opportunities to practice connecting with campus resources

Bridge with partner institutions
Build relationships for instructors, admin and students

Set realistic goals
You will never be able to fit everything a first year international students needs to know into 1 course.

Go light
Students are stressed. Create a course and classroom that rejuvenates and empowers.

Hire a sexual health educator
The only thing worse than no sexual health education is bad sexual health education.
Application to various educational contexts
Possibilities

- Wellness workshops
- Combine with basic academic skills
- Offer mandatory online modules
- Offer optional course within residence or international support services
- Mandatory stamp card of workshops
Thanks!

Questions?
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