

Orientation Course and Cultural Adjustment Cycle: An Orientation Course for First-Year Chinese International College Students and Its Impact on Their Ways of Coping with Stress, Anger Expression, and Psychological Well-being

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to introduce a semester-long orientation course for first-year international students and evaluate the impact of this course in helping Chinese international students improve their psychological well-being. The participants were 53 Chinese international students from the orientation course who were in their first year in the U.S. The results suggest that the orientation course had a positive impact and contributed to better interaction with Americans and better functional adjustment, as well as the use of more appropriate ways of coping with stress and expressing anger, thus leading to greater psychological well-being for the international students.

Introduction

It has been documented that the number of international students increased about 7.0% over the previous year to 623,805 international students in the United States in 2007/08 (Institute of International Education, 2009). For many international students who come to the United States seeking a better education and greater opportunity and who, simultaneously, need to adapt to the new culture, as well as a new educational and social environment, the transition to college life can be very stressful. Research results have shown that acculturation stress often has negative impacts on international students' psychological well-being, such as anxiety, confusion, or depression (Choi, 1997; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Lin & Yi, 1997), and on their academic performance (Parr, Bradley & Bingi, 1992; Yang & Clum, 1994).

Among the international student population, India, China, South Korea, Japan, Canada, and Taiwan were listed as the top six places from which international students originate (Institute of International Education, 2009), and Asians comprised a majority among the international student population. Due to the greater differences in language, religion, and value systems among Asians and Americans (Chan & Leong, 1994), there is a greater gap between the Asian and American cultures than between those of the Europeans and Americans. As a consequence, Asian students have shown more acculturation stress than European students (Parr et al., 1992; Yang & Clum, 1994).

Acculturation can be very demanding; it is a long-term process (Berry, 2005), and acculturation stress would be most prominent immediately upon arrival (Ying, 2005). However, to our knowledge, many U.S. institutions offer only a short-term basic international students' orientation program in response to these students' needs. Even though many institutions have provided a freshman seminar course for traditional college freshmen, the specific needs of international students, and especially those of Asian students, may not be fully addressed by the existing curriculum. Furthermore, there is no up-to-date grounded theory about international student development that can be used as a framework for developing programs for international students, and little research has been focused on examining the effectiveness of existing international orientation programs.

To overcome these limitations, we explored the international students' adjustment cycle on the basis of Chickering's student development theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and the

cultural adjustment cycle (Rhinesmith, 1985) through our literature review. Using that framework, we then developed and conducted a semester-long orientation course for the newcomers from overseas. Our main purpose in conducting this study was to test the effectiveness of this program in contributing to the students' psychological well-being.

Literature Review

International students face biological, cognitive, and social changes during their college years as American college students do; however, international students face the additional challenge of leaving their own countries behind and experiencing acculturation into a new country and culture. Acculturation takes place when an individual encounters and adjusts to a different culture (Berry, 2003). It can be divided into eight stages: application anxiety, arrival fascination, initial cultural shock, surface adjustment, mental isolation, integration/acceptance, return of anxiety, and shock/reintegration. During this adjustment cycle, international students move from anxiety to excitement when they are new arrivals; from culture shock to surface adjustment when they have settled down physically and are able to communicate basic ideas with Americans; from mental isolation to integration when they feel more at ease in their school setting, social surroundings, and language communication; and finally, from return of anxiety to reintegration when they move back to their home countries and are able to integrate both cultures into a new perspective (Rhinesmith, 1985).

While working on their acculturation adjustment, international students are also expected to develop fully in their tasks as college students, for example, to: (a) develop intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competencies; (b) manage emotions through appropriate ways of coping; (c) move from autonomy toward interdependence; (d) develop mature interpersonal relationships and be able to tolerate the differences of others; (e) establish identity and build up self-confidence; (f) find their purpose; and (g) develop integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

In the following, we have relied on Rhinesmith (1985) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) to develop an international students' college adjustment model. In each cycle, we have identified issues and tasks the international students would face and complete during their acculturation process.

International Students' College Adjustment Cycle

Cycle 1: from culture shock to surface adjustment. There are two stages in this cycle: culture shock and surface adjustment. When international students enter a new culture, they experience cultural shock (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). They not only feel confused and disoriented (Rhinesmith, 1985) but also face many acculturation stressors - physical, social, cultural, and functional (Berry, 2005; Ying & Han, 2006). Physical stressors include a different climate and unfamiliar settings (Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Ying, 2005). Social stressors include feeling homesick and isolated (Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Ying, 2005). Cultural stressors involve being unfamiliar with the new culture (Ying, 2005), and functional stressors include cultural and language barriers, as well as life style changes (Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Ying, 2005). Many scholars have found that international students who experience more stressors will be more vulnerable to suffering from depression (Berry, 2005; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Wei, Heppner, Mallen, Ku, Liao, & Wu, 2007). This is one of the major concerns for newly arriving international students that educators should be aware of. Fortunately, once the international students start to develop their physical, intelligential, and interpersonal competencies (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), they are able to adjust to the time difference and develop new eating habits. Language improvement at this point enables them to

engage in basic communication and interaction with others. They are entering the stage of surface adjustment (Rhinesmith, 1985).

Cycle 2: from mental isolation to acceptance. This cycle includes four stages: mental isolation, managing emotional control, development from autonomy to interdependence, and developing mature interpersonal relationships. According to Rhinesmith (1985), the mental isolation stage arises when international students have a desire for the deeper experiences, greater language proficiency, and better academic performance, which they experienced many times back home. However, the discrepancy between their current level of language facility and the desired level might lead to feelings of inner conflict, which usually causes mental isolation.

This communication discrepancy experienced by international students might be explained as a personal-enacted identity gap which is caused by the difference between one's own view of self and the expressed self due to language and culture barriers (Jung & Hecht, 2004). It has been found that this gap can significantly predict depression levels (Jung et al., 2007; Spencer-Oatley & Xiong, 2006). Another reason for international students' not feeling comfortable about expressing themselves fully could be their perception of discrimination from Americans. This, in turn, would make them tend to avoid communicating with Americans and might lead to feelings of depression (Jung et al., 2007). Conversely, with greater social support and language ability, they would handle discrimination in better ways and would experience less acculturation stress (Lee et al., 2004; Poyraid, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). It seems apparent that, when helping international students at this stage, it is essential to focus on enabling them to build up self-confidence by learning communication and social skills, as well as fostering cultural awareness about the United States by providing opportunities for them to interact with Americans. Completion of these tasks might reduce their personal-enacted identity gap and anxiety when interacting with Americans (Jung et al., 2007).

For the development of mature interpersonal relationships, the ability to manage emotion is essential (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The central development for young college students is related to identity and autonomy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968), and as we have mentioned previously, feelings of frustration that international students have encountered in regard to the identity gap might be intertwined with maladaptive anger regulation and depressive symptoms. Therefore, the main task during the stage when the students are learning to manage emotional control is to familiarize them with appropriate ways of coping and managing their emotions through increased awareness and integration of their feelings, which will allow them to be flexible in controlling and expressing their emotions. This would help to enhance their psychological well-being (Galaif, Sussman, Chou, & Wills, 2003; Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996; Wills & Cleary, 1995).

Coping can be broadly described as the whole acculturation process or can be specifically described as the cognitive and behavioral strategies that international students use to manage each external and internal demand during their adjustment procedure. It should be understood as management, and its quality can only be judged in relation to the adjustable results in a specific situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988b; Kosic, 2004). In general, coping strategies can be divided into problem-focused strategies, which directly manage the problem-solving aspect, and emotion-focused strategies, which directly manage reduction of the emotional distress level caused by the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Folkman and Lazarus (1988b) further proposed eight kinds of ways of coping based on individuals' efforts in either facing and seeking support to solve the problem or avoiding the issue, including: confrontative, distancing, self-

controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, planful problem solving, and positive reappraisal coping strategies

Studies have found that use of adaptive mechanisms such as problem-focused strategies (Holahan et al., 1996) and seeking social support (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992) can lead to positive adaptation to a problematic situation, while use of maladaptive mechanisms such as avoidance (Wills & Cleary, 1995) and anger coping strategies (Galaif et al., 2003) would increase the risk for depression and perceived stress. Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) confirmed that social support was a powerful coping resource for individuals under acculturation stress. In other studies, international students with social support were significantly less likely to report symptoms of depression (Lee et al., 2004) and to utilize anger coping strategies, and experienced less stress over time (Galaif et al., 2003; Wills & Hirky, 1996) than those with low levels of social support. Furthermore, students' higher levels of using positive reappraisal strategies have shown a strong positive correlation with their academic achievement (Chang, 1998).

Although anger is a common emotion that is expressed throughout the life span to cope with stress, studies have found that different ways of expressing anger may have different effects on individuals' psychological well-being. Based on whether individuals express or control outward or inward anger emotion, anger expression can be divided into four types: anger expression-out, anger expression-in, anger control-out, and anger control-in (Spielberger, 1999b). Among these types, Freud (1957) was the first to identify redirected anger at oneself as a cause of feelings of depression. Similarly, many theories also suggest that individuals' feeling anger internally and not expressing it outwardly (Blatt, 2004, Gross, 1999) or using anger control-out excessively (Spielberger, 1999b) may be associated with depressive symptoms.

Special attention has been given to the study of cultural differences among Asians and Americans with regard to anger expression. Studies have found that Asian families have different practices when it comes to expressing anger. When compared with Americans, Asians are more likely to be encouraged not to express their emotions openly (Lin & Wang, 1995), to inhibit aggressive behavior (Ho, 1986; Ho & Kang, 1984), and to adapt to their environment rather than to seek outward change (Aubert, Daigle & Daigle, 2004; Lee & Kleinman, 2000). This attitude might, in turn, make Asian international students more vulnerable in terms of their psychological well-being than students from other cultures.

Such cultural tendencies would require international students, especially Asian students, to learn new coping strategies in order to respond to the American culture and environment (Taft, 1977). Since being able to use positive coping strategies in managing emotions and coping with stress is essential for building mature interpersonal relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), when international students start to establish emotional and instrumental autonomy, they are entering the developmental stage of autonomy to interdependence. The ultimate goals of this stage are that the international students will regain their self-confidence, be able to make decisions on their own, put their goals into action, be willing to take responsibility for their actions, and be able to move toward interdependent relationships with others.

Furthermore, as Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory predicts, once international students improve their capacity for communication in English and achieve more familiarity with the American culture, they will come to feel increased tolerance for, and acceptance of, the differences between their own culture and the new culture. As a result, they will have an increased capacity for mature and intimate relationships. Then, they will be able to complete Chickering's task of developing mature interpersonal relationships.

Cycle 3: from dilemma to integrity. In this cycle, the international students have settled in well and started to work on three more of Chickering's tasks: establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. In the stage of establishing identity, the international students carefully examine themselves and the new society in which they are living. They are away from their old identity and facing the dilemma of establishing a new identity. Yin and Han (2006) apply Piaget's concept of cognitive concept to the acculturation process. They explain that when international students encounter acculturation stressors and experience cognitive disequilibrium, they will restore their equilibrium by using assimilation and accommodation strategies. Berry (1997) further expanded Piaget's concept into four modes of acculturation to specify an international students' adjustment model according to whether the students accept or reject the old and new cultures. The modes are: biculturalism, assimilation, separation, and marginality. International students with a bicultural mode have high identification with both new and original cultures. With the assimilation mode, they have high identification with the new culture but low identification with the original culture, while with the separation mode they have low identification with the new culture and high identification with their original culture. With the marginality mode, they have refused to allow either culture to be part of their identity (Wade & Tavris, 2006). International students with separation and marginality modes experienced more acculturative stress and adjustment problems than those in a bicultural acculturation mode (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Other studies also found that international students who had a higher degree of acculturation to the U.S. reported fewer symptoms of psychological distress (Huang & Ting, 2008; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Consequently, it is important during this stage to help international students become familiar with the new culture and recognize their learning and growth from their new experiences. Eventually, they come to accept themselves with a new identity and become more fully integrated with their surroundings.

Once the international students have established their identity, they enter the stage of developing a purpose. At this stage, international students begin to clarify their interests, their educational and career options, and their life style preferences and to search for the meaning of life. Such a search for meaning has been found to be associated with positive mental health outcomes (Shek, 1993; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992) and to make a strong positive contribution in the prediction of positive effect in acculturation (Pan, Wong, Chan, & Joubert, 2008). Along with these findings, Pan et al. (2008) suggested that two ways to improve the positive effect of international students would be to help them decrease acculturative stress from the host country and to help them develop a sense of the meaning of life from various sources.

The final stage of the international students' college adjustment cycle is developing integrity. In this stage, the students develop a capacity for integration of both overseas and original experiences and cultures, and their recent and past learning experiences. They experience a new level of maturity, and of insight into oneself and the world. They are able to actively contribute their useful resources to the society.

Overview of the Present Study

While there are many cross-cultural training programs available that provide some useful stress management techniques to prepare students for study abroad (Albert, 1986; Ptak, Cooper & Brislin, 1995), no recent program or research has provided a framework for helping international students during their cultural adaptation in the United States. Since Asians, a large proportion of whom are Chinese, comprise a majority among the international student population (Institute of International Education, 2009) and face greater cultural differences with the host culture than European international students (Chan & Leong, 1994), and because the great

preponderance of the international students who would be attending the orientation course during this research period were Chinese, in order to fulfill the students' needs, we developed an orientation curriculum that took into consideration the cultural nature of Chinese international students. For this reason, from this point forward, we will use the term "Chinese international students" when referring to the participants of this study to avoid misrepresentation and overgeneralization of the results. However, we will still use the terms "international students" and "Asian international students" as appropriate when referencing previous research studies to keep a broader perspective in the literature review.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, based on an international students' college adjustment cycle, a semester-long orientation course was developed to help first-year Chinese international students make a successful cultural and academic transition and adjustment. Second, the effectiveness of this teaching model of an orientation course was evaluated to see whether the orientation course would help the first-year Chinese students improve their affiliations with Americans and their functional adjustment in both living and studying in the U.S., and whether this course would influence their ways of coping with stress and expressing anger, thus increasing their psychological well-being.

The hypotheses of this study were that the orientation course would help the first-year Chinese students improve their affiliations with Americans and their functional adjustment in both living and studying in the U.S., and that, at the same time, this course would influence their ways of coping with stress and expressing anger, thus increasing their psychological well-being.

Method

Participants

The participants were 53 Chinese international students at a mid-western university in the 2007-2008 school year, who were in their first year in the U.S., and who were taking the orientation course as a requirement. The sample consisted of 22 (41.5%) males and 31 (58.5%) females. The majority of them (88.7%) were majoring in business, 7.5% were majoring in social sciences, and 3.8% of them were majoring in art and human sciences. The sample as a whole was relatively young ($M = 19.92$, $SD = 2.82$).

Assessment Instruments

Affiliation with others. This was measured by two items: "To what extent have you formed relationships with Americans?" and "To what extent have you formed relationships with students from your home country?" These two questions were adapted from Ying and Han's (2006) Affiliation with Taiwanese and Americans questionnaire with minor changes. The validity of those original items was supported by Ying and Han's research findings. The students were asked to circle one response: "not at all (1)," "a little bit (2)," "somewhat (3)," "quite a bit (4)," or "very much (5)."

Functional adjustment. This was measured by two items: "How well are you adjusting to living in the USA?" and "How well are you adjusting to studying in the USA?" These two questions were adapted from Ying and Han's (2006)'s Functional Adjustment questionnaire with minor changes. The internal reliability for the original items was .81. The students were asked to circle one response: "not well at all (1)," "a little bit (2)," "somewhat well (3)," "well (4)," or "very well (5)."

Coping with stress. The Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ) (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988a) was used to assess coping strategies. The questionnaire consists of eight subscales designed to distinguish eight ways of approaching stressful situations: (1) confrontive coping refers to aggressive efforts to alter the situation (6 items); (2) distancing refers to cognitive

efforts to detach oneself or to minimize the importance of the situation (6 items); (3) self-controlling refers to making efforts to regulate feelings and actions (7 items); (4) seeking social support refers to making efforts to seek information and emotional support (6 items); (5) accepting responsibility refers to acknowledging their own role in the problem and trying to put things right (4 items); (6) escape-avoidance refers to trying to escape or avoid the problem (8 items); (7) planful problem solving refers to making efforts to use an analytic approach to solving the problem (6 items); and (8) positive reappraisal refers to making efforts to create positive meaning by focusing on personal growth (7 items). Ratings are made on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “does not apply or not used” (0) to “used a great deal” (3). The WCQ has excellent face validity based on evidence that the coping strategies described are those individuals have used when facing a stressful situation. The WCQ also has good construct validity as Folkman and Lazarus found the results consistent with theoretical predictions on coping which indicated that coping is a process and should include both problem and emotional focus. In internal consistency reliability, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the eight scales ranged from distancing (.61) to positive reappraisal (.79), and although these seem low when compared with the traditional acceptance range, they are still higher than the alphas of most other measurements of the coping process (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988b).

Anger expression. *The Anger Expression and Anger Control scale of the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2)* (Spielberger, 1999a) was used to rate how often examinees generally reacted or behaved in certain ways when they felt angry or furious. Four subscales of this scale have been defined: (a) “anger expression-out” refers to outward expression of anger toward others (8 items); (b) “anger expression-in” refers to suppressing feelings of anger (8 items); (c) “anger control-out” refers to controlling the outward expression of anger (8 items); (d) “anger control-in” refers to being able to calm down and reduce anger soon after being angered (8 items). Ratings are made on 4-point Likert scale from “almost never” (1) to “almost always” (4). The alpha coefficients for the four subscales range from .74 to .95 and have been validated against other anger and hostility related self-report measurements (Spielberger, 1999b).

Depression. *The Clinical Assessment of Depression (CAD)* (Bracken & Howell, 2004a) was used as a measure of depressive symptoms. The CAD is a 50-item self-report inventory with a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (4). The CAD has four symptom scales: (a) Depression Mood, related to feelings of extreme unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, and a discouraged outlook on life (23 items); (b) Anxiety/Worry, reflecting increasing anxiety, worry, and fear (11 items); (c) Diminished Interest, reflecting loss of interest in activities that previously were enjoyable pursuits for the respondent (6 items); and (d) Cognitive and Physical Fatigue, addressing somatic issues related to fatigue and a lack of the mental or physical clarity needed to complete tasks (10 items). The conceptual framework for the development of the CAD has been well documented. The CAD is internally consistent with alpha coefficients ranging from .78 to .97 for the subscales (Bracken & Howell, 2004b).

Research Design

This study used a one group pre-test and post-test design. All new international students in the institution where this study was conducted were required to attend the orientation class in their first semester. Because the international student population at this relatively small university was almost entirely Chinese, the orientation course was designed as a semester-long course for new Chinese international students based on the international students' college adjustment cycle. The class met once per week for one hour, for a total of fifteen sessions. It was

conducted by the first author of this study, a woman who used to be a Chinese international student herself and has experienced the acculturation process first hand. She has an educational background in counseling, as well as many years of teaching and counseling experience with Chinese international students. Thus, she is aware of the struggle and issues students might encounter during their adjustment in the United States.

The objectives of the course are designed to help Chinese international students make a successful cultural and academic transition and adjustment.

Part 1: helping international students move from culture shock to surface adjustment. The objectives of the course design in this part focus on the issues arising in the first adjustment cycle, and they include helping students become familiar with their surroundings and enabling restoration of their competencies. The following sessions were designed to fulfill these objectives.

Session 1: where am I? This session is set up in a one day formal orientation style with the purpose of assisting Chinese international students in becoming familiar with the institution and community environment, as well as with immigration issues. First, several speakers from international student services, the registration office, housing, student life, etc. were invited to give a welcoming address, and to introduce the rules and regulations of student life on campus, as well as immigration issues. Then a students' panel was conducted to give former or more experienced Chinese international students a chance to share their experiences with culture shock and adjustment. Students were then divided into small groups facilitated by the panel presenters for deeper discussion. This session closed with a tour of the campus and community. The former and experienced Chinese international students were invited to join the tour to show the new students their favorite spots on campus or in the community.

Session 2: getting to know each other. Starting with this session, the class met in a regular classroom setting. The purpose of this session is to assist group members to get to know each other and increase group coherence. The class started with dividing students into two groups by even and odd numbers. Students with odd numbers made an inner circle, and students with even numbers made an outer circle. The two circles faced each other, with opposing people becoming a pair. The instructor then assigned a topic for each pair of students to talk about for one or two minutes. Once they had finished, the students in the outer circle moved to another position to switch partners for another topic. The sample topics for this activity included: (1) Introduce yourself by name and share your American dream; (2) Share your first impression of this institution and this country; (3) Share the most exciting moment and the most difficult moment you have had in the United States; (4) Share your best wish for yourself in the United States; (5) Share the thing you miss the most about your country; (6) Share your goal for the future.

The instructor made an assignment of "observing the U.S. culture" for homework. The students were encouraged to observe the U.S. culture and write down their impressions and experiences of shock.

Session 3: who are they? The purpose of this session is to assist Chinese international students to understand the U.S. culture. Several American students were also invited to join the class. The Chinese international students first presented their observations and culture shock experiences. Then the American students introduced the U.S. culture and answered questions. Finally, the two groups of students joined together for more detailed discussion. The assignment for the next session was "finding resources on campus." Each student was required to visit and interview one staff member of a particular setting on campus.

Part 2: helping international students move from mental isolation to acceptance.

The objectives of the course design in this part focus on issues raised in the second adjustment cycle, and they include helping students recognize available resources on campus and in the community, learning communication skills, and building up their capacity for interdependent relationships with others. The following class sessions in this part were designed to fulfill these objectives.

Session 4: where can I get help? The purpose of this session is to assist Chinese international students to be aware of available resources on campus. First, the students were asked to list some difficulties they had encountered during the first few weeks in the new environment. The students took turns acting out problems, and the other students used the information they had acquired through the assignment from the previous week to provide assistance. After the role-play practice, the students were asked to present information about the sites they had visited.

Session 5: how to survive in the classroom? The purpose of this session is to assist Chinese international students to make a better adjustment in the classroom setting. Several former Chinese international students were invited to join the class. The session started with a lecture introducing reading skills, listening skills, note-taking skills, and how to study and prepare for tests. Then the former Chinese international students shared their experiences of using these skills in the classroom. Finally, the students were given a short article and asked to use the skills that had been described to read the article. The students were then asked to share their insights of the article. The assignment for the next session was to find an article or book from the library on any topic they found interesting.

Session 6: how to use library resources? The purpose of this class is to assist Chinese international students to learn how to use library resources. The class met in the library and started with the students' sharing their experiences of the previous week in the book or article search. Then, a librarian gave students a tour and an introductory presentation on how to use library resources. Finally, the instructor gave students a random topic for article or book search practice. The assignment for the next session was to list their difficulties in interacting with professors and their solutions.

Session 7: how to interact with professors or advisors? The purpose of the session is to assist Chinese international students to learn how to interact with professors or advisors. A professor was invited for the class. First, students identified difficult situations they had encountered when interacting with their professors. Then, the students used role-play to act out the situations with the professor. The other students observed the situations and provided feedback. The practice was continued until the student felt comfortable with the situation. Next, the professor presented his own concerns when interacting with international students and used role-play to practice with the students. The students then made a plan for meeting with one of their professors before the next session.

Session 8: how to interact with American classmates or roommates? The purpose of this session is to assist Chinese international students to learn how to interact with American classmates and roommates. The students first shared their last assignments. Then, the instructor gave a lecture on effective communication. The students wrote down some difficult situations they had had with American classmates or roommates and turned them in to the instructor. The students were divided into small groups; each group got one scenario and used information from the lecture to find a better solution for the case. The student who originally had the problem used role-play to act out the suggested response to that situation to explore how that way of

responding might influence the relationship. The students' assignment for the next week was to interact with at least one American classmate or roommate and report their experience back to the class next week.

Session 9: how to be a good emotional manager? The purpose of this session is to assist Chinese international students to learn better ways of expressing their anger and managing their stress. The students were asked to self-evaluate their current stress level and share their ways of coping with stress. Then the instructor lectured on the concept and skills of stress management. The students divided into small groups and discussed how to apply the stress management skills to their own situations.

Next, the students identified some situations that had made them angry, and they described how they had expressed their anger. The instructor introduced four anger expression strategies: anger expression-out, anger expression-in, anger control-out, and anger control-in. The students discussed what the better ways of expressing anger were and how cultural belief influenced their ways of expressing emotion. The students used role-play activity to practice healthy ways of expressing anger. The assignment for the next session was to record their time usage every day.

Session 10: how to be a good time manager? The purpose of this session is to assist Chinese international students to learn how to adequately manage their time. First, the students reported on their time usage for the week and made a self-evaluation. Then the instructor gave a lecture on time management and asked the students to revise their time allocation and make a new time plan for the coming week. Students paired together to make their new time allocation plans. The assignment for the next session was to practice the new time schedule.

Part 3: helping Chinese international students move from dilemma to establishing the integrity of a new identity. The objectives of this part are focused on the third cycle of the adjustment cycle and include encouraging Chinese international students to: examine themselves and the new environment, make a career plan, and integrate the overseas experience and culture with their original experience and culture. The following sessions were designed to fulfill these objectives.

Session 11: show and tell (1) -- my cultural heritage. The purpose of the session is to assist Chinese international students to appreciate their own cultural heritage and establish self-confidence by sharing their cultural heritage with their university community. The time of the session can be flexible depending on the time of the specific cultural holiday (for example, Autumn Festival for fall semester or Spring Festival for spring semester). The students are asked to focus on the theme of the holiday and design a program for the celebration.

Session 12: show and tell (2) – my American life bag. The purpose of the session is to assist Chinese international students to be aware of their adjustment process in the U.S. The class started with a lecture on the acculturation process and the four identity modes. The students identified which acculturation stage and identity mode they were currently in and shared with others their experiences reflecting acculturation and identity. Finally, the students shared their “American life bag,” which contained five things that meant the most to them in their U.S. life.

Session 13: where am I going? – career plan (1). The purpose of this session is to assist Chinese international students to make a career plan. The instructor first gave a lecture about career development. Then students were asked to write down about 10 to 20 randomly selected job titles on 3x5 index cards. Next, the students were asked to pick one card and imagine what position they would like to achieve in ten years, and to make a business card for their dream position. Then the students made a career plan for achieving that position. After this, the

students divided into two groups and shared their career plans with each other. The assignment for the next session was to develop a resume.

Session 14: how can I get there? – career plan (2). The purpose of this session is to assist Chinese international students to learn job search skills. A staff representative from career services was invited to the class to introduce the resources available at career services, and to teach students about resume-writing and interviewing skills. Then the students revised their resumes according to the content of the lecture. Interview skills were practiced through role-play.

Session 15: feedback and evaluation. The purpose of this session is to assist Chinese international students to integrate their learning experience and give feedback to each other and the instructor.

Statistical Collection and Analysis

Prior to data collection, this research was approved by the first author's Institutional Review Board. The informed consent with a detailed explanation about the research was distributed to the students. After students signed consent forms to indicate their agreement to participate in the study, they were given packets consisting of the two affiliation questions, two functional adjustment questions, and three questionnaires, the WCQ, STAXI-2, and CAD; the data collection was administered at the beginning and the end of the orientation course by the first author of this study. The questionnaires were completed in a group format in approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

The first four chi-square tests for independence were used to investigate whether there was a significant difference between the Chinese international students' responses in each question of affiliation with others and functional adjustment at the beginning and the end of the orientation course. The fifth chi-square test for independence was used to explore whether there was a significant difference between the Chinese international students' ways of coping with stress at the beginning and the end of the orientation course after the most frequently used among the eight ways of coping as measured by the WCQ was recorded as nominal data. The sixth chi-square test for independence was used to explore whether there was a significant difference between the Chinese international students' ways of expression with anger at the beginning and the end of the orientation course after the most frequently used among the four ways of anger expression as measured by the STAXI-2 was recorded as nominal data. One dependent t-test was used to compare and determine significant differences in the scores of the Chinese international students for depression symptoms as measured by the CAD at the beginning of and when completing the orientation course. The significant alpha level of this study was .05.

Results

First of all, this study explored the Chinese international students' affiliations with Americans at the beginning and the end of the orientation course. The majority of the Chinese international students responded that they formed relationships with Americans "a little bit" (50.9%) and "somewhat" (32.1%) at the beginning of the orientation course. The percentage of the Chinese international students who responded to the item concerning forming relationships with Americans with "not at all" (5.7%), "very much" (5.7%), or somewhat (32.1%) at the beginning of the orientation course remained the same at the end of course. However, the percentage of students responding "a little bit" decreased from 50.9% to 43.3%, while the percentage of "quite a bit" responses increased from 5.7% to 13.2% at the end of the orientation course. Findings from the chi-square test for independence indicated that the Chinese international students' affiliation scale on forming relationships with Americans showed a significant association for the beginning and the end of the course, $\chi^2(16, N=53) = 39.82, p > .05$.

Secondly, this study explored the Chinese international students' affiliations with students from their own country at the beginning and the end of the orientation course. The results showed that half of the Chinese international students (50.9%) responded that they interacted with students from their own country "very much" at the beginning of the orientation course: however, this percentage decreased to 30.2% at the end of orientation course. On the other hand, at the end of the orientation course, the percentage increased from 18.9% to 20.8% for "a little bit," from 11.3% to 15.1% for "somewhat," and from 13.2% to 28.3% for "quite a bit." The percentage of the Chinese international students who reported interacting "not at all" with students from their own country remained the same (5.7%). The findings from the chi-square test for independence indicated that the scale for forming relationships with other students from their own country showed a significant association for the beginning and the end of the orientation course, $\chi^2 (16, N=53) = 34.71, p < .05$.

Thirdly, this study explored the levels of the Chinese international students' functional adjustment to life in the U.S. at the beginning and the end of the orientation course. The results showed that the majority of the Chinese international students' responses concerning their adjustment to life in the U.S. were "somewhat well" (30.2%), "well" (37.7%), and "very well" (15%) at beginning of the orientation course. The percentages in these three categories increased from 30.2% to 34.0% for "somewhat well," from 37.7% to 41.5% for "well," and from 15.1% to 17.0% for "very well" at the end of the orientation course, while the percentage for "not well at all" decreased from 5.7% to 1.9% at the end of the orientation course. Findings from the chi-square test for independence indicated that the scale for the Chinese international students' functional adjustment to life in the U.S. showed a significant association for the beginning and the end of the course, $\chi^2 (16, N=53) = 38.37, p < .05$.

Fourthly, this study explored the condition of the Chinese international students' functional adjustment to study in the U.S. at beginning and the end of the orientation course. The results showed that the majority of the Chinese international students responded concerning their adjustment to study in the U.S. with "somewhat well" (30.2%), "well" (37.7%), and "very well" (7.5%) at the beginning of the orientation course. These percentages increased from 37.7% to 50.9% for "well" and from 7.5% to 13.2% for "very well" at the end of the orientation course, while the percentage decreased from 3.8% to 1.9% for "not well at all," from 20.8% to 5.7% for "a little bit," and from 30.2% to 28.3% for "somewhat well" at the end of the orientation course. Findings from the chi-square test for independence indicated that the scale for the Chinese international students' functional adjustment to studying in the U.S. showed a significant association for the beginning and the end of the course, $\chi^2 (16, N = 53) = 60.83, p < .05$.

Fifthly, this study explored the differences in the Chinese international students' ways of coping with stress at beginning and the end of the orientation course. The most frequently used among the eight ways of coping was recorded as nominal data. The results from the chi-square test for independence showed that the Chinese international students' ways of coping with stress had a positive association with their experience in taking the orientation course, $\chi^2 (36, N = 53) = 65.16, p < .05$. After the students took the orientation course, the percentage increased from 0% to 1.9% for using a confrontative strategy, from 5.7% to 11.3% for using a self-controlling strategy, and from 17% to 30.2% for using a positive reappraisal strategy. On the other hand, at the end of orientation course, no students reported using distancing ways of coping; the percentage decreased from 22.6% to 13.2% for using the seeking social support strategy, and from 3.8% to 1.9% for using the escape-avoidance strategy. The percentage using accepting

responsibilities (9.4%) and planful problem solving (32.1%) remained unchanged at the end of orientation course.

Sixthly, this study explored the differences in the Chinese international students' ways of expressing anger at the beginning and the end of the orientation course. The most frequently used among the four ways of anger expression was recorded as nominal data. The results from the chi-square test for independence showed that changes in the Chinese international students' ways of expressing anger had significant association with their experience in taking the orientation course, $\chi^2(9, N = 53) = 31.24, p < .05$. After the students completed the orientation course, the percentage of their use of internal control to deal with anger increased from 41.5% to 60.4%. On the other hand, the percentage of students using aggressive behavior to express anger decreased from 7.5% to 5.7%, and the percentage of students using controlling the outward expression of anger decreased from 43.3% to 26.4%. However, the percentage of students suppressing rather than expressing feelings of anger remained unchanged at the end of the orientation course (7.5%).

Finally, this study explored differences in the Chinese international students' depression levels at beginning and the end of the orientation course. As indicated in the results from dependent t-test shown in Table 1, there were significant differences for the Chinese international students at beginning of and when completing the orientation course in the scores of depression mood ($t = -3.74, p < 0.05$), anxiety/worry ($t = -2.58, p < 0.05$), diminished interest ($t = -3.70, p < 0.05$), and cognitive and physical fatigue ($t = -5.06, p < 0.05$). Comparison of the mean scores of pre-test and post-test indicated that the students' depression symptoms, depression mood ($M = 1.73, SD = 0.45$), anxiety/worry ($M = 2.25, SD = 0.42$), diminished interest ($M = 2.00, SD = 0.48$), and cognitive and physical fatigue ($M = 2.00, SD = 0.40$) decreased significantly to depression mood ($M = 1.54, SD = 0.41$), anxiety/worry ($M = 2.12, SD = 0.46$), diminished interest ($M = 1.74, SD = 0.47$), and cognitive and physical fatigue ($M = 1.77, SD = 0.40$) at the end of the orientation course.

Table 1

Dependent t-test Results for Differences in the Chinese International Students' Levels of Depression Symptoms at Beginning and the End of the Orientation Course

Depression Symptoms Scales	Pre-test		Post-test		t-value	P-Value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Depression Mood	1.73	0.45	1.54	0.41	-3.74	0.000
Anxiety/Worry	2.25	0.42	2.12	0.46	-2.58	0.013
Diminished Interest	2.00	0.48	1.74	0.47	-3.70	0.001
Cognitive and Physical Fatigue	2.00	0.40	1.77	0.40	-5.06	0.000

Discussion

The process for international students to adjust to a new culture and college life can be very stressful, and acculturative stressors are most prominent immediately upon arrival. Based on the international students' college adjustment cycle, we have developed and conducted a semester-long orientation course for first year Chinese international students. The results supported our hypotheses and suggest that the international orientation course had a positive impact and contributed to better interaction with Americans and better functional adjustment, as well as the use of more appropriate ways of coping with stress and expressing anger, thus leading to greater psychological well-being for Chinese international students. In the following paragraphs, each element will be discussed more specifically.

In terms of affiliation with others, as many studies have found, when international students move away from home and enter an unfamiliar culture, they encounter many stressors (Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Ying, 2005) and easily become mentally isolated by culture and language barriers. Social support has been shown to be a powerful coping resource that helps international students overcome acculturation stress (Lee et al., 2004; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992), and this may explain why many of the Chinese international students (50.9%) in this study had a tendency to stay in close interaction with students from their own country before they took the orientation course. Even though associating with students from the same country can serve as a great support for Chinese international students, it could also be a disadvantage in that they would have less time to interact with Americans and fewer opportunities to learn about the new culture. For this reason, in the orientation course, we designed several sessions to help the Chinese international students become familiar with the U.S. culture and to enhance their communication skills. We expected to find significant differences in the Chinese international students' interaction with Americans or with students from their own country at beginning and the end of the orientation course. Our findings support these hypotheses. After the orientation course, the percentage of the Chinese international students' interacting with Americans "quite a bit" improved while the percentage of those interacting with students from their own country "very much" decreased.

In regard to functional adjustment, Berry (2005) voiced the concern that during their acculturation and college life adjustment process, international students experienced physical and psychological distress. This stressful experience might make them more vulnerable to suffering from depression (Jung et al., 2007; Wei et al., 2007). To address this concern, several sessions in the program were designed to teach the students living and study skills to enable them to make a better adjustment in both living and studying in the U.S. We expected to find a significant difference in the level of adjustment to living and studying in the U.S. at beginning and the end of the orientation course. Our findings support these hypotheses. The Chinese international students showed improvement in adjustment to living and studying in the U.S. at the end of orientation course.

As for ways of coping with stress, as the literature review indicated, international students who employ maladaptive coping strategies will be at increased risk for depression (Wills & Cleary, 1995). Learning adaptive coping strategies would enable them to make a better adjustment to the new culture (Taft, 1977). To respond to this need, in this orientation course, we designed several sessions to teach the Chinese international students positive coping strategies that they could use to deal with their acculturation stressors. These sessions included: stress management, help-seeking strategies, utilizing campus resources and library resources, time management, and communication skills. Our expectation was to find a significant difference in the Chinese international students' ways of coping before and after the orientation course. The results provide evidence that after the orientation course, although the number of Chinese international students who used planful problem solving and accepting responsibility strategies at the time of the pre-test remained the same, there was a decrease in the number of students using maladaptive coping strategies such as distancing and escape-avoidance, and there was an increase in the use of confrontative coping and positive reappraisal strategies. Furthermore, many of the sessions in the orientation course were designed to teach the Chinese international students how to move from dependence to independence, and to help them develop a capacity for interdependence in their interpersonal relationships. The decreased percentage of students seeking social support and the increase in use of self-controlling strategies are

indications that the Chinese international students made some improvement in learning how to face and solve their own problems independently.

With regard to anger expression, many studies have indicated that an individual's cultural background will play an important role in influencing the anger expression style habitually used, for example, in discouraging the open expression of emotion and aggressive behavior in Asian culture (Ho, 1986; Ho & Kang, 1984; Lin & Wang, 1995), and also the definition of maladaptive anger expression for the individual, for example, encouraging adapting to rather than seeking outward change in their environment in Asian culture (Aubert et al., 2004; Lee & Kleinman, 2000). Such attitudes might contribute to the vulnerability of international students in terms of their psychological well-being. Thus, in this orientation course, we designed stress management sessions to teach the Chinese international students different ways of expressing anger and to allow them to practice appropriate ways of expressing anger to deal with the feelings of anger they might experience. We expected to find a significant difference in the Chinese international students' anger expression before and after the orientation course. The results give evidence to support our hypothesis. Spielberger (1999b) suggested that using anger control-in rather than putting a great deal of energy into expressing anger outwardly would lead to more positive results, and after the orientation course, more Chinese international students indicated that they were able to exercise internal control when a situation aroused anger, and to calm down and reduce the anger response. Conversely, fewer Chinese international students indicated that they expressed their anger in aggressive behavior toward other persons or objects directly than before the course.

Finally, in the area of psychological well-being, our expectation was that there would be a significant difference in the Chinese international students' levels of depression symptoms before and after the orientation course. Our findings support this hypothesis. At the end of the course, the Chinese international students reported that they were less likely to have a depression mood or to feel anxiety and worry; they also reported feeling more interest in activities and having more energy to complete tasks. Depression and maladaptive ways of coping with stress and expressing anger have often been linked in psychological literature (Galaif et al., 2003; Holahan et al., 1996; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Wills & Cleary, 1995). As shown in the previously mentioned results and discussions, the Chinese international students who participated in this study showed improvement, not only in their affiliation with Americans and adjustment to both studying and living in the new land, but also in their ways of coping with stress and expressing anger after they took the orientation course. These changes might well have contributed to the improvement of the Chinese international students' psychological well-being at the end of orientation course.

This study is a beginning effort to understand the importance of an orientation course for international students. However, there are several limitations to this study worth mentioning. The first and the most significant limitation of this study is that because the study has a one-group pre-test and post-test design, many internal threats, such as maturation, pre-test practice effect, history factors, etc., may influence the internal validity of this research (Ary, Razavieh, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2009). Secondly, this study was conducted at an institution located in a small town in mid-western United States; due to geographical and cultural differences among different areas of the country, the generalizability of these results may be limited in regard to institutions located in larger cities or in different areas of the country.

For further research, we have the following suggestions. First, to ensure the effectiveness and increase the internal validity of the program, a true-experimental design should be utilized in

a follow-up study. Second, more testing and evaluation needs to be done for this orientation course to reassess whether the content and teaching strategies best fit Chinese international students' needs in general. Third, this course should be conducted with more diverse international student groups to make sure that the content of this course design is applicable to international students from more diverse cultural backgrounds. Fourth, when conducting this type of research in other institutions, researchers need to be aware of the differences in the cultural background of the international students involved and adjust the course content accordingly.

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