LDR 810: Cross-Cultural Dynamics

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Omega Graduate School

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**Assignment #3 Instructions from LDR 810 Syllabus**

***Assignment #3 – Essay***

**1.** Write a 5-page essay based on one (1) of the three (3) items below:

a. Write a paper highlighting a cross-cultural experience that involved a project or

work-related activity to which you could have applied Community Development

principles. Discuss principles you violated and principles you used. Give a

synopsis of, now being aware of the principles, you could have proceeded for a

positive outcome.

b. Develop a project plan related to your work that will focus on a cross-cultural

strategy and enumerate practical applications of the Community Development

principles.

c. Choose a factual event in a cross-cultural setting from books, media, or personal

knowledge that was development-focused and critique it through the grid of the

10 principles.

**2. Paper Outline**

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of **eleven** scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

**LDR 810 Assignment 3: Toward an International Student Success Plan at OGS**

International students face many challenges when attending universities based in the United States (U.S.). According to Qureshi (2023), “These problems range from the linguistic to the sociocultural and psychological, including problems related to race and stereotyping; exacerbating these problems is lack of student support services and resources for these students” (p. 1). It is difficult for international students to “adjust to U.S. academic culture” and pedagogical techniques (Qureshi, 2023, p. 1). Additionally, trying to adapt to different teaching and learning methods from what the international students are used to may cause “diminished individual engagement and academic success” (Qureshi, 2023, p. 1). Compounding these issues is the cultural insensitivity of some U.S. faculty and staff. For example, King and Bailey (2021) found that many international students feel as if faculty do not understand “their cultural norms, psychological challenges, or health issues” (p. 285). Based on these problems, Qureshi (2023) concluded, “If universities fail to provide international students with necessary resources in an equitable manner, these students will likely find it extremely difficult to improve their performance in academic programs” (p. 1).

 Omega Graduate School (OGS) is a small religious graduate school in Tennessee. It could be classified as a “learning community” because all the faculty, staff, and students have gathered around common thematic and curricular goals: constructive social change through rigorous learning and social science research (Gokpinar-Shelton & Pike, 2022, p. 280). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, course instruction has been primarily delivered online, with annual, week-long, in-person intensives at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. In 2024, the school enrolled graduate adult learners from seven countries outside the United States: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Ethiopia, Fiji, Jamaica, Russia, and Trinidad and Tobago. While these students are not physically relocating to the United States to complete their programs, they still face many of the same academic challenges as those students described by Qureshi (2023) and King and Bailey (2021). Many of OGS’s international students have struggled to break through the language barrier, adapt to OGS’s andragogical self-directed approach to learning, and access online resources to complete assignments. To help mitigate these academic challenges, I will develop a working proposal for an international student success plan for Omega Graduate School. The project will follow a two-pronged approach. First, it will include cross-cultural intelligence and communication training for faculty. Second, it will implement a new international student information/orientation session to help the acculturation process. After briefly presenting the working proposal, I will conclude by discussing practical applications of the community development principles listed in the LDR 810 syllabus.

**International Student Success Plan Part 1: Faculty Training**

The first part of the OGS international student success plan will be training faculty in cross-cultural intelligence and communication.

**Cultivating Cross-Cultural Intelligence**

Frunza (2023) defined cross-cultural intelligence (CQ) as “the ability to function effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational cultures” (p. 86). Furthermore, Frunza (2023) described CQ as a “way of thinking” and a “way of action” couched in the background of a “pluralistic perspective” (p. 86). Frunza’s (2023) explanation provides a helpful framework for faculty training in CQ. To develop a cross-cultural way of thinking, the OGS Academic Team will craft and host a 3-hour long faculty training session prior to the 2024-2025- academic year introducing faculty to principles of cross-cultural understanding. The first subject that the training will introduce is cultural relativism; the idea that people should not judge a different culture according to the standards of their own culture(s). Rather, the attempt must be made to understand the other culture by its own internal logic (Whiteman, 2024).

The training will stress the importance of faculty adopting cultural relativism so that they can accurately understand and listen to international students. The training will also remind faculty that cultural diversity in their classrooms adds, in the words of Aririguzoh (2022), “colour and meaning” (p. 8) to the course and provides for a more holistic learning experience. This will help entrench the rationale for the training in the professors’ minds. The OGS Academic Team will report on the different cultures that our students represent. Since most of our international students are from Africa and the Caribbean, the team will emphasize the “cultural idiosyncrasies and nuances that make the needs of Black international students unique” (White, 2022). The goal of developing this cross-cultural way of thinking will be to make the OGS classroom a “safe space…where meaningful cultural exchange can happen” (White, 2022, p. 46), which fits with the OGS tagline, “a safe place to think.”

 With the acceptance of cultural relativism as the background, faculty and staff will be walked through Duane Elmer’s “Cultural Adjustment Map” (Elmer, 2002, p. 72). Elmer (2002) argued that there are certain inevitable feelings that those confronted with a different culture experience. These are “frustration”, “confusion”, “tension”, and “embarrassment” (p. 72). What matters, however, is the approach people bring to the encounter and how they respond to cultural differences. If they approach the cultural differences with “openness”, “acceptance”, and “trust”, then they are better equipped to respond to cultural differences by “observing”, “listening”, and “inquiring” (p. 72). This results in “rapport” and “understanding” with those of different cultures. On the other hand, if they approach cultural differences with “fear”, “suspicion”, and “inflexibility”, then they will be tempted to respond to cultural differences with “criticism”, “rationalization”, and “withdrawal” (p. 72). These responses lead to succumbing to “alienation” and “isolation” (p. 72).

After the map is explained, faculty will be asked to recall a time when they had a negative cross-cultural experience with an international student. Then, they will be given time to work through Elmer’s (2022) questions on page 81, which are as follows:

1. What cultural difference prompted the negative emotion
2. Which negative emotion(s) did you feel?
3. What thoughts ran through your mind during the negative emotions(s)?
4. Did your negative feelings prompt any action(s) you now regret? If so describe
5. If you could do it over again, what would you do differently? Look at the upper track. Be specific about what you might have done differently.
6. Look at your response to the fourth question. Is there some way you might have broken trust with someone? What can you do to restore that trust?
7. Looking at the upper track and assuming that negative emotions will arise at some future point, what options did you have? Or what options would you prefer to exercise in future situations? (p. 81)

**Cross-Cultural Communication in the Classroom**

According to King and Bailey (2021), it is important for faculty to “learn about cultural differences so they can consider those differences in their classroom, know resources that might benefit international students, and discuss these cultural differences with their students—as part of the educational content that faculty integrate into their curriculum” (pp. 285-286). One hope for the OGS cross-cultural faculty training will be that faculty will take their CQ into the classroom and communicate more effectively with international students. Cross-cultural communication ability “refers to the ability to effectively communicate through language while understanding the cultural context between different ethnic groups in other countries” (Wei Wei, 2024, p. 384). Due to “cultural barriers” present in the communication event, even professors with proficient oral skills can create misunderstanding in the classroom (Wei Wei, 2024, p. 384; cf. Jakucionyte, 2020).

Some cross-cultural communication strategies for the classroom that will be discussed include, slowing down speech when lecturing, utilizing universally understood examples, and replacing culturally specific idioms (e.g. “It’s raining cats and dogs.”) in course content (King and Bailey, 2021, p. 285). Faculty must also be encouraged to ask open-ended questions and practice active listening, which involves “listening for feelings more than just hearing words,” when talking with international students (Whiteman, 2024, p. 349). According to Qureshi (2023), listening to “international students’ linguistic and academic concerns,” and evaluating their academic skills can help faculty “develop teaching materials and assignments accordingly” (p. 103).

**International Student Success Plan Part 2: New International Student Information Session**

The second part of the plan will be to develop an information/orientation session for new international students who attend OGS. Per Qureshi (2023), one helpful way to help acculturate international students is to offer info/orientation sessions at the very beginning of the program before they begin OGS coursework. Qureshi (2023) explains, “These sessions can inform students regarding the institution’s academic practices, requirements, and policies as well as available campus resources, which could help reduce the disparity between students’ expectations and actual experiences” (p. 101). In addition to describing the items listed by Qureshi (2023), the OGS Academic Team will also help explain some of the OGS-specific language that is often verbalized at OGS (e.g. “OGS DNA,” “tutorial method” and “contextualization”), which will help remove the barrier of in-group language and symbols (Mogea, 2023). The availability of OGS tutors and faculty will also be stressed as one-on-one support is an exceptional strength of OGS. Finally, students will be asked about their social support structures in their home country. International students’ family members and supportive friends may be included on the call because, as Hansen et al. (2018) found, international students who have parental or other social support are better able to cope with and adapt to U.S. academic culture.

**The International Student Success Plan and the Principles of Community Development**

The syllabus for LDR 810 lists ten “principles of community development” (Omega Graduate School, 2024, p. 3). I have listed the ten principles below. After each of the principles, I have also listed a practical application that could be used to help refine the international student success plan.

1. *Start where people are*: This principle stresses the importance of patience and active listening. It is easy for OGS staff and faculty to expect international students to immediately understand and be able to apply the OGS academic process. Instead of making this assumption, OGS faculty and staff must be willing to ask international students about themselves and their cultures and their current understanding of OGS and its programs. Then, from this starting point, growth can happen.
2. *Introduce new ideas after relationships have been established*: This principle highlights the importance of connecting new international students to OGS tutors, faculty, and staff immediately after acceptance and before classes begin. The proposed informational/orientation session can help make these connections so that the relationships can be established and provide the foundation for international students to learn OGS course content.
3. *Keep the program simple*: In the attempt to make sure that international students are adequately informed about OGS academic policies, procedures, and in-group language, it would be easy for OGS staff to overload and overwhelm international students. Thus, it would probably be best to have a Faculty Senate meeting where the Senate discusses the top five items that new international students should understand about OGS. Then, these five items can be covered at the initial information session.
4. *Involve the community*: This principle provides the foundation for allowing the international students’ family members and social support to attend the initial information session. OGS must stress that the students’ communities play a vital role in the student’s success.
5. *Conduct training on location as possible*: This principle will be difficult to implement explicitly given the online nature of the courses. However, I will discuss some thoughts on this principle when addressing number seven (7).
6. *Train in locally acceptable facilities and formats*: The online format is acceptable for each of the countries represented by our students.
7. *Train trainers who can train others*: This principle highlights the need to use OGS alumni who live in the countries represented by currently enrolled international students. We can encourage alumni to meet with current students to tutor them and encourage them to complete the program. In this way, principle 5 could be addressed. These alumni should also be a part of the information session for new international students and be asked to share their experiences at OGS.
8. *Identify and involve local leadership, both existing and emerging*: International students will be encouraged to connect with their local leadership (in business, politics, church, etc.) in order to explore options for future research projects. OGS faculty and staff must be willing to talk with these leaders and advocate for our international students.
9. *Cooperate with local, regional, and national governments*: The plan will ensure that OGS and the international students comply with all necessary regulations.
10. *Encourage interdependent relationships rather than dependent or independent relationships*: The goal of the OGS tutorial method will be explained. OGS tutors and faculty are attempting to foster the life-long learning impulse in each of our students. It will be stressed in the information session that faculty and students will be learning from each other. Professors will provide international students with the tools needed to become self-directed researchers, who can always return to the professor for assistance.

In conclusion, I have provided some ideas toward an international student success plan at OGS. My intention is to bring these ideas before the OGS Academic Team and faculty for their feedback. The feedback will be used to construct a revised plan that will, in the end, help OGS international students overcome some of the obstacles they face while attending graduate school.

**References**

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