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ABSTRACT

In the last two decades, the international student population has increased in the United States. Although these students demonstrate a need for counseling services, they often underutilize what counseling services colleges and universities have available. Researchers have reported that people from different ethnic and social groups display different problems, coping strategies, and preferences for counseling styles. This paper looks at the differences found among international students regarding their expectations from counseling services and counselors. International students (N=170) enrolled in a southwestern university participated in the study. The results indicated that international students underutilized counseling services. Friends were their most preferred source for help, followed by their parents and teachers. International students did not prefer counselors to be highly informed about students' cultural backgrounds but were more concerned about their years of experience. The paper discusses some of the limitations of the study, including the sample size. (Contains 35 references.) (JDM)

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RUNNING HEAD: Counseling Expectations of International Students

Expectations of International Students From Counseling Services

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EXPECTATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM COUNSELING SERVICES

ABSTRACT

International student problems increase as the population grows rapidly in the US. These students show greater need for counseling services; however, underutilize such services offered in colleges. The present study found significant differences among international students regarding their expectations from counseling services and counselors.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the international student population in the U.S. increased by 14.61 %. In 1990, there were 386,850 international students who were enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States. Among 1,168,075 foreign students studying in different countries of the world, 407,530 attended colleges and universities in the US (34.89 %), 11.64 % in France, and 7.87 % in Germany (Sandhu, 1994). Researchers agree that the number of students coming to the United States is increasing, and it is most likely to continue increasing (Dillard & Chisolm, 1983; Fernandez, 1988; Fouad, 1991; Haung, 1994; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Mau & Jepsen, 1988; Pedersen, 1985, 1991; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Therefore, as the numbers of international students increase, the need for the effective counseling interventions will increase (Fouad, 1991; Yuen, & Tinsley, 1981).

Current literature show a growing interest on international student population due to the fact that they play an increasingly important role in American colleges and universities. Different aspects of international students have been examined over the years by researchers such as expectations (Bradley, Parr, Lan, Bingi & Gould, 1995; Yuen &

Tinsley, 1981), counseling style preferences (Exum & Lau, 1988; Yau, Sue, & Hayden, 1992), attitude differences toward counselors (Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982; Mau & Jepsen, 1988), the utilization of counseling (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986), and general problems and characteristics of international students (Idowu, 1985; Das, Chow, & Rutherford, 1986; Wehrly, 1986).

Over the years, investigators have found that people who come from different ethnic and social groups display different problems, coping strategies, and preferences for counseling styles. Research results also show that international students underutilize mental health services (Leong, 1986; Sue, 1987), even though the need for professional counseling is often greater among foreign students (Barna, 1983; Brinson & Kottler, 1995; Church, 1982; Dillard & Chisolm, 1983; Hull, 1978). One of the reasons for this underutilization might be the fact that training programs are not equipping current counselor trainees to work effectively with international students (Fouad, 1991). Current counseling literature is not sufficient regarding the importance of multicultural understanding while working with culturally diverse clients (Acosta, Yamamoto, & Evans, 1982; Atkinson, 1985; Casas, 1984; Gau, 1996; Leong, 1986; Ponterotto, 1988; Ponterotto & Casas, 1991; Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993; Siegel, 1991; Sue, 1978; Sue & Sue, 1990).

According to Sandhu (1994), international students report problems that are both intrapersonal and interpersonal. Intrapersonal problems include profound sense of loss due to the sudden departure, sense of inferiority, and sense of uncertainty. Interpersonal problems include communication patterns, culture shock, loss of the social support system, and academic problems due to the differences in educational systems.

Researchers disagree regarding the most effective counseling interventions to help international students deal with their problems. Although earlier research recommended directive and structured forms of counseling (Alexander, Klein, Workneh, & Miller, 1981; Idowu, 1985; Yuen & Tinsley, 1981), other researchers found quite contrary results (Yau, Sue, & Hayden, 1991). Fouad (1991) emphasized that the most important characteristic of a training program to be the commitment to cultural awareness and respect for cultural diversity. He also stresses that that wide diversity among international students is present and that not all international students are alike.

In a previous study measuring the counseling expectations of international students, Bradley, Parr, Lan, Bingi, and Gould (1995) used the International Student Questionnaire (ISQ) and found that on the Goals factor, “giving students information about their concerns” and “teaching students relaxation techniques” received clearly desirable ratings. In terms of the Counselor Characteristics factor, international students rated trustworthiness ($\underline{M} = 1.41$); showing acceptance ($\underline{M} = 1.67$); being concrete ($\underline{M} = 1.84$); being warm ($\underline{M} = 1.91$); listening empathetically ($\underline{M} = 1.92$); and the counselor being highly informed about the student’s culture ($\underline{M} = 2.54$) as very desirable characteristics. In the Counselor’s View factor, the most desirable items were counselors’ self-disclosure of their own experiences that related to student’s concerns ($\underline{M} = 2.86$) and counselors helping them explore and express their feelings ($\underline{M} = 2.92$). Two items on the Charisma factor were relatively undesirable: “the use of advanced techniques” ($\underline{M} = 4.75$) and “physical attractiveness” ($\underline{M} = 4.44$). Women rated items on the Goals factor as significantly more desirable than men. The students’ country of origin made a significant difference on the Counselor Characteristics factor. Students from South Asia rated these

items as significantly less desirable than did Chinese, African, or South/Central American students.

Yuen and Tinsley (1981) also investigated whether students differed in their expectations regarding counseling on a sample of 150 (40 American, 39 Chinese, 35 African, and 36 Iranian) freshmen and seniors. They found that American students expected counselors to be less directive and protective. On the other hand, Chinese, Iranian, and African students expected to assume a more passive role and that the counselor would be more directive and nurturing authority figure. The researchers also found that American students scored significantly lower than Chinese and Iranian students on empathy; that the Chinese students scored significantly lower than the American and Iranian students on responsibility and motivation scales.

Exum and Lau (1988) studied the counseling style preferences of 50 students from Hong Kong. Participants rated the counselors in two video tapes and on the Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale (CERS), a 7-point Likert scale. The CERS is a semantic differential questionnaire consisting of 10 items stemming from four concepts related to counselor credibility. Concepts include counselor's knowledge of psychology, counselors ability to help client, counselor's willingness to help the client, counselor's comprehension of the client's problem, and respondent's perception of the counselor on the tape as someone the respondent would see to discuss a problem. Results showed that directive approaches were rated more positively than non-directive approaches across all items with the exception of friendliness. However, when Yau, Sue, and Hayden (1992) investigated the counseling preferences of 6 international and 1 White-American student, they did not find confirm that international students prefer a directive counseling style.

Mau and Jepsen (1988) compared Chinese and American graduate students according to their attitude differences toward counselors, counseling process, and preferences for counselor's characteristics. They found that Chinese students were more concerned about counselor's age and ethnic background, whereas American students were more concerned about counselor's religious beliefs and socioeconomic backgrounds. Men were more concerned about counselor's age, whereas women were more concerned about counselor's gender. Chinese students perceived the counselor's role as one of mother and friend. On the other hand, American students perceived counselor's role as one of a listener.

Idowu (1985) investigated the eminent characteristics of Nigerian students in the US and noted that relationships in typical Nigerian culture are based on age, status, and respect, which seemed to conflict with self-help and independence bases of western counseling relations. He suggested that when counseling with Nigerian students, counselors should be aware that the Nigerian clients are family, structure, and group-oriented.

Leong and Sedlacek (1986) investigated the sources of help preferred by international students for emotional-social and educational-vocational problems on 194 international and 179 American students. Students were asked to imagine that they were faced with a particular problem and they would look for a help source and directed to indicate their choices on a 5-point Likert scale. Results showed that international students preferred a faculty adviser, a parent, or an older friend regarding their educational-vocational problems. They were less likely to seek help from a psychiatrist or a minister. On the emotional-social problems, international students preferred to seek help from

parents, an older friend, or other students. They were less likely to prefer ministers, psychiatrists, physicians, or faculty members. American students, on the other hand, were more likely to prefer faculty members, faculty advisors, counselors, psychiatrists, or physicians.

Dadfar and Friedlander (1982) also studied differential attitudes of international students toward seeking professional psychological help and found that “Western” students had more positive attitudes than non-Western societies toward seeking professional help. International students who were inexperienced with professional help perceived it as a non-trustworthy and inappropriate means for solving personal difficulties. They conclude that the continent of origin and limited prior contact with mental health treatment to be the most important determinants of international students’ attitudes regarding counseling services.

In sum, international students bring their unique problems with them and those problems require helping professionals to have special skills. Psychological services are lacking for this special population. In this study, the main assumption was that the more helping professionals understand international students, the more effectively they will be able to serve them. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the expectations of international students regarding counseling services.

METHOD

Sample. One hundred seventy international students who were enrolled in a mid-size southwestern university were contacted via mail to participate in the present study. Fifty-five students completed and returned the questionnaire (Return rate = 32%). Out of the 55

international students, 38.2 % were women, 61.8 % were men. Most students were single (61.8%) or married and living with their spouses (29.1%). The average age in the sample was 24.5 years. More than half of the students have been living in the United States for 1-4 years (58.2%) and 20% have been living in the USA for 5-8 years. Forty percent described themselves as being moderate in both their primary culture and American culture; 29.1% indicated that they were still in their primary culture to the extent that American values had no major effect on their lives.

Instrument. A modified version of the International Student Questionnaire, ISQ, (Bradley, Parr, Lan, Bingi, & Gould, 1995) was used in the present study. The original ISQ includes 11 items on demographic characteristics, 5 items regarding whom students turn to with their concerns (helper identity), and 30 items on the characteristics of counselor and counseling process. In this study, the Helper identity section was modified to 7 items using a 5-point Likert scale: friends, counselors, parents, teachers, religious leaders, nobody, and other. The Counseling Factors section was also modified from a 6-point Likert scale to a 5-point Likert scale.

Factor reliabilities reported for original items were Counseling Goals .93; Counselor Characteristics .85; Counselor Charisma .64; Counseling Process .54; Counselor's view .61; and Counseling Atmosphere .24 (Bradley et al., 1995). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the five items on helper identity was .59; the coefficient for the counseling items was .93.

Procedure. In the beginning of the study, the university's International Student Advisor was contacted and a list of international students currently enrolled was obtained. The

researcher, then, sent an e-mail to the international student list server outlining the purpose of the research and asking students' assistance. In order for students to understand the purpose and procedure, an introduction section was added at the beginning of the questionnaire. In this introduction section, students were assured that participation was voluntary and confidentiality would be protected. After the completed questionnaires were returned, items were coded into a data file by using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences Version 7.0 (SPSS). Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed. Results were reported in terms of groups and a copy of results was sent to the International Students Advisor as well as to the international list server.

RESULTS

The sample consisted of international students from 13 different countries. Most students were pursuing toward their master's degree (69 %), 10 were working toward their doctorate degree (18.2 %), and only 6 students were in undergraduate studies (10.9%). The most frequent study major was computer science (32.7%) followed by business (29.1%).

In terms of helper type, international students reported seeking help mostly from their friends ($M = 2.62$, $SD = .56$). Parents were the second most frequently used help sources ($M = 2.05$, $SD = .76$), followed by teachers ($M = 1.73$, $SD = .73$). The least used help sources for this group were college counselors ($M = 1.29$, $SD = .60$) and religious leaders ($M = 1.56$, $SD = .74$).

Means and standard deviations for each counseling factor were computed (Table 1). The most desirable items were related to Counselor characteristics ($M = 2.69$, $SD =$

.27) such as being honest and warm. The least desirable items were related to counselor charisma ($M = 1.97$, $SD = .55$) such as being attractive or persuasive.

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviations for the Counseling Factors

Factors	M	SD
Counselor Characteristics	2.69	.27
Counseling Atmosphere	2.43	.49
Counseling Process	2.26	.66
Counselor's View	2.18	.61
Counseling Goals	2.13	.53
Counselor Charisma	1.97	.55

Means and standard deviations were also computed for each item on the questionnaire. For the Counseling Goals factor, the most desirable item was "Give me information about my concerns" ($M = 2.53$, $SD = .74$). "Help me explore my religious convictions" was the least desirable item ($M = 1.51$, $SD = .74$). For the Counselor Characteristics factor, the most desirable items were "Be honest and genuine" and "Being trustworthy". For the Counselor Charisma factor, the most desirable item was "Be persuasive". The least desirable item was "Being attractive". For the Counseling Process factor, the most desirable item was "Help me express and explore feelings" ($M = 2.38$, $SD = .80$). The

least desirable item was “Confront me if my thinking was irrational or my behavior inconsistent” ($M = 2.15$, $SD = .80$). For the Counseling Atmosphere factor, students preferred “Be specific about how I should change” ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .69$) over “Allow me just talk without being judged” ($M = 2.31$, $SD = .77$).

Three types of one way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were computed, six helper identity by nine background information, six counseling factors by nine background information, and each questionnaire item by demographic information. When significant group differences were found Scheffe and Least Significant Differences (LSD) multiple comparison post-hoc analyses were performed.

Results revealed that the total number of years’ lived in the U.S. had significant effect on students’ helper choice of parents ($F [3,51] = 3.56$, $p < .02$) and teachers/professors ($F [3,51] = 4.14$, $p < .01$). The total numbers of years lived in the U.S. had also a significant effect on the Counselor Characteristics factor ($F [3,51] = 3.06$, $p < .04$) and the Counselor Charisma factor ($F [3,51] = 6.07$, $p < .005$). Students who have been living in the U.S. for one year or less rated the Counselor Charisma factor significantly higher than students who have been living in the U.S. for 1-4 years ($p < .01$) and students who have been living in the U.S. for 5-8 years ($p < .03$). Students who have been living in the U.S. for one year or less rated the Counselor Characteristics factor significantly higher than students who have been living in the U.S. for 1-4 years ($p < .01$) and students who have been living in the U.S. for 5-8 years ($p < .01$). Similarly, students’ acculturation level had a significant effect on the helper types for friends ($F [6,48] = 5.33$, $p < .01$) and religious leaders ($F [6,48] = 2.59$, $p < .02$). Students who reported that they still lived in their primary culture preferred their friends as helpers.

Students' religion had significant effects on the helper type for teachers/professors ($F [3,48] = 3.10, p < .03$) and religious leaders ($F [3,48] = 7.05, p < .01$). Christian and Muslim students indicated a statistically significantly higher preference for their religious leaders as helpers when compared to students with no religious affiliation. There was also a significant difference between students' religion and the Counselor Characteristics factor ($F [3,48] = 2.87, p < .04$). Muslim and Buddhist students rated this factor significantly higher than students with no religious affiliation ($p < .03$ and $p < .01$, respectively).

There was a significant difference between students' marital status and their scores on the Counselor Characteristics factor ($F [2,51] = 3.64, p < .03$). Single students rated this factor significantly higher than married students who lived with their spouses ($p < .04$). There were also significant differences between gender and four counseling factors. Women rated all four counseling factors, Counseling Atmosphere, Counseling Goals, Counseling Process, Counselors' View, significantly higher than men. However, there was no significant difference between gender and the Counselor Charisma factor.

Individual items in each counseling factor have been examined in relation to each demographic data. In terms of gender differences on the Counseling Goals factor, there were two items on which there were significant differences between men and women. Female students wanted the counselor to help them change how they relate to people ($M = 2.48, SD = .51$) more than male students ($M = 1.85, SD = .78$). Women also scored higher on the item "Help me to be more aware of and change my self-talk ($M = 2.52, SD = .68$) than men ($M = 1.58, SD = .74$). On the Counseling Process factor, men and women differed significantly for the item "Confront me if my thinking was irrational or my behavior inconsistent" ($t [53] = 2.80, p < .01$). Female students rated this item higher than

male students ($\underline{M} = 2.48$, $\underline{SD} = .60$ versus $\underline{M} = 1.94$, $\underline{SD} = .74$, respectively). For the Counselors' View factor, there was a significant difference between students' gender and the item "Disclose his/her own experiences that related to my concerns" ($t [53] = 2.39$, $p < .02$). Female students desired this item more than male students ($\underline{M} = 2.48$, $\underline{SD} = .51$ versus $\underline{M} = 2.00$, $\underline{SD} = .82$, respectively). The only significance difference between male and female students on the Counseling Atmosphere factor was the item "Allow me just talk without being judged" ($t [53] = 2.46$, $p < .02$). Female students wanted to be allowed to talk without being judged more than male students ($\underline{M} = 2.62$, $\underline{SD} = .67$ versus $\underline{M} = 2.12$, $\underline{SD} = .77$, respectively).

Students' major made a significance difference for the Counselors' View factor ($t [29] = -2.50$, $p < .02$). Physical science majoring students more preferred counselors to disclose their own experiences related to students concerns than social science majoring students ($\underline{M} = 2.30$, $\underline{SD} = .70$ versus $\underline{M} = 1.63$, $\underline{SD} = .52$).

Total number of years lived in the USA made significance differences for one Counseling Goals factor ($F [3,51] = 5.43$, $p < .01$). Students who have been living in the U.S. for 1-4 years desired more information about their concerns than students who have been living in the U.S. 1 year or less ($p < .01$). Also, students who have been living in the US for nine years or more scored significantly higher than students have been living in the U.S. for one year or less ($p < .03$). For the Counselor Characteristics, there was a significance difference on the item "Listen emphatically" ($F [3,51] = 1.32$, $p < .05$). Students who have been living in the U.S. for one year or less preferred the counselors to be attractive more than students who have been living in the U.S. for 5-8 years ($p < .01$).

Students who have been living in the US for nine years or more also rated this item significantly higher than students have been living in the U.S. for 5-8 years ($p < .04$).

CONCLUSION

Results of the present study indicated that international students underutilized counseling services. Friends were the most preferred helpers followed by parents and teachers. Students tended to either internalize the problem or try to solve it alone. Findings also suggest that friends and parents or other close relatives are the most important support systems for international students. When counseling with international students, counselors should keep in mind the importance of families and incorporate them into counseling interventions.

Items on the Counselor Characteristics factor were rated as highly desirable. International students desired that the counselors listened emphatically; were honest, genuine, accepting, trustworthy, warm, and understanding. All of these qualities are the essential qualities of a skilled counselor in general.

After their study, Bradley et al.(1995) reported that counselors' expertise was not necessarily a desirable characteristic. Similarly, in the present study, international students did not prefer counselors to be highly informed about students' cultural background nor did they prefer counselors to be attractive. Students seemed to be more concerned about the personal qualities of the counselor than their physical qualities. After finding that international students did not want the counselor to be at least within five years of their age, Bradley et al. (1995) concluded that students were open to and preferred working with helpers who were experienced. Similarly, in this study, the least desired item was "Be at least within five years of my age."

There are similarities between the Bradley et al.'s (1995) study and the present study. Also the findings from the present study and the international student advisors' responses to the same questionnaire were similar. These similarities suggest that the desired and undesired counselor qualities are relatively invariant across different populations. Since Bradley et al.'s (1985) study did not include international students, they expressed a concern that "it remains unclear how these findings might generalize to international students who have not sought the assistance of such an office" (p.29). The present study attempted to answer in this direction. Bradley et al. (1985) asked similar questions to advisors of international students and student personnel. This study posed to international students.

Finally, one of the biggest limitations of the present study was that the sample size was restricted. Even though the questionnaire was sent to every member of the population, the population itself was very small ($N = 170$). Future validation studies are necessary with larger samples. Studies examining the counseling needs of international students must continue as the population continues to increase. It is clear that the needs of international students are somehow different from those of American students. Future studies should try not only to focus on the needs, problems, and expectations of international students but also on the ways to integrate research results into helping interventions so that helping professionals become more effective in working with international students.

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