



A Full Range of Support for Improving International Students' Experience in Higher Education:

A Case Study from the University of Minnesota Libraries

Yao Chen and Kristen Mastel

The University of Minnesota has nearly 6,000 international students, making up 13 percent of the total undergraduate and graduate student population, with students mostly from China, India, and Korea. The University of Minnesota Libraries engages international students through our year-round endeavor of a wide variety of programs and activities with the hope to ensure their academic and personal success. These activities include early interventions, such as orientation events and Introduction to Library Research tutorials. To ensure continued outreach during the academic year, the English-language learning librarians collaborate with subject experts to create Library Course Pages and scaffolded library instruction throughout the academic program. More importantly, the library actively participates in building a campus community to better serve international students. Together, this series of resources and services aims to help students and staff achieve success throughout the academic year. These programs and activities not only enrich international students' learning and cultural experiences, they also provide staff with opportunities to develop professionally and become diversity leaders and advocates.

Many libraries may not have a designated librarian for international students who could be the key person in the library to serve as their advocate. The work with international students has so many dimensions that it cannot be accomplished by a single person or even just a few individuals. At the University of Minnesota, the Diversity Leadership Committee, in collaboration with the English-language librarians and undergraduate services librarian, coordinates international student services internally and works closely with other campus departments and units to serve our international students and to collaborate on other diversity- and inclusion-related matters. Committee members, coming from different library units, volunteer to form subgroups and take on different projects. The committee guarantees that there is always a library representative to participating in different campus initiatives, programs, and events. Members rotate off the committee at different years to ensure the work will not be impacted by the reposition or vacancy of individuals. Committee members from different library units also bring information back and serve in an advisory capacity to the whole library.

Outreach to International Students

New Students Orientation is the first chance for students to get a glimpse of campus life and is an opportunity for the University of Minnesota Libraries' initial interaction with the students. As new international students orientation programs are probably mandatory in most universities, this is a great way to meet and get connected with international students. Since 2010, the University of Minnesota Libraries has been a key supporter of a variety of international students' orientation programs and activities hosted by the university's International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS). In addition to tabling at resource fairs during the new students' orientation events each fall semester, the new transfer students' orientation each spring semester, and some mid-term refresher programs, the libraries also provides open workshops and library tours to help international students navigate the physical and virtual library. Due to the voluntary nature of the workshops and tours and the fact students are usually overwhelmed at the beginning of a semester, we also tried to create materials that could be used by students at their own pace. In 2010, the libraries created a library brochure to introduce basic library resources and services to international students. Along with this English-language brochure, a Chinese version was also released, since about 50 percent of our international students came from China. A Korean version was created in 2013. The three versions of the brochure were uploaded to the library's website and were distributed to thousands of international students. After years of effort, the university's ISSS office now includes our brochures in the information package sent to all students prior to their travel to the US. This resource is also included in the annual ISSS adviser resource guide for new undergraduate international students. This brochure familiarizes new international students with the library and serves as a useful tool for academic advisors.

Audio-visual materials have been utilized in library orientations and instructions since the 1970s.¹ Today, advancements in technology makes it much easier and less costly to create streaming videos. Considering the popularity and effectiveness of audio-visual materials in learning, we created a welcome video for all new and transfer students in 2015. The video was originally planned to target the international student population. During a conversation with our undergraduate services librarian, we realized that all students could benefit from this video. Instructional design staff and the library's Commu-

nication Office were invited to participate in this project. In this welcome video, viewers are presented with a virtual tour of the library with a voiceover narration as well as an introduction to major services. One of our librarians welcomes and says goodbye to students at the beginning and end of the video to offer a friendly and approachable image of the library. Still images were used for most parts of the video, along with a transcript for easy captioning, allowing the content to be updated easily.

Building on orientation events, the English-language librarians are connected through academic units that primarily serve this student population. Housed under the College of Continuing Education, the Minnesota English Language Program (MELP) provides both credit-bearing and non-credit courses in English as a Second Language (ESL) at the University of Minnesota. The courses are designed to help non-native English speakers improve their listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills for success in the university classroom or in the workplace. MELP's coursework is based on skill and practical knowledge, such as pronunciation, grammar, listening, and speaking skills. Two main opportunities the library has that tie into the courses are in the Academic Writing and Speaking for Academic Purposes courses. In the Academic Writing course, students are expected to write an eight-page research paper. Throughout the course, students are guided through the process, from topic development to outlining and writing. Our library instruction mirrors this incremental approach. Often, the librarians are able to come into the course twice. During the first visit, we tour the library in small groups and discuss topic development and what is appropriate for an eight-page paper through mind mapping. From this, we distill the main concepts and how to apply keywords. Then we search the discovery tool to find books and articles for their paper. In the second session, we build on previous knowledge by introducing citation management tools and more specialized databases by subject. For the Speaking for Academic Purposes course, the librarians often give presentations on slide design, presentation techniques, and where to find copyright-free images. Many of the courses require students to practice their speeches in the library's 1:Button Studio, which is a plug-and-play recording studio. In addition, the library purchased a subscription to Lynda.com and various other streaming videos about public speaking that faculty use and require for students to view as part of their courses. Through these two courses, we begin to introduce a wide variety of resources and services the library provides that include hands-on experiences. By teaming up with subject librarians to create library support pages designed for specific courses with ESL-designated sections, we can reach more students across a variety of disciplines. ESL 3007 English for Physics is one example of a collaborative Library Course Page. We worked with the physics librarian to include physics foundation texts, reference materials, and links to videos that go along with each course week. This collaboration is beneficial because the English-language librarians know how to organize the information in a meaningful way while the physics librarian brings the subject expertise for reference resources.

The majority of MELP courses are not research-focused, and students may not have opportunities to use the library's extensive research resources and services. To explore new ways to reach out to MELP and raise awareness of a breadth of library services, the English-language librarians contributed an APP column in *Just for Fun*, a bi-weekly MELP newsletter distributed to all MELP students and instructors. The column introduces mobile applications that facilitate English-language learning. The higher education edition of the *2014 New Media Centers (NMC) Horizon Report* predicted that social media would be one of the "driving changes in higher education over the next one to two years."²² In the 2017 report, NMC confirms the importance of social media technology

and describes it as an integral part of our lives that will continue to “evolve at a rapid pace.”³ This exploration of mobile applications for learning purposes is a great way to reach out to students in an effective and relaxed manner. Mobile devices are playing an increasing role in both informal and formal education. It is a perfect place to teach information and media literacy. During one academic semester, seven applications were introduced to MELP students. The applications were selected based on certain criteria and had to meet several requirements, including low storage space needs, adequate privacy and security settings, and that they would not slow down the speed of devices. New features of mobile device software were also introduced. The Google Translate mobile application, for instance, allows instant text translation by focusing on the text with the device camera. The applications were selected to make students’ learning and life easier and fun. The column was well received by the students and we were approached to contribute a new series of columns that introduce library research strategies.

In addition to MELP, the first-year writing courses became another great opportunity to engage students. This course is mandated for all new and transfer international undergraduate students, and librarians are usually invited to conduct a one-shot library instruction session. Library staff, who teach the sessions, are provided with a pre-formatted, standard syllabus, which is used to teach all first-year writing students, both domestic and international. It has been challenging to deliver the pre-formatted information to international students during a short period of time, and course instructors reported that the sessions were helpful but too overwhelming for the students. Some course instructors tried to break library instructions into smaller chunks and teach them in their own classroom but risked providing students with incorrect library information or concepts. For example, one instructor tried to introduce the concept of subject headings and explained that by selecting “subject” instead of “any” with a keyword in the library catalog search box, the user would receive more relevant results. This illustrates that ongoing collaboration with instructors and coordination of research skills both in the classroom and supplemented with online tutorials are needed in most courses.

Collaborating with faculty to teach information literacy has been well documented in library literature. In a few cases, librarians also partner with non-faculty specialists, such as writing specialists,⁴ teaching assistants,⁵ tutors,⁶ and peer mentors.⁷ As much as we would like to seek meaningful collaborations, in reality, that is not always easy. For example, many instructors request that the English-language librarians teach databases and the mechanics of searching, rather than the different dimensions of information literacy and the complexity of the research process. We attempted to strategically foster a deeper collaborative relationship by creating a list of self-paced modules to introduce information literacy skills. Rather than a replacement for the one-shot library instruction sessions, these modules serve as a complementary resource for students and instructors, allowing instructors to focus on their priorities in the classroom and giving students the opportunity to systematically study research skills on their own. While the modules cover common stumbling blocks that students encounter during their assignments, they help enrich both the faculty’s teaching experience and improve students’ learning experience. First-year writing program administrators commented that this resource substantially complements the work they have done to support international student writers across the university.

Studies have shown that students frequently turn to their friends and classmates when needing assistance.⁸ Keeping this in mind, we created the Peer Research Consul-

tant (PRC) program in 2009. With the creation of the SMART Learning Commons in the mid-2000s—a program that offers peer tutoring and media project support—there was an opportunity for library-led, peer-delivered academic support services. The PRC program was envisioned to help students with the library research process. Another PRC program goal is to support and hire students from traditionally underrepresented groups. We consider diversity training and experience as a requirement for peer-research consultants and try to include international students in the hiring. Information literacy techniques and strategies instruction are provided by our undergraduate services librarian, and day-to-day supervision and operational management are performed by our SMART Learning Commons coordinator. These peer consultants are not tutors in subject disciplines but rather are research consultants who provide one-on-one assistance to develop strategies and locate resources for research papers. They host drop-in hours in several libraries and are located where a lot of MELP students visit, the International Student and Scholar Services and Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence offices. In the 2016–2017 academic year, we provided more than 150 one-on-one consultations through the program, supporting mostly writing studies courses but also psychology and a variety of other courses. Student feedback has been very positive, including: “My experience with my peer research consultant went very well. She was willing to help me narrow my research topic and guided me in finding the appropriate sources for it. Overall, my peer research consultant boosted my confidence in exceeding in this paper.” “The PRC helped simplify my search for articles. She was very knowledgeable in many resources. She was also great at being mindful of my particular style of brainstorming, which I really appreciated.”

The libraries have also been making efforts to actively participate in existing national and university-wide initiatives and projects to engage international students. Since 2008, we have been celebrating the annual International Education Week, a joint initiative of the US Department of State and the US Department of Education that aims to celebrate the benefits of international education and exchange worldwide. This event is usually celebrated in November, and we find it is a perfect platform to bring both domestic and international students together to enhance their mutual understanding. American students are prepared for a global environment on campus through our diverse collection and staff expertise. International students are invited to exchange their experiences. In the past nine years, our library has been inventively exploring different approaches to enhance programs that integrate our resources and services into academic and non-academic programs and activities on campus. One year, the international studies librarians, area studies librarians, and other library experts from the arts and humanities and social sciences (e.g., journalism, history, political science, linguistics, etc.) hosted a one-stop consultation panel to provide research and non-research assistance to participants. Another year, we teamed up with archivists to stage a pop-up library in a busy student hub building to introduce and showcase our diverse collections and answer questions on site. Also, a library scavenger hunt was designed to encourage students to explore valuable collections located in lesser-known locations. For example, students were introduced to the only stand-alone South Asian collection in an academic library in the United States, one of the world's leading repositories of research materials on South Asia. In addition to hosting events for external users, we sent out one email every day to all library staff during this week with background information about the internationalization initiatives on campus and in the library field, including tips on open-mindedness and serving a diverse group of

patrons. This series of events highlights the indispensable role the library plays in higher education and increases the visibility and presence of the library on campus.

In another highly visible interaction, librarians participated in the New International Student Seminar Moodle course, coordinated by the university's ISSS office. This online course is designed to help new and transfer international students adjust to the US and university culture, classroom etiquette, and academic expectations after they have been enrolled for a month or so. All new and transfer students are required to attend this online forum in order to register for their next semester's courses. There are five categories in which students could post their questions and share their experiences: writing papers, English language, classroom success, cultural adjustment, and health and safety. Staff from different campus units volunteered to moderate their preferred topic(s). This forum offers a relaxing mode in which moderators can interact with students about their university life, both academic and non-academic. Volunteer moderators do not grade students but rather have a conversation about topics they are interested in. In this forum, librarians can highlight our resources, services, and campus connection expertise to international students at their points of need on a daily basis. The participation in this program establishes an approachable image for the library. More importantly, it strengthens the collaboration between the library and the other student-supporting units, fostering future collaboration opportunities. This participation and collaboration arose out of conversations that took place in Academic Resources for International Students, an informal international student academic support group initiated by the former chair of the Diversity Leadership Committee.

Outreach to Staff Across Campus

International students often turn to the library for assistance with everything from research support to referrals to additional support that may be offered elsewhere across our campus. Since the University of Minnesota serves 60,000 students, there are many offices spread across two cities, and often they are in siloes that do not talk to one another. In addition, academic support units may have competing priorities, with each trying to promote their unique services to support teaching and learning. This is why the libraries initiated a group to coordinate campus-wide services and referrals. In 2013, the Academic Resources for International Students group was formed with the intention of bringing together groups on campus that offer academic support-related services to better serve our international students. Twelve key units that participate in this group meet bi-monthly, including the Office for Student Conduct and Counseling Services, SMART Learning Commons, the Department of Writing Studies, and the Center for Education Innovation, to name a few. As the initiator, the libraries have been a part of this group from the very start.

This group coordinates the Global Gopher event every spring to bring awareness of our services to international students via tours and an exhibit fair. However, this was not enough; we needed a resource geared not just to students but also to the front-line staff, such as advisors and faculty that might not get questions on a regular basis. The team of departments created the informal Academic Resources for International Students site (<http://z.umn.edu/internationalstudents>). The Google Sites-hosted platform was selected because it is easy to navigate, update, and suited our needs for this pilot project. Content was developed by all areas of campus, and rather than organizing items by department,

resources and tools are integrated to support students' needs, such as adjusting to US culture, stress management, and paper-writing resources. Helpful icons were developed so a student or advisor could look through the resources easily and know if they were available by drop-in or by appointment, or if they were meant to be one-on-one assistance or in a group setting. This tool has proved helpful for library service desk staff, who often are approached by students looking for assistance with writing a paper or needing guidance on what services are provided across campus. Serving on cross-campus working groups allows us to reach out to all campus units to promote our resources and services and integrate them into the workflow of the campus.

We believe that an increased awareness of international students' backgrounds, their needs, and challenges will enhance our understanding of their information-seeking behaviors and our ability to offer tailored services. Our library is committed to exploring ways to empower and support our staff to in turn support international students. In addition to the email message sent out to all library staff members during the International Education Week, we host other events to learn about international students. For example, we invited an international student panel to have a conversation with public services staff and non-public-facing employees. We also invited ISSS to come in for a tailored training session to equip staff with knowledge and skills on working effectively with international students, scholars, and colleagues. We encourage staff to attend programs and activities on campus, such as the biannual Internationalizing the Curriculum and Campus Conference, to engage with a diverse group of scholars and students.

All these resources aim to help students and staff find success throughout the academic year. These programs and activities enrich international students' learning and cultural experiences; they also provide staff with opportunities to develop professionally and become diversity leaders and advocates. The Diversity Leadership Committee plays a key role in delivering and coordinating library services to international students. In addition to annual reflection on the work with international students, the committee is currently conducting a more systematic assessment to evaluate our existing services and identify areas for potential improvement.

Internationalizing campuses across the United States has been an ongoing mission of American higher education. Our library continues to work with collegiate units to ensure international students have a memorable and beneficial stay at the University of Minnesota.

Notes

1. Necia Parker-Gibson, "Reference and Media-Instruction by Any Means Necessary," *The Reference Librarian* 31, no. 65 (1999): 65.
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3. New Media Centers, "NMC Horizon Report 2017 Higher Education Edition," 2017: 37, 2017), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.nmc.org/publication/nmc-horizon-report-2017-higher-education-edition/>.
4. Peggy A. Pritchard, "The Embedded Science Librarian: Partner in Curriculum Design and Delivery," *Journal of Library Administration* 50, no. 4 (2010): 376.
5. Sue Samson and Michelle S. Millet, "The Learning Environment: First-Year Students, Teaching Assistants, and Information Literacy," *Research Strategies* 19, no. 2 (2003): 84.

6. Laura Brady, Nathalie Singh-Corcoran, Jo Ann Dadisman, and Kelly Diamond, "A Collaborative Approach to Information Literacy: First-year Composition, Writing Center, and Library Partnerships at West Virginia University," *Composition Forum* 19 (2009): 1.
7. Rachel Callison, Dan Budny, and Kate Thomes, "Library Research Project for First-year Engineering Students: Results from Collaboration by Teaching and Library Faculty," *The Reference Librarian* 43, no. 89–90 (2005): 99.
8. Alison J. Head, "Project Information Literacy: What Can Be Learned about the Information-Seeking Behavior of Today's College Students?," paper presented at the ACRL Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana, April 10–13, 2013.

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