

INTO MASON : DESTINATION MASON

Maximizing Mason's Multiculturalism

Existing Research

International student engagement on university campuses plays an important role in acclimation to the U.S. higher education system. Being an involved and engaged graduate student is essential for all students but especially for international students who may not have been exposed to holistic learning environments and often do not have similar networks as their domestic student colleagues do when they begin their academic programs.

Several researchers have investigated international student engagement in U.S. higher education. Zhou and Cole (2016) model a framework to predict overall satisfaction of international students in the categories of academic involvement, social involvement, and racial/ethnic diversity involvement. More involvement allows students "to engage with their peers and faculty in ways that contribute to their socialization to the norms of graduate school" (Gardner and Barnes, 2007, p. 371). Research by Mittelmeier, Kennedy, Bankart, and Obadare (2014) found for socialization that "perceived cultural understanding of the United States positively correlates with campus involvement and friendships with American students for Chinese international students" (p. 16).

The benefits of involvement as graduate students are particularly significant, namely by increasing opportunities for networking, improving engagement with larger communities, putting lessons learned in classrooms into practice, and expanding professional development opportunities. Notably, the students in Gardner and Barnes' study (2007) discussed "the great influence that involvement had upon their ability to network as well as expanding currently existing networks of influence." That networking ability was "tied directly to their potential job searches but also allowed them to find...collaborative opportunities" (p. 380) later in their careers. Furthermore, they all saw their involvement as directly contributing "to a set of skills that translated to their current or future careers," especially skills like presenting and writing (Gardner and Barnes, 2007, p. 381), two areas where English Language learners can always improve upon (Harris-Scott, 2017).

Gardner, Susan K., and Barnes, Benita J. (2007). Graduate Student Involvement: Socialization for the Professional Role. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48, 4, pp. 369-387.
 Harris-Scott, S. (2017). Graduate Student Involvement as an International Student. Unpublished manuscript.
 Mittelmeier, J., Kennedy, J., Bankart, C., & Obadare, E. (2014). Chinese International Student Campus Involvement and Friendship Network Patterns in the United States. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
 Zhou, J., & Cole, D. (2016). Comparing international and American students: involvement in college life and overall satisfaction. *Higher Education*, 73(5), 655-672.



Overview

Destination: Mason is an initiative which encourages INTO Mason students to get involved on campus. The pilot combines university events with required classroom assignments. Students attend six campus events in the categories offered. The initiative was piloted this spring 2018 semester in several courses across INTO Mason's three programs: Academic English, the International Year One program, and the Graduate Pathways program. It is jointly facilitated through INTO Mason faculty and Student Services collaboration. Faculty decides how to incorporate the events into their curriculum and how to keep track of attendance. Student Services sends out a weekly newsletter of opportunities and facilitates the completion materials. Finally, Destination: Mason aims to provide another incentive for INTO Mason students to become more engaged in the Mason community. Through becoming involved and more integrated into campus life, these students further internationalization efforts of the university.

Purpose of the Program

Student Benefits:

- Earn class credit through participating in events outside of class
- Increased awareness of campus resources and student life at GMU
- Practice communication skills by sharing their experiences with native English speakers
- Recommendation letter from INTO Mason's Executive Director
- Certificate of completion and celebration party

Campus Benefits:

- Increased international student participation in events/activities
- Further Mason's internationalization goals leading to greater cross-cultural perspectives

Faculty/Staff Benefits:

- Provides structured, yet flexible way to learn about campus resources, events, and activities that relate to university curriculum
- Faculty increase their understanding of how students engage outside the classroom
- Increased attendance to Student Services events
- Creates opportunity for academic affairs and student affairs collaboration



Students who completed Destination Mason celebrated at an end-of-term party.

Statistics of the Program

Fall 2018 current participants include 15 different faculty across all 3 INTO Mason programs in 10 different classes for a potential of upwards of 180 students completing the program!

Spring 2018 saw 30 students successfully complete the program from all 3 INTO Mason programs in 5 different classes.



Future Plans

Share the student experience:

- Determine ways students can share their experiences through Destination Mason across the INTO programs and with the broader campus. Possibly through:
- Applying the skills of teamwork, presentations, and peer feedback for GPW students to coach AE and UPW students giving presentations on Destination Mason.
- Open up the presentation/celebration to colleagues in the various departments across campus (similar to the GPW poster session).
- Request that GPW students include Destination Mason in their digital portfolios, reemphasizing student involvement as a capstone of the program.
- Having students participating in the program add more to INTO Mason social media to build exposure.

Share knowledge with faculty:

- Archive and make available to faculty the different ways in which instructors have adapted the program to meet the specific learning outcomes of their courses
- Provide workshops in which instructors share "best practices" for maximizing student levels of engagement with and benefit from the program; e.g. improving oral communication skills by interacting with native English speakers

Measure impact:

Fall 2018 cohort also includes a short assessment that is given pre/post participation asking students the following questions.

Y/N:

- I have attended an event hosted by George Mason University not located in the Mason Global Center
- I am part of a Mason club or organization

Likert Scale Extremely agree to Disagree

- I know my way around campus
- I know where to go to find out what is happening at Mason
- I feel comfortable speaking with other, non-INTO Mason students
- I feel like I am a member of the Mason community



INTO Mason Mission:

As an integral member of the George Mason University Community, INTO Mason creates vibrant experiences for international students through transformational learning opportunities tailored to meet specific linguistic, academic and cultural needs.



Student Testimonial

I gained very much from attending the six events and completing the assignment. For example: I felt the passion of Americans towards athletic activities, learned how to write a resume, learned how to relax during stressful studying, saw other countries' culture, saw the charm of music and food as well as other languages. However, the most important thing I learned is how to find passion in daily life. Honestly speaking, I thought that assignment was very boring and treated as a required assignment at first. But after I attended the activities, I found my passion for them.

-Yuanqi Du (Univ 140, Spring 2018)