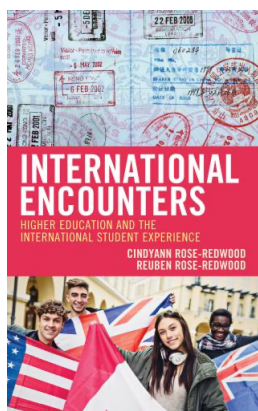


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International Encounters: Higher Education and the International Student Experience

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In light of the exponential rise in international student numbers for decades—a rise that has narrowed in the last 2 years—many higher education institutions around the world have been called to consider questions around the value of the internationalization of higher education. A changing view of internationalization’s benefits was identified in a global survey conducted by the International Association of Universities. The results indicated that “enhanced international cooperation and capacity building” has become a more important benefit, and neither “increased international awareness of/deeper engagement with global issues” nor “quality of teaching and learning” were in the top three benefits at the global level (Marinoni et al., 2019). Therefore, it is more

important than ever for higher education professionals to rethink current pedagogy around international student instruction. *International Encounters* is among the newest contributions to ongoing discussions of international students’ learning experiences in higher education. Thirteen chapters comprise the book, which begins with a description of current enrollment trends and framing statistics. Then, authors Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood present a brief overview of the “stages of adjustment” framework proposed by Du Bois (1956) and three “waves” of international student studies from 1980 to 2000 contended by Kettle (2017). A summary of the remaining chapters, which were grouped by four host countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada) are then presented.

Unlike many other international student studies enumerating issues that these students face, this book is dedicated to rethinking key assumptions and concepts in international student studies and providing alternate perspectives for scholars. The contributors share the argument that current models including the cultural deficit model, adjustment lens, institutionalist perspective, and fixed national or cultural identity assumption cannot represent international students' experiences wholly and appropriately. For example, the host country or institution would not benefit from the mutual engagement if they just hoped "international students [would] adjust to the local culture," which also assumes that the "educational environment was not changeable" (p. 123). This assumption is, in fact, affecting much international student programming in higher education.

As demonstrated by the Global Learning rubric and Civic Engagement in VALUE rubrics developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU, 2009), it is widely accepted that assisting students to "become informed, open-minded, and responsible people who are attentive to diversity across the spectrum of differences" or "prepar[ing] graduates for their public lives as citizens, members of communities, and professionals in society" are essential outcomes for educators. Moreover, educators strive to assist students to achieve higher level performance on these competencies. Having domestic students work with international students on projects or interact via informal activities are common strategies to achieve these goals (Killick, 2012; Leask, 2009). However, as educators incorporate rewards, incentives, or course credit strategies into their practices, they may reach a point where no more progress can be made in terms of increasing participation rates or boosting stronger learning achievement. For example, international students stated that they did not see the value, could not find a time, were not aware of services, or there were not many domestic students who could help international students adjust to the host culture (McKenna et al., 2017). Therefore, if educators are focused only on international students' adjustment issues, the host institution may fail to effectively develop international student programs.

Considering that many institutions nowadays have an office dedicating to helping international students adapt to the host culture and assisting them with visas, housing, academic learning, etc., this book provides relevant and alternate perspectives. However, case studies were not discussed in this book. I believe readers can expect to learn the value of mutual engagement, the various struggles around fluid student identity, and the impact of transnational immigration policy, but perhaps not the identification or replication of good practices, with an explanation of the differences between existing practices operating under "old" assumptions. In Chapter 4, the authors suggest faculty "bring international students' diverse perspectives into class discussions more effectively" (p. 59). However, the audience may still not be able to develop a new instructional strategy using this short description.

As the editors have strong professional backgrounds in the areas of social and cultural geography, it is not surprising that this book addresses "place matters when it comes to understanding the specificities of the international student experience" (p. 10). It is a pity, though, that *International Encounters* did not provide a comprehensive summary of the similarities and differences in students' experiences across the four host countries in their collections. However, readers are still able to

perceive different policies, and the political environment impacts, on a country by country basis. For example, in Chapter 5, the authors describe U.K. visa regulations and their adverse impacts on international students' sense of belonging.

My attention to the book structure and related suggestions should not detract from the publication's main contribution: high quality results from qualitative studies. For example, in Chapter 2, the authors conducted an in-depth interview with 60 international graduate students at a research university and examined their social activity under a social interaction continuum model. Their results were well intertwined with quotes and their argument. In Chapter 10, the authors examined data from focus groups and in-depth interviews to compare perceptions from staff and students on some critical international student issues. The differences and similarities between staff and students could be a guide for professionals to reflect on their own programs and services. Although many of these chapters did not provide clear suggestions for higher education programming, the theoretical frameworks and results discussed provide vivid evidence that current international student services and instructional strategies are problematic.

Contributors also raise some provocative perspectives on international student identities and introduce educators to theories widely applied in other professional areas but not so much in educational studies. These include Chapter 11's discussion of "ways of knowing," usually applied in women's or cultural studies, as well as "social identity" and "anti-essentialism," which were adopted in Chapter 12's discussion of Caribbean student experience. Moreover, the concept of "social and symbolic boundaries" from sociology was implemented to analyze students' postgraduation experiences in Chapter 13. These theoretical frameworks broaden our eyes in the interpretation of international students' experiences. Apparently, being an international student is not the sole identity that shapes behavior. I hope *International Encounters* will resonate with educational areas outside of international education. It is critical that researchers break the dichotomy of noninternational students and international students study and start to examine similar or different struggles that students all have.

In summary, while *International Encounters* does an excellent job of providing alternate research perspectives on international student studies and challenging predominant theoretical frameworks in the literature, it also indicates the difficulties of identifying different students' needs. This book provides a riveting reflection on international students' experiences and indicates that we educators should move beyond exploring strategies to enhance international students' engagement and also look to how cultural background and identity development affects students' learning development. Overall, this book offers a thorough presentation of the subject for higher education professionals. Both faculty and student affairs professionals could benefit from this book.

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