On Campus Employment as a Conduit for Campus Internationalization

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This action research study investigated a recently created international student employment program at a small rural community college. The program was designed to increase the opportunities for cross-cultural interactions between international students, domestic students, and staff. The aim of this study was to understand the interactions that were occurring as a result of the employment program, and if those interactions resulted in improvement of cultural competency and increased support for campus internationalization.

Intergroup Contact Theory, an anti-racist concept from social psychology, was used as a framework to guide an extended “look” and “think” phase of the action research cycle. As part of this inquiry process, a campus-based team of stakeholders developed interview protocols designed to learn more about how the employment program encouraged greater contact across constituent groups. In total, 14 interviews of college staff and faculty were conducted and analyzed. The findings discuss the perceptions shared by the participants as to the quality and nature of the interactions that were occurring as a result of the program, what was learned, and their ideas about institutional change. The study found that the program showed promise in providing opportunities for interactions between international students and the campus community. The drivers of these interactions included characteristics of the worksites where international students were placed for their job assignments, the nature of the work being done and the efforts of the supervisors. Study participants attributed increases in cultural competency within their worksites and amongst students as a result of their participation in the program.

Increasing the support for campus internationalization and cross-cultural learning at rural community colleges has the potential to better situate rural community colleges to serve international students. These campuses have many benefits to offer international students including individualized attention, lower costs, and robust academic support tailored for students who are unfamiliar with how to navigate college. Moreover, rural community colleges that are situated in areas with limited opportunity for cross-cultural interaction can benefit from bringing together domestic and international students in order to expand their opportunities to develop cross-cultural competency and a global outlook.