

The Role of Student Associations in providing Community Involvement and Integration between domestic and international students

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To provide a context for effective interaction between domestic and international students has been an issue for many institutions over the years. Various policies and procedures have been reviewed and adapted over time but still there are some tasks that at some stage go beyond the main responsibilities of international offices. One central factor to be considered is the role of student associations which are mostly formed by volunteering students. To provide community involvement and to help in the integration of international students, both student associations and institutions need to be collaborative in order to offer a fruitful cooperation.

In this article we would like to reflect on the importance of the role of student associations in providing an appropriate environment for integration and, therefore, community involvement for international students. Not all institutions offer the same level of service provision and as a result student involvement within the community is at some stage not the same for all types of students. Domestic students are often unaware of the benefits interaction can bring and international students may not always have opportunities to interact and integrate as they would like to.

The research will analyse the role of student associations and demonstrate the benefits of improving the integration of international students on campus. We will use a qualitative method to help us discover the real actions and thoughts of student volunteers and administrative staff taking part in provision of services to students. Focus groups are used to allow a comparison of two cases from two different countries and universities: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain and Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Italy. The resulting comparative analyses review in detail the main services requested by international students, and gather together the main concerns of the two groups involved in that provision of services.

It is hoped that this research will enhance the recognition and use of student associations as principle links between domestic and international students to foster better integration and community involvement. However, for real integration of domestic and international students it is evident that effective collaboration between the institution and the student associations will be indispensable.

Keywords: community involvement, volunteering, integration, student association, domestic and international student