

Executive summary:
Needs, strengths, and challenges of Foreign Born International Educators:

NAFSA: Association of International Educators
Foreign-Born International Educator Special Interest Group
October 2003

This study was conducted primarily to identify needs of the Foreign Born International Educators (FBIEs). A previous cultural background survey of FBIEs (N=70) yielded that an identity of being foreign-born is the most salient attribute that defines this group of people. (www.wmich.edu/oiss/fbie/survey2003/survey2003.htm). Subsequently, a group of FBIEs (N=9) responded to the current survey which explored impacts of carrying the foreign-born attribute as an international educator, its advantages and disadvantages, and specific session topics that FBIEs could contribute using their foreign-born perspectives. The data collected in both surveys were analyzed by framing FBIE strengths as “enhancers” of their needs and disadvantages as “degraders” of their needs. Three emerging themes were all related to managing professional and/or personal identities. The results are shown below.

A. Foreign Born International Educators (FBIEs)’ needs were identified as: (these are interpretations resulting from scanning two survey responses)

1. Gaining credibility from peers and students

- ◆ ...a Ph.D. degree will increase my credibility and job advancement opportunities
- ◆ ...having international experience gives me an credibility with international educators
- ◆ ...students from certain countries think I do favors for them because they are from the same regions, while other students may have the perception that I favor those students when I in fact do not
- ◆ ... I also find it difficult at times to convince people that FBIEs can also think or function like their American counterparts. You often feel that you must make twice the effort to prove your points and such kind of frustration can hit you occasionally.

2. Utilizing cultural bridge experiences to a full extent

- ◆ ...I have seldom seen professional development or training sessions for international educators which attempts to facilitate FBIEs as resources (cultural informants)
- ◆ ...I would like to work toward building global learning communities on campus
- ◆ ...It is my feeling that technical knowledge (immigration reg. or counseling degree) is much more valued than our international/cultural education or background which initially attracted us to the field

3. Being accepted for what s/he really is and not get pigeonholed into ascribed/ stereotypical roles

- ◆ ...often FBIE in the offices feel we must fit in to the American work styles
- ◆ ...seen as the token spokesperson for international issues on campus. There is more dimensions to me than my ethnic/national background

B. “FBIE strengths” are attributes that address the above needs

- ◆ ...international students feel comfortable approaching me because I have been there and done that
- ◆ ...can provide another perspective on office operation, decision making and policy making
- ◆ ...students and scholars see that I can sympathize
- ◆ ...bilingualism, foreign language skills
- ◆ ...empathy and understanding for students
- ◆ ... knowledge/awareness of other cultures
- ◆ ...being an open-minded, critical thinker, and a challenger of status quo
- ◆ ...being able to speak on cultural differences/similarities without being labeled stereotypical

C. By the same token, “FBIE challenges” are attributes that counter the above needs

- ◆ ...harder to get jobs (or lost my job) because of my foreign status
- ◆ ...language issues in professional context
- ◆ ...prejudice and bias from colleagues
- ◆ ...being seen as outsiders
- ◆ ...difficulties getting promoted
- ◆ ...unable to become DSOs
- ◆ ...lack of trust from students/getting too close to students

D. Finally, FBIE-SIG should contribute in session and program topics such as:

- ◆ Entering the field of international education: Challenges facing FBIEs (language, SEVIS, intercultural interactions at work...)
- ◆ Professional development for FBIEs in the field
- ◆ Non LPR, citizen FBIEs’ role as international student advisor in the Post-SEVIS era
- ◆ FBIE mentor – mentee program for newcomers
- ◆ Training on intercultural sensitivity from FBIE perspective
- ◆ How do FBIEs cope with ethnocentrism/patriotism?
- ◆ Bringing advocacy for international students and scholars to the foreground of NAFSA forum (not enough is being done).
- ◆ Collegiality – what it means in different cultures

The survey form can be viewed at www.wmich.edu/oiss/fbie/survey02/test.htm

Abe, J., Takagi, H., & Forrest, S. (2003). Executive summary: Needs, strengths, and challenges of Foreign Born International Educators. Retrieved from NAFSA Foreign Born International Educators Special Interest Group web site: <http://www.wmich.edu/oiss/fbie/resources.htm>