

# THE VOICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

## JHBC OFFICE OF ACADEMIC EQUITY



On February 24, 2020, the JHBC Office of Academic Equity (OAE) hosted the first International Students recording event for The Voice Series. The event was created in collaboration with Dr. Liu, the new international student advisor. The logistics of the event was organized by Marina Kamel and students Danny Chung and Zheng Cai.

The free event was designed to engage the international students in a candid conversation to understand their needs. Eight (8) students attended the event.

Dr. Beer welcomed participants and explained that the college is proud to attract international students. Beer, who was an international student herself, stated that she understood how the admission process for U.S. colleges and universities is extensive and challenging. She congratulated students for their determination and perseverance during the application process.

During the event, participants mentioned several concerns, including misunderstanding employment expectations within the United States. For instance, students outlined their frustrations with their inability to acquire work experience due to U.S. immigration law. This event highlights a need to help international students become desirable candidates for on-campus work and internship positions. Drs. Beer and Liu suggested continuing these conversations to ensure the office understands students' expectations before they leave their home country. Beer and Liu will also collaborate with the JHBC Student Success Center to try to identify internship positions for students.

Students also expressed a desire to have access to healthier, higher quality food options on-campus. In addition, they wish to eat meals more familiar to their native cuisine. International students' diets can significantly change from their home country. Hence, CSUSB international students' diet requirements may be considered. Drs. Beer and Liu will bring this issue to the campus food services.

For international students with young children, some have concerns about the high costs and difficulties finding childcare. Students with children express worries when finding childcare, as they are not only in a different living environment, but also cannot rely on close family and friends for childcare assistance. Similar uncertainties have been documented in the literature, Myers-Walls et al., 2011. To address this concern for CSUSB students, Drs. Beer and Liu stated that they will try to disseminate on-campus childcare resources, and possibly add this information to the JHBC Office of Academic Equity website.

With their transition away from familiarity, the participants also reported suffering from loneliness in the absence of their families and loss of their social networks. Drs. Beer and Liu both expressed similar feelings from their own international moves. The loneliness of being in a new environment is a pervasive issue for international university students and can worsen their ability to initiate social interactions and develop new social ties (Tsai et al., 2017). Drs. Beer and Liu aim to develop stronger interactions between international students and their faculty, other domestic students, and themselves.

Another concern important to participants was their initial difficulty understanding the expectations of the college, and the differences between the JHBC curriculum and their home curriculum. More specifically, the students noted the philosophy of an American education (e.g. to instill life skills regardless of career type) was unfamiliar; this difference in expectations is understandable, especially as many other countries may emphasize different goals throughout their educational institutions (e.g. college entrance examinations) compared to some American university systems (Dorsett, 2017). Understanding this challenge, Drs. Beer and Liu will try to collaborate with the JHBC Student Success Center to develop materials and information sessions outlining these possible differences.

Lastly, language proficiency can have a profound effect on an individual's ability to develop and integrate into American society. Students at this event noted that despite taking language proficiency exams, such as the TOEFL, the English language is still difficult to understand. Furthermore, students feel difficulty being understood in English while speaking and writing. As language fluency is a major determinant of successful integration, and typically a major concern for many international students (Myers-Walls et al., 2011), Beer and Liu will initiate conversations with the JHBC new Communication Center and the college Writing Center.

In addition, this initiative can benefit both domestic and international students within JHBC. Numerous domestic students do not have either the time nor the money to study abroad; therefore, interactions between both groups of students can improve cross-cultural experiences, especially for domestic students unexposed to others of different nations.

Beer and Liu strongly believe that there are substantial benefits in having a diverse and inclusive campus. The JHBC OAE is determined to ensure all students feel welcome and engaged.

