


**For External
Audiences**

Understanding Community Partners' Perspectives Working with International Students

May, 2018

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At the University of Minnesota, international students represent over 140 countries and make up over 11% of the total population. As the overall University student population changes, the approach to community engagement must be reconsidered. In recent years, CCEL has experienced a significant increase in the number of international students seeking services in our office. Most notably, 28% of students meeting one-on-one with our peer advisors identify as international students. In real numbers, that is approximately 315 international students meeting with our advisors in 2015. Similarly, we have seen a significant increase in the number of international students participating in service-learning classes from 4 in Fall 2005, to 33 in Fall 2010, to 57 in Fall 2015.

There have been extensive studies (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Swaner & Brownell, 2008; Taylor & Haynes, 2008, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) regarding the impact and positive learning outcome for students. However, they were mostly focused on US students, and few studies focus on the impact and learning outcomes of international students. Glass (2012) studied international students in the US who participate in different educational experiences including community service. The study highlighted that when they had opportunities to engage with people of diverse cultures and backgrounds international students experienced greater levels of learning and development.

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In the field of community engagement in higher education, attention to student learning from community engagement has been studied extensively, but minimal attention has been dedicated to understanding the experience of community partners working with students. There is only one study on community partners perspectives working with international students doing community engagement. Through our collective work with community partners, the Center for Community-Engaged Learning (CCEL) has anecdotally identified a number of challenges encountered by community partners when working with international student, such as background checks, language issues, and cultural norms, but we seek to deepen that knowledge through this project.

A survey was developed to understand community partners' motives, challenges, and other perspectives on working with international students and strives to identify resources needed to strengthen the partnership between international students and local communities.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Community partners' experience working with international students are positive in many aspects:
 - International students bring provide cultural assets and increase diversity in the organizations.
 - Organizations related to education fields expressed the value of international students being a great model for English as a Learning Language students.
 - International students are not much different compared to domestic students in terms of work capacity. They bring language and cultural diversity in addition to their ability.
 - Almost all community partners' want to continue working with international students in various areas.

- There are a few major challenges that inhibit effective partnership:
 - A few community partners raised concerns about not being able to communicate with international students because of their limited English. For some of the partners this was a major issue why they don't want to work with international students in the future.
 - Background checks are not required for all organizations, but it is mandatory for organizations working with children. For several partners, background checks prevent them from accepting international students.
 - Getting references can be more challenging for international students compared to domestic students.
 - Like domestic students, transportation issues and time constraints limit their ability to be involved.

- The major benefits for international students to engage:
 - Learning about US culture and understanding the local community.
 - Getting hands-on experience working in different areas and build confidence.
 - Professionalism and personal development.

- Recommendations to better prepare international students and community organizations for partnership:
 - At university, prepare International students to understand of the community, develop English proficiency & communication skills, and increase understanding of US volunteerism/service-learning.
 - Offer community partners trainings such as intercultural competency, cultural sensitivity, and awareness etc.
 - Community partners want more knowledge about cultural background of international students.
 - Community partners want more clarity and support on navigating the background check process for international students.

METHODOLOGY

Phase I : Online Survey



- Date: Jan.11th ~ Feb.21st
- Total 18 questions
- Questionnaires Reviewed by Dr. Mitchell (OLPD) and 4 community partners*
- Date: Feb.22nd~ April.25th
- Sent to 310 community leaders registered in the CCEL google group.
- Total 68 have completed the survey
- Date: April.26th -May 16th
- Survey result: Total 68 completed responses (22%)
- Date: May 16th – June 8th
- Report writing and editing

Phase II : In-depth Interview



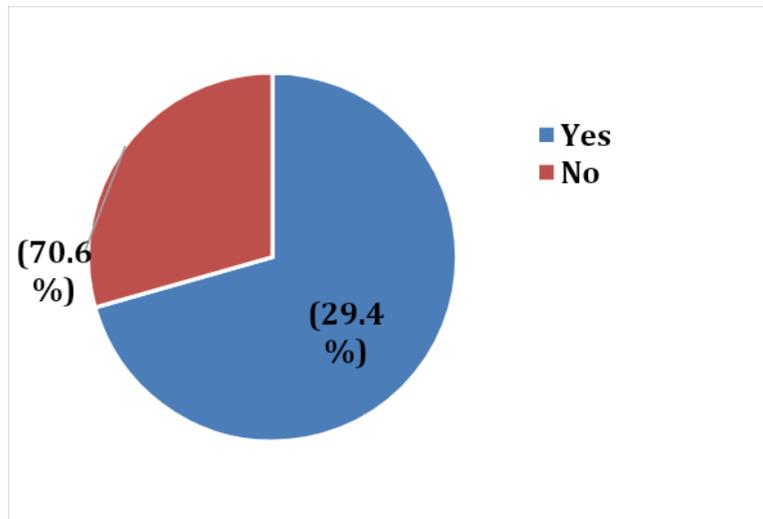
- Date: Jan.11th ~ Feb.21st
- Total 10 questions & 5 sub-questions
- Questionnaires Reviewed by Dr. Mitchell (OLPD) and 4 community partners*
- Date: Feb.22nd~ April.25th
- Two Graduate Fellows interviewed total 23 interviewees by in-person & phone
- Date: April – May
- Transcription
- Date: May 16th – June 8th
- Report writing and editing

*Questions reviewed by four community partners: Mark Rosen & Laura Herman (Augustana Care), Nancy Thornbury (Hennepin County Libraries), Gini Sanchez (Pratt Community School)

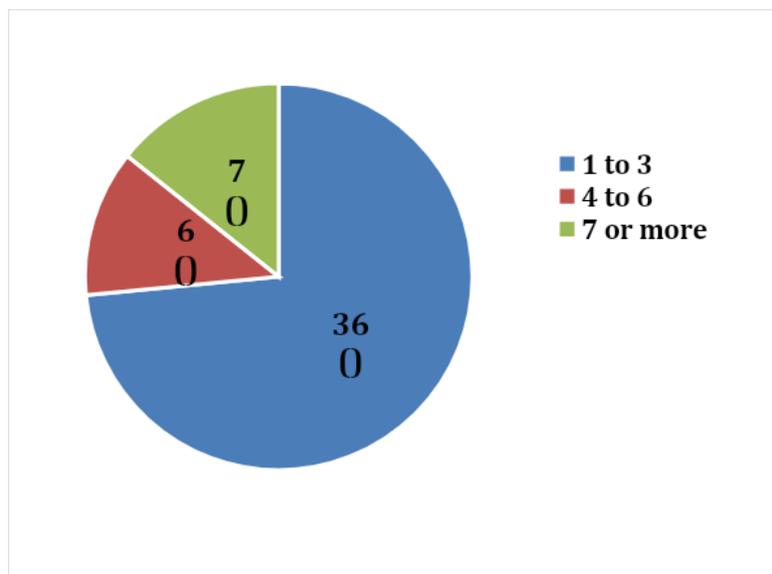
PHASE I: ONLINE SURVEY RESULT

- ☐ Survey invitation was emailed to 310 community members who were registered in the CCEL system. Approximately 22 percent of the 68 individuals from 56 organizations participated the survey.

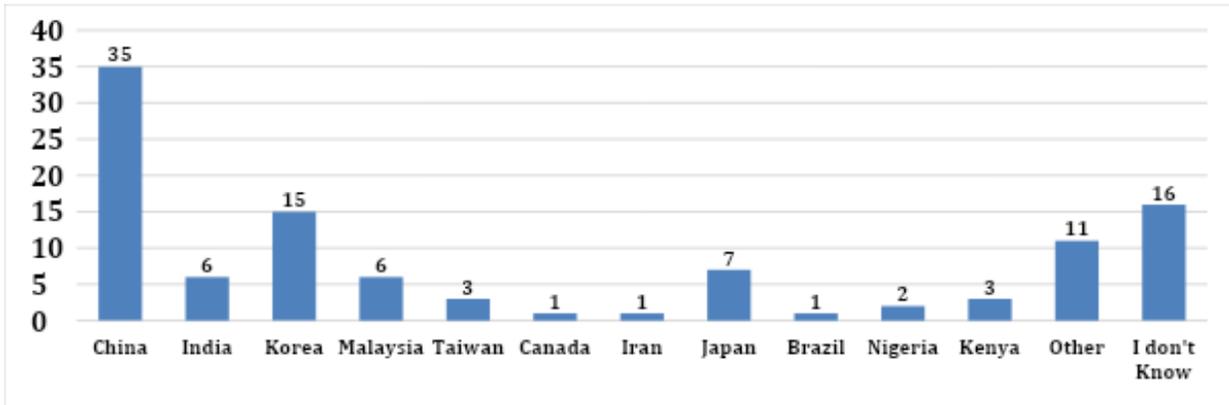
1. HAVE YOU HAD INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VOLUNTEERS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION? (N=68)



2. IF YES, HOW MANY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TYPICALLY VOLUNTEER EACH SEMESTER? (N=48)



3. WHERE WERE THEY FROM?



Others: Russia, Pakistan, England, Laos, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, (Ethiopia, Somalia)

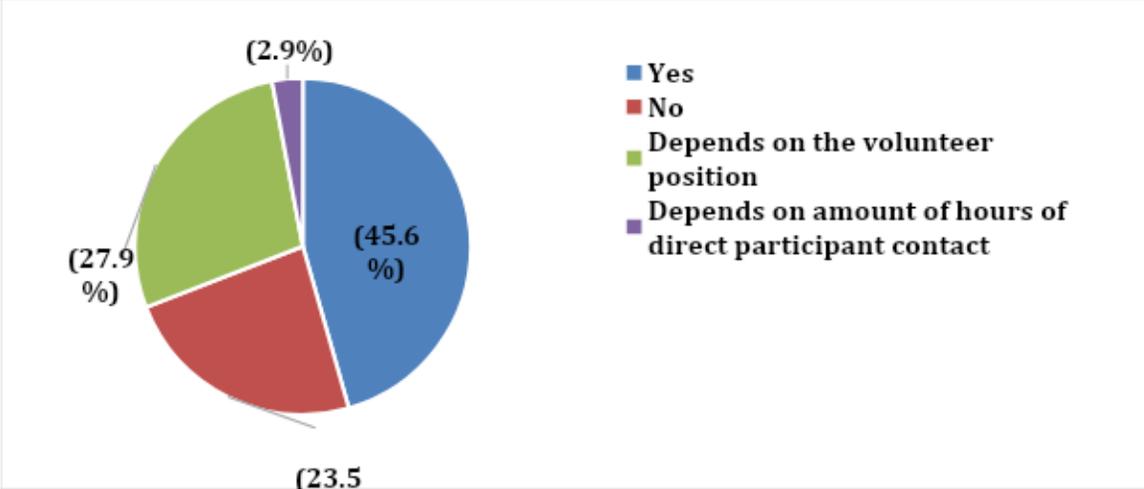
4. IF NO, WHY HAVEN'T YOU HAD INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS VOLUNTEER IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Respond	Number
Unable to submit a background check for someone without a social security number	3
No international students applied to my organization	17
We are not interested working with international student volunteers	0
We do not have capacity to support international students	0
Others	7

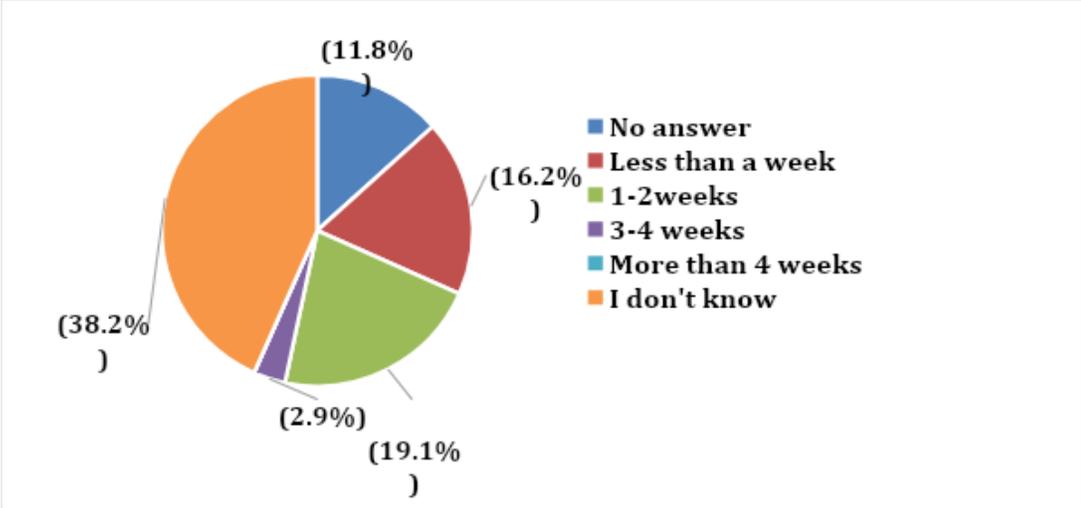
Others :

- we don't have international students because we didn't have the opportunity
- The minimum age requirement is 24, and time commitment 6 months
- We had a couple, but few apply
- We have international students form other colleges, but none from UofM have applied

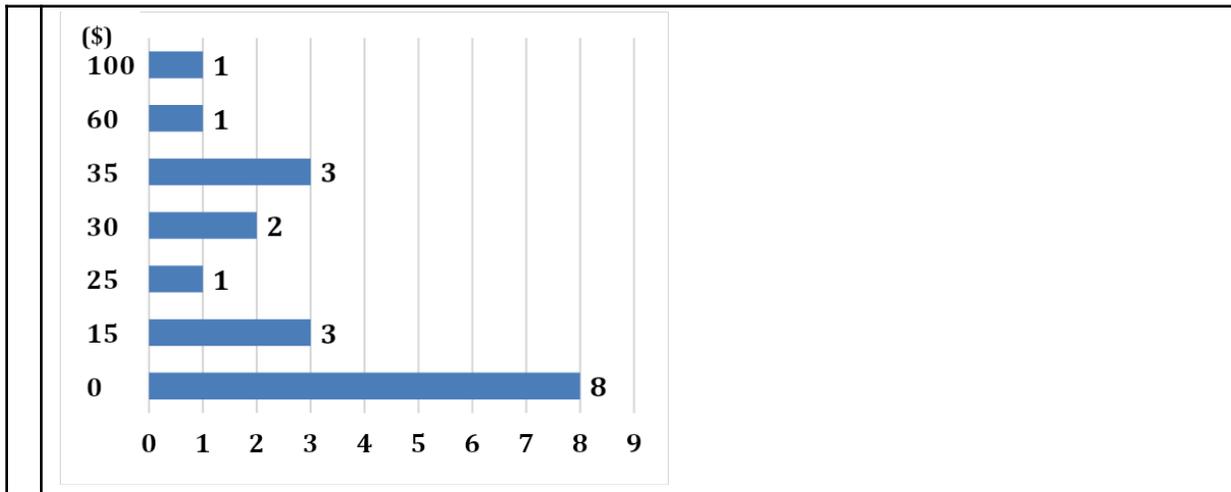
5. Do/Would you require background checks for international students? (N=68)



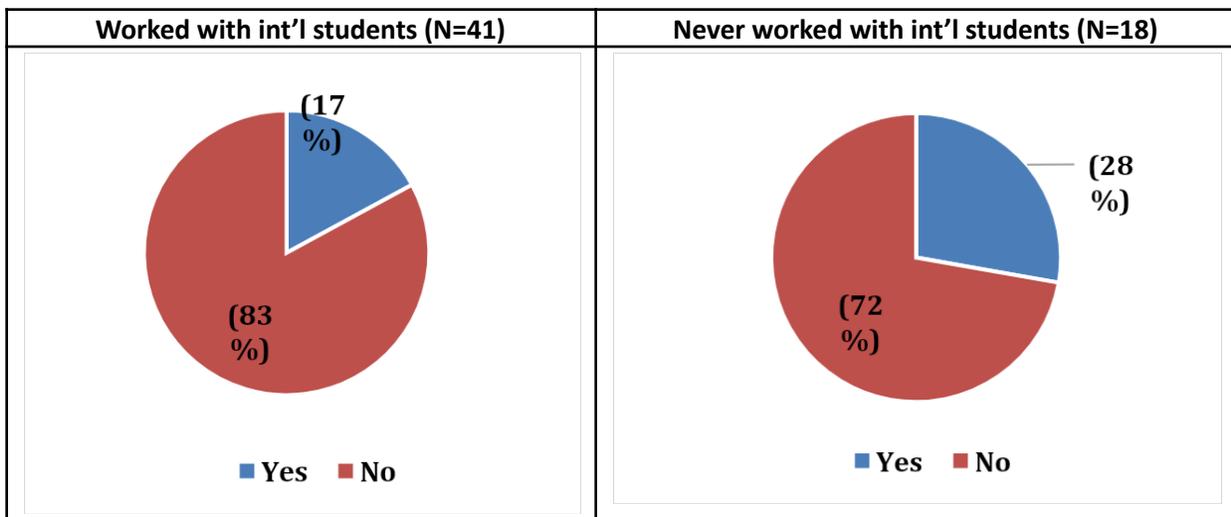
6. If YES, how long does/will it take to complete a background check for international students?



7. APPROXIMATELY WHAT IS THE TOTAL COST TO DO A BACKGROUND CHECK FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?



8. THE NEED TO COMPLETE BACKGROUND CHECK IS A HINDRANCE TO ACCEPTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?



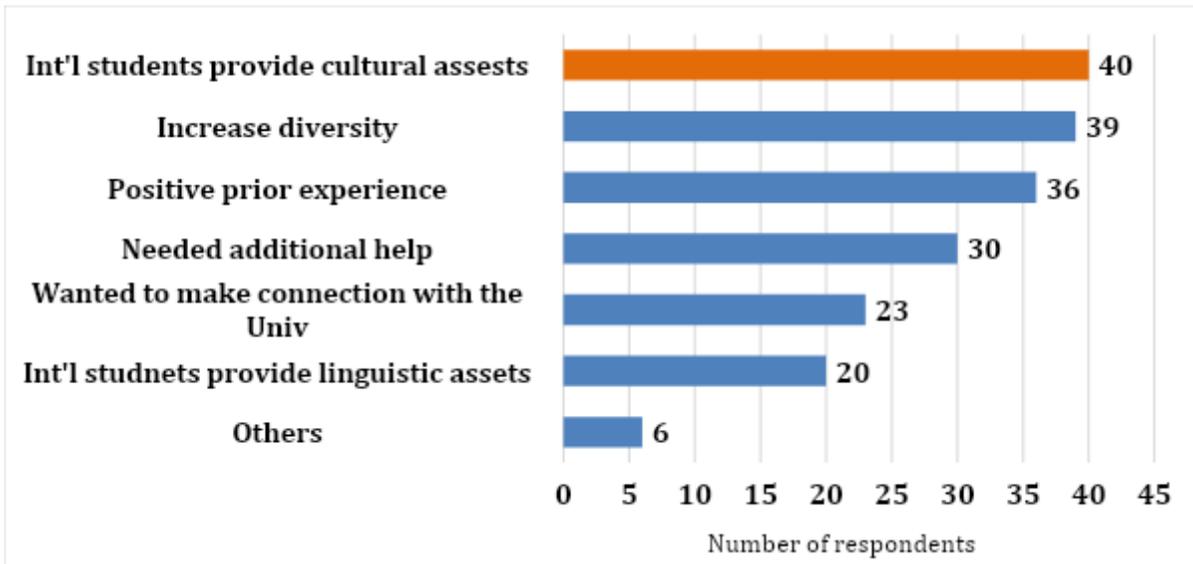
9. IF YES, PLEASE SAY MORE ABOUT WHY IT IS A HINDRANCE.

- It's a standard policy we have for anyone working with youth to have a background check. It applies to our staff, volunteers, interns, etc.
- Since a social security number isn't a viable option, I would rely on the interview and reference check. If the candidate wasn't able to provide references, it's unlikely a placement would be made through my program.
- By the time the student is able to start volunteering- nearly a month has gone by without complex background check system.
- I am not sure about this process for international students. I will have to approach our HR department for more information.
- Organization policy requires that we do background check for volunteers and staff who would be working with the young people we serve. It's a policy adopted to keep the youth safe and

assurance to parents/guardians that the person choosing to volunteer or work with us does not have a criminal background - mostly related to assault or abuse. Drug offenses are a case by case base.

- We do background checks on volunteers in certain positions - front desk, volunteers who have access to member data, therapist - and I have not allowed international volunteers in those positions because I do not know how to do background checks on international students.
- I am not the staff person who would handle a background check. But, I believe that all volunteers working with youth at my organization must undergo a background check. Not sure how that is handled for int'l students.
- Background checks are one of the things that affect how long it will take someone to move through our process and be able to start volunteering. This is likely to be more of an issue for the student than us, if they have a timeline for when they need to complete service hours.
- We haven't had to run background checks for international students/volunteers before. Our current background check that we are using is not comprehensive enough to cover other countries. I'm assuming that seeking a background check that would do so would definitely be more expensive and possibly take longer.
- We have had one international student. We arranged the position so we didn't need a background check but we don't want to continue to do this. We don't know how to do a background check on international students (our system uses driver's license and social security numbers that most international students don't have). Ideally, we would want help with this or would want the U of M to do the check.
- Without a SSN we are unable to run our traditional background check for international students. Instead, I have worked with our HR Manager to develop an alternative background check based off searching MN public record databases. I find great value in working with students from all backgrounds; developing an alternative background check process for international students was a year-long project that required buy-in from numerous organization stakeholders and members of leadership. It's not a hindrance, but I cannot complete a background check with the system we use. So, I bypass this requirement for volunteering.
- Our background check requires a social security number.
- I'm not sure if it's a hindrance or not, but I assume there are extra steps we would need to take to get a complete background check. Our current program does not do international checks.

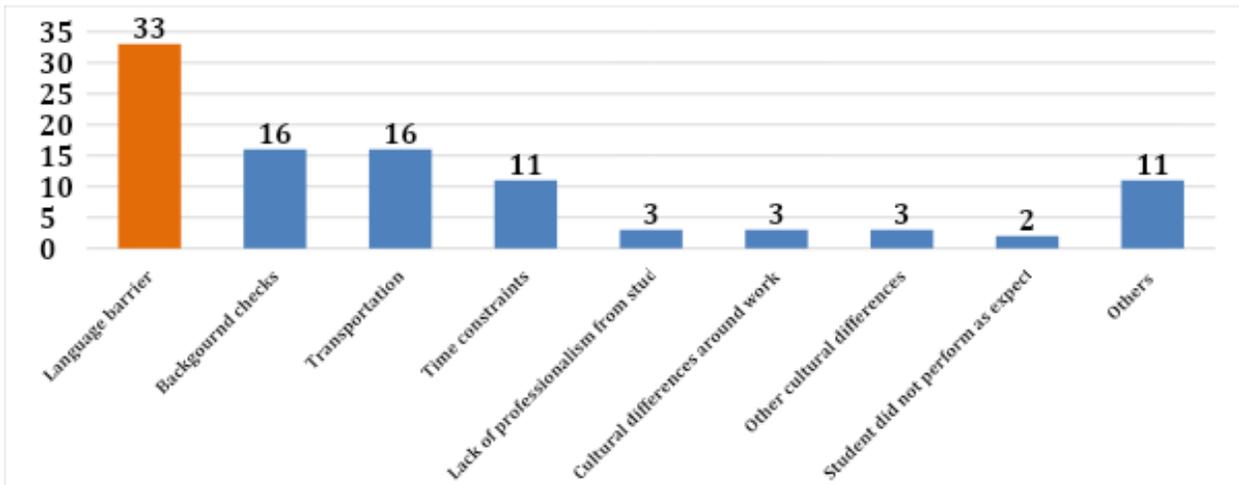
10. What were your reasons for accepting international as volunteers?



Others

- Welcoming students from other cultures into our program
- International students have empathy for English language learners.
- Part of a group of students working on a project
- If interest and availability fit volunteer positions and needs, we accept volunteers - including International students.
- We have a very diverse client, staff and volunteer population. We accept people based on their ability to fulfill a need and are fortunate that the diversity of our volunteer pool happens organically likely because of our location and our already diverse/multi-cultural environment/community.
- I believe students from all background deserve the opportunity to volunteer
- International students bring unique perspectives to our work

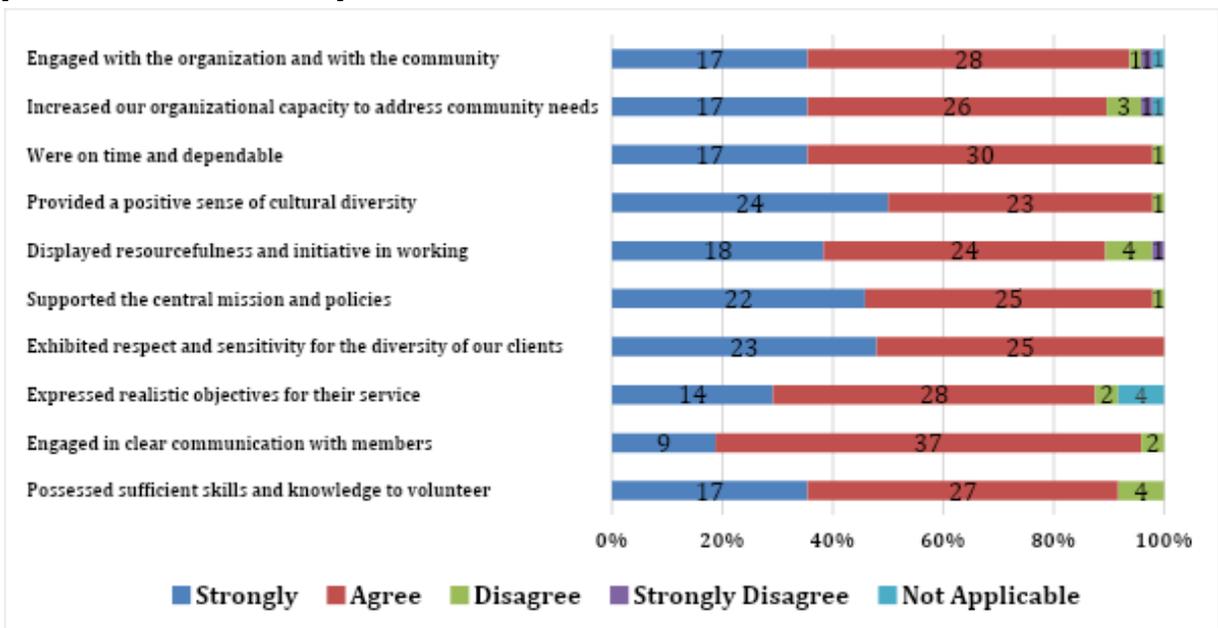
11. WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS? (SELECT ALL APPLY)



- ☐ The biggest challenge when working with international students was the language followed by background checks and difficulties of transportation.
- ☐ Cultural sensitivity on certain topic or religious beliefs may be an issue when working with participants.
- ☐ Others include references, academic issues, and some stated barriers of international students are similar to domestic students.

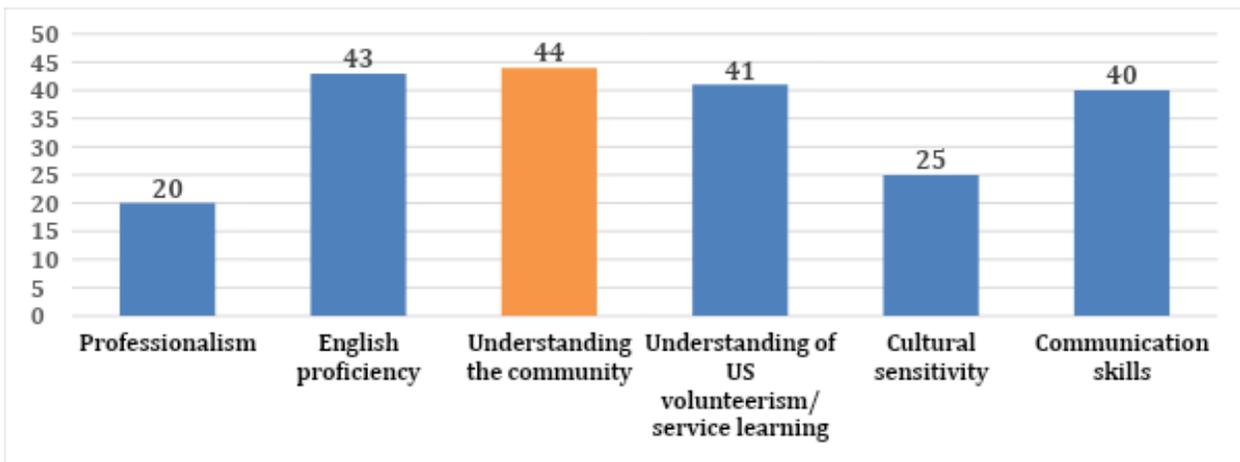
12. PLEASE INDICATE YOUR OVERALL LEVEL OF AGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS.

[Overall level of satisfaction]



- ☐ Overall, community partners were satisfied working with international students. They were most satisfied with students providing a positive sense of cultural diversity and exhibiting respect and sensitivity for the diversity of the clients.
- ☐ Highest scored satisfaction of international student volunteers is providing a positive sense of cultural diversity and exhibiting respect and sensitivity for the diversity of the clients.
- ☐ Areas for improvement include, engaging clear communication with members and displaying resourcefulness and initiative in working.

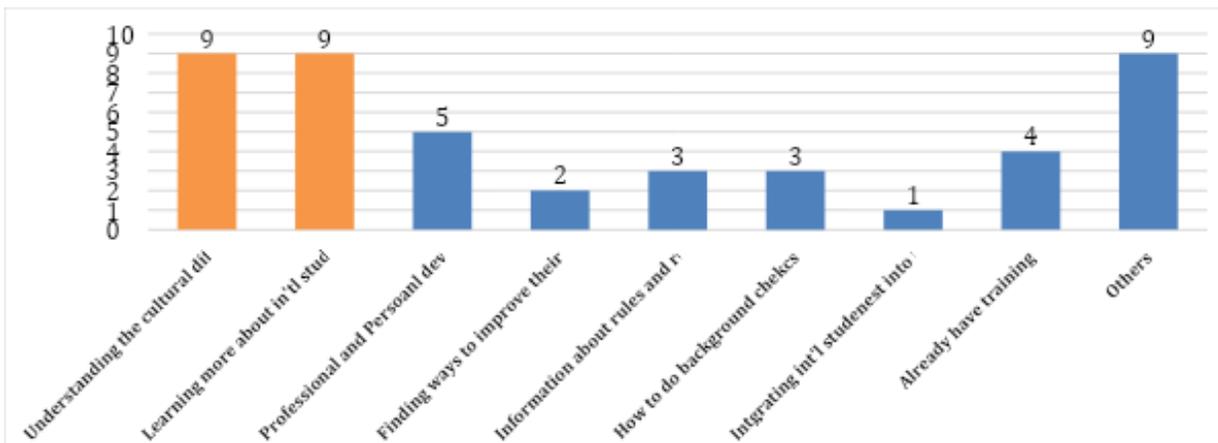
13. TO BETTER PREPARE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FOR VOLUNTEERING AND SERVING IN THE COMMUNITY, WHAT TYPES OF TRAINING OR RESOURCES WOULD YOU FIND USEFUL FOR STUDENTS TO HAVE PRIOR TO VOLUNTEERING IN YOUR ORGANIZATION? (PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)



Others include:

- Confidence that they can do it
- While I think the international students, I've worked with have demonstrated all these skills, I think it's useful to have a foundation of knowledge before volunteering in service learning projects.
- Organizing training
- I think the agency can/should do training on community/population served. The U could do the other training.
- I believe these are all topics that ALL students can benefit from. In some cases, it seems international students have already demonstrated leadership by virtue of choosing to attend school in another country and culture. The primary issue is that all volunteers need to be English Language Proficient
- International students have been the same as other students. Some bring more skills and better attitudes than others. All students need an understanding of how to take up the work of the organization and meet their obligations to the group.

14. WHAT RESOURCES OR TRAINING DO YOU THINK YOUR ORGANIZATION COULD USE PRIOR TO WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS? (N=40)

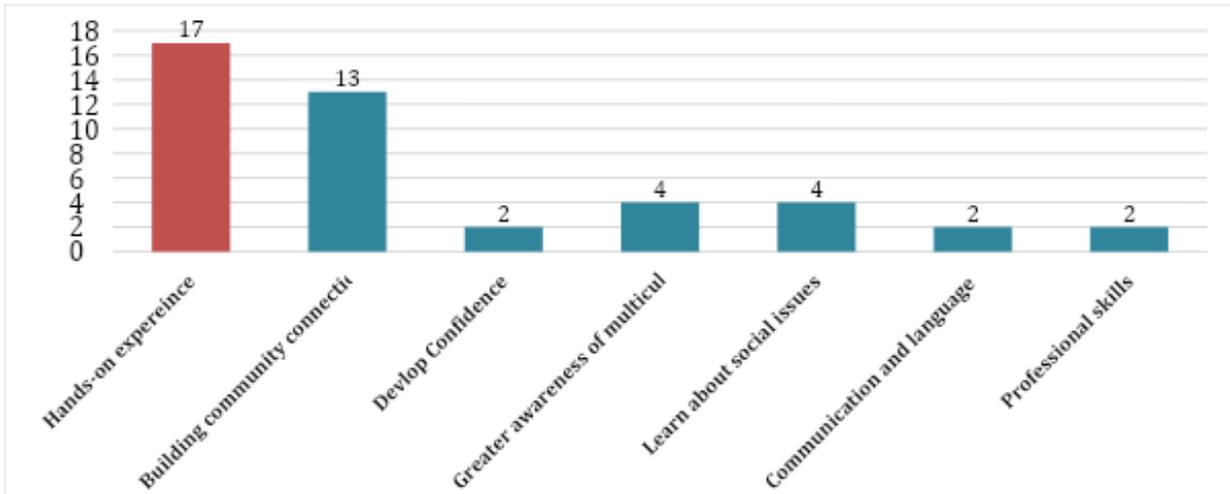


- ☑ Some of the comments made by the community partners were:
- Providing opportunities in understanding cultural differences
 - Providing training such as volunteer services best practices, cultural sensitivity, and awareness and professional and personal development
 - Finding out more about international students' experiences and finding ways to improve their experiences
 - Knowing information about any rules or regulations working with international students
 - Integrating int'l students into the community served

Others:

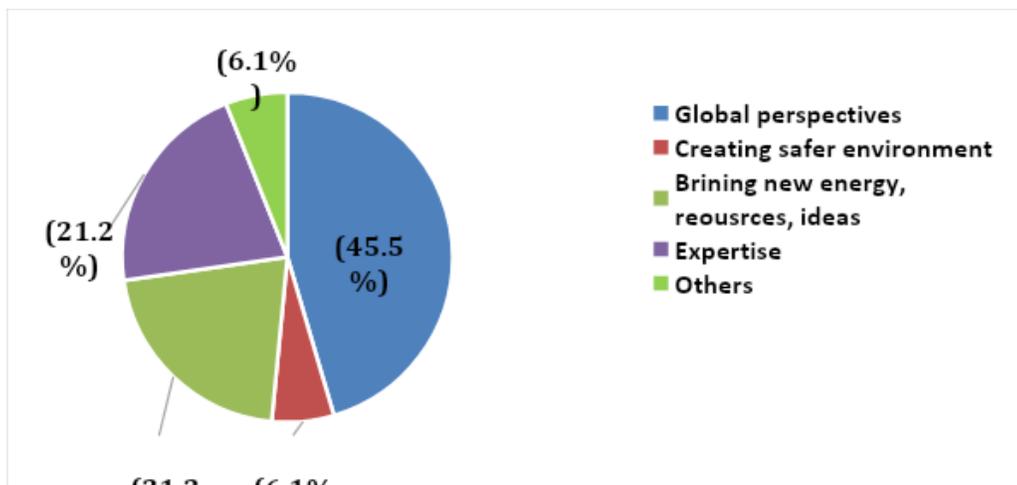
- 1) We do a good assessment of any volunteers wanting to work with us. As long as language isn't a barrier we can work with international students
- 2) Don't think this is necessary
- 3) Best practices for recruiting, selecting, and supporting
- 4) Our organization works well with international students
- 5) We would love to have more international students apply to work with us- so anything we could do to support that in happening would be really useful!
- 6) We have had very few international students so it's hard for me to generalize/see trends.
- 7) Not sure.
- 8) Since we do not screen based on international / national status and our outreach programs are typically mostly done through word-of-mouth, I think it would be great to have resources detailing where we would be able to advertise the program to international students.
- 9) I don't really think it's very different than working with residents

15. WHAT BENEFITS DO YOU THINK INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS RECEIVED BY VOLUNTEERING WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION? (N=44)



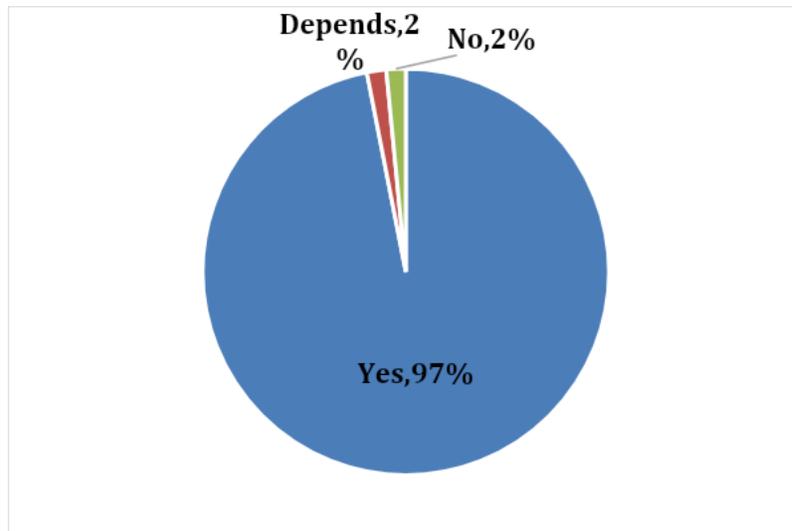
☐ The benefits students received by volunteering were mostly on obtaining hands-on experience in the US context and building community connection and having a greater awareness of multiculturalism and the diversity of the community.

16. WHAT UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS, IF ANY, DID INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS MAKE TO YOUR ORGANIZATION? (N=33)



☐ The most significant contributions mentioned was international students bringing global & diverse perspectives into the organization for both clients and staff.

17. WOULD YOUR ORGANIZATION BE WILLING TO WORK WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE FUTURE? IN WHICH AREA? WHY? (N=65)



- ☐ Almost all partners expressed they want to continue working with international students.
 - Some had specific areas they wanted to work with such as performing arts, visual arts, one-to-one adult literacy tutors, Spanish language speakers.
 - There were two responses where they raised concerns about international students' English proficiency and the limited time (one semester) they can work at the organization.

18. DO YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND/OR SUGGESTIONS?

- Interview is the best tool to learn more about volunteers, review expectation and determine suitability to perform the duties.
- Having more information on hiring process of international students would be helpful for the community partners.
- Find an easier way to get reference will help to keep the application process moving.
- International students are a great asset to the community and wish to have more volunteers.

PHASE 2: INTERVIEW RESULTS

- ☐ In addition to the online survey, in-depth interviews were conducted in-person and by telephone.
- ☐ A total 22 individuals participated from various types of organizations who had experience working with international students.
- ☐ The purpose of the interview was to understand community partners' motives, challenges, and other perspectives on working with international students.

Key Findings:

1. Have you ever worked with international students from University of Minnesota or from other campuses? How many? From where?

- Majority of community partners did not know the country of origin of international students. Yet, many were from Asia which reflected UMN's demographic. None of the organizations required students to identify their nationality in their application. Some were confused whether students were immigrants or international students.
- Organizations on average, had 3-5 international students a year coming from China, Korea, and India.
- Most of the students worked for a semester and a few worked for a year or longer.

2. What is the process for applying for to be a volunteer position with your organization? 2a. Do you require background checks, resumes, and references?

- All of the organizations have a typical process for applying for the volunteer position (online application, short interview). Almost no organization required a resume.
- Medical related organization required detailed processes compared to other organizations.
- Many of them, especially organizations working with children, required background checks.
- Few organizations did not require background checks because they do not have the capacity.
- Some require professional references for all volunteers and cited that as a challenge for international students.

3. What motivated you or your organization to accept international students into your organization? 3a. What motivates you to continue the relationship?

- Major motivations of organizations were: international students bring cultural diversity into the organization, being a good model to the ESL students, have specific skills (knowing how to play squash, which is not a popular sport in the U.S, know specific language e.g., Korean, Spanish etc.)
- They bring new energy and dynamics in the organization.
- Most of them accepted international students because they applied for the position.

4. How would you describe the value of international student volunteers to your organizations? What contributions do they make?

4a. Are these different from US/domestic students volunteering?

- Almost all interviewees emphasized the value international students presence because they 1) bring cultural diversity in the organization 2) bring specific skills
- Also, the majority said they aren't different from US/domestic students other than bringing certain language skills and culture.

5. What challenges and barriers do you face when working with international student volunteers in your organization? How do you manage these challenges?

- Not many of them expressed challenges or barriers working with international students.
- The major challenge working with international students was language.
- International students are not familiar/aware of the US culture or how to communicate with diverse people.

6. Do you have any special language requirements (e.g., English proficiency standards, TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS) for volunteers?

- Even though language barriers were somewhat of an issue, none of the organizations required English proficiency standards and most of them weren't aware of standard tests.
- Few said they can identify student's level of English during the interview. None of the organization have rejected students because of their English proficiency.

6a. Do you have any other specific language preferences for volunteers? (e.g., Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali etc.)

- Depending on the type of the organization and clients they serve, some organizations said they would like to have volunteers with specific language skills such as Somali, Korean.

7. What resources does your organization allocate to the relationship with the University of Minnesota? Financial/human/other?

- Majority of organizations allocated human resources when working with all volunteers, such as orientation, mentorship, supervising.
- None of them gave financial resources to the students.

7a. Does working with international students require additional resources beyond the typical resources needed?

- None of the interviewees said international students required additional resources beyond the typical resources.

8. What do you think international students get out of the relationships?

- Students will gain both practical and cultural experience beyond campus.
- Understand the U.S society, especially population with low socio-economic status.
- Understanding the meaning of volunteerism.
- Gain confidence through volunteering.

9. What could University of Minnesota(CCEL) do to support you and your organization when working with international students?

- Many answered the university and CCEL is doing a great job especially disseminating information through newsletters and workshops.
- Some organizations wanted more information about international students' culture and their experience working with organizations
- Also, create a training seminar around hiring process (background checks, transportation, reference).

9a. What could faculty do to support you in working with international students from their classes or to support international students working in your organization?

- Many haven't thought of this question and only a few had experience meeting/working with faculty at the U.
- Giving out clearer directions to the students (application process)

- Include more curriculum around volunteering.
- Provide more opportunities for international students and domestic students to work together.

9b. What could international students do to be more effective in your organization?

- Many were satisfied with the performance of international students.
- Have confidence and initiative taking, expand understanding of U.S working culture and culture in general and know that they are greatly valued.

9c. What could your organization do differently to support international student working with your organization?

- Learn how to do background checks.
- Set up meetings and gatherings with students.
- Provide better facilities (bigger spaces) for students.

10. Is there anything else that you would like to add that I may have missed in my questions?

This interview gave an opportunity to community partners to think about working with international student. A few interviewees mentioned they will raise this issue during next staff meeting and see how other staff are doing with international students.