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SERIES IN SOCIOLOGY

CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES IN US HIGHER EDUCATION



Kruti S. Chaliawala

Cultural Influences and International Students

Understanding Academic Experiences in US Higher Education

SERIES IN SOCIOLOGY

About the author

Kruti S. Chaliawala, PhD, CHES, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Public and Population Health at Boise State University. As an international scholar from India who spent over 14 years navigating the U.S. academic system as an international student, she brings both lived experience and academic expertise to her work. Her research centers on psychosocial determinants of health, health disparities among international students and minority populations, mental health, and sexual health. Her dissertation, 'Balancing Health Abroad: A Comprehensive Study of International Students' Sexual Health and Psychological Well-Being', directly informed the content of this book. Her earlier Master of Science thesis also focused on 'Sexual Health Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors Amongst South Asian International Students'.

Dr. Chaliawala's interdisciplinary training in public health education and her commitment to health equity guide her community-engaged research, which often explores how cultural identity, institutional policy, and psychosocial stressors intersect to shape health outcomes. She has presented her scholarship at over 30 national, state, and regional conferences. Her body of work highlights the structural challenges and resilience within marginalized communities, with a particular focus on the lived experiences of international students in U.S. higher education.

In the classroom, Dr. Chaliawala teaches courses such as "Culture, Equity, and Health," drawing from both evidence-based frameworks and her lived experiences to inform pedagogical practice. Her academic training is complemented by extensive leadership and service. She organized research symposia and developed programs to address community-building and belonging as the leader of the graduate international organization on a college campus. She also served on the mental health committee, where she contributed to strategies focused on culturally responsive mental health support for graduate students.

These scholarly, pedagogical, and service-based experiences collectively equip Dr. Chaliawala with comprehensive and authoritative insight into the cultural, psychological, and institutional dimensions shaping international students' academic and health trajectories.

Summary

Navigating the intricate landscape of U.S. higher education can be profoundly challenging for international students. This groundbreaking work offers a vital, dual perspective, interweaving deeply personal lived experiences with rigorous academic research to illuminate the multifaceted journey of cultural and academic adaptation.

Beyond the author's compelling narrative in the preface, the book shares personal stories, making complex challenges tangible and relatable. From dissecting the nuances of U.S. grading systems and academic culture to exploring complex social integration, language proficiency hurdles, and the pervasive challenges of "othering" and discrimination, this book provides an honest and comprehensive account. A unique focus is placed on the distinct barriers faced by female students from conservative cultural backgrounds, offering empathetic insight into their unique struggles with participation, social norms, and mental well-being. Distinguished by its blend of personal narrative and evidence-based solutions, this book transcends mere description. It critically examines the role of institutional support, advocating for culturally sensitive mentorship, inclusive classroom practices, tailored mental health services, and essential cultural competency training for faculty and staff.

'Cultural Influences and International Students' is an indispensable resource for current and prospective international students seeking to understand and prepare for their journey. It is also an essential guide for higher education professionals, including faculty, advisors, administrators, and policymakers, providing actionable strategies to foster truly inclusive environments. This work stands as a powerful call to action for transforming U.S. campuses into spaces where every international student can thrive academically and personally.

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