

The integration of exchange students at AUI

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Abstract

This research paper is based on a study of the integration of exchange students within Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane community. The purpose of the research is to evaluate the level of this integration, according to different points of view: exchange students, Moroccan students, staff and faculty members, collected through Interviews and surveys. Through the procedure of the study, the team tried also to determine whether the exchange programs are beneficial for foreign students and for the AUI community, and to assess the level of achievement of the exchange goals. The research process revealed that there are two major opinions: the first group of the subjects considers that the exchange at AUI is a positive and beneficial experience, and the second one who think that this experience is not really favorable due to the lack of some conditions crucial to its success. All in all, the subjects gave suggestions to improve the integration of exchange students into the AUI community, in order to attain a high level of achievement of the goals of the exchange programs. Therefore, AUI as well as other foreign universities would better take those suggestions into consideration so that the exchange programs accomplish their mission for the benefit of both the foreign students and the hosting university.

Introduction

Exchange programs are programs which allow students, faculty, staff and researchers to go abroad to foreign universities or schools for a determined period of time (a summer, a semester, a year, etc). Exchange programs offer people from different nationalities the opportunity to enlarge their cultural perspectives, and to discover different languages, religions and customs. Exchange programs became popular after World War II, considering their role in teaching their participants tolerance and promoting cross-cultural communication (Wikipedia.org). The college exchange programs are generally the result of agreements between universities from different parts of the world; they can be divided into models(two types that are the following: long term exchange which lasts more than one academic year (10months), and short term exchange which is only for a summer session, one semester or for one academic year). Because of these differences, the costs and application process can vary from one university to another. Obviously, like every international program, the exchange programs were set in order to achieve specific goals. According to the Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane website, some of the goals of exchange programs are “to expand international awareness, promote productive intercultural interaction and foster tolerance and sensitivity in students, faculty and administration” (www.aui.ma).

Since exchange programs were created basically in the purpose of enhancing the wealth of multicultural interaction at academic and social levels, it is important to question and assess the achievement of this aim. In some point of views, exchange programs do not successfully attain their goals due to religious and cultural differences, intolerance, etc. Therefore, theses barriers might in some cases prevent exchange students from integrating in the receiving community. It means that they are not able to be an equal and homogenous part of the population they live with during the exchange period.

This paper deals specifically with the case of Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane. AUI has several agreements with different partners from the five continents, and offers the opportunity for Moroccans to go abroad as well as for foreigners to study in Morocco.

The research team assumed that exchange students do not integrate within the AUI community based on some noticed phenomenon: groups formed exclusively by exchange students, problems they face in administrative and social services due their lack of fluency in the host country's language, etc. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of AUI exchange programs at meeting their stated goals.

Thus, it was appropriate to ask the following question: "What are the reasons that prevent exchange students from integrating into AUI community, and what role do cultural differences play in this situation?" This was discussed in terms of integration, interaction between students, and cultural barriers. Using surveys and interviews, the team tried to define both strengths and weaknesses of the exchange experience from AUI exchange and Moroccan students' perspective in order to evaluate how successful the practice of the idea is.

Literature review

The research questions of the topic are "what prevent exchange students from integrating within the AUI community? What role does culture play in this non-integration? Does that mean that exchange programs goals are not achieved?" To be able to answer to these questions, the research team first needed to gather information about exchange programs, especially those related to AUI, and then gather information in relation with culture differences and the role it plays in preventing integration of exchange students.

The purposes of exchange programs, either at the individual or the social levels, are commonly agreed among educational professionals. As stated in Nacht (1988), "the goals of student exchange programs can range from being a grand tour to exploring one's roots to

improving international relations”. This is what Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) explained

“At the start of the 21st century, one of the most prominent features of our time is globalization, which has led to a greater sense of interconnectedness than ever known before. Yet, the prevalence of violence and acts of terror around the globe have also heightened people’s awareness of our differences and our need to understand each other in order to overcome the great challenges which face us all with regard to health, environmental sustainability, and violence. Over the past thirty years, educators throughout the world have tried to help students understand our interconnectedness and to help weave a garment of global awareness and mutuality by building international bridges of understanding through the promotion of study abroad”.

By noting that exchange programs “have the goal of improving language skills and communication with foreigners, they also tend to focus on individual development and international understanding”, Kraft, Ballantine, and Garvey (1994) agree with the idea of American University Center of Provence (AUCP, 2004). This Center sees that among the goals of exchange programs is “to create circumstances that would allow students to achieve optimal results in the acquisition of foreign language and in the development of cross-cultural sensitivity and skills”. In relation to this idea, there can be a reference to ESN, which is an international student-run organization that has as a major goal the integration of foreigners in the host community.

From another perspective, the exchange programs seem to also have a beneficial economic impact on their participants. This is what was supported by Fugate and Jefferson

(2001), who states that “The academic community has fallen behind in preparing students to be “global citizens” who can compete with other nations and work and live in different countries. Therefore, institutions of higher education and state governments also see student exchange programs as a vital way of competing in the global market place”.

According to the research, cultural differences play a big role in the non integration of exchange students within a receiving community, and this is due to many aspects of those cultural differences: lack cultural consciousness, individualism, long term orientation, and language. All those factors illustrate the difficulties that exchange students face when they live in a foreign country for a determined period of time. This information was gathered from different sources but the common point is that each one gave a new perspective that showed how important the role played by culture is in the non-integration of foreign students. Indeed, one of the most important key words of the study is cultural consciousness, which assumes two things: “a) an individual must have an understanding of his or her own worldview, and b) humans have the capacity to reduce their ethnocentrism (Hanvey, 1982). Much of the information that has been gathered about the research topic was about this main idea of culture consciousness. The degree of culture consciousness achieved by the student is the main element which determines how good or difficult the exchange experience could be. Therefore, the information has been divided into two parts: a first part dealt with the main components of cross-cultural awareness, and a second part was about the different levels of cross-cultural awareness.

Hanvey also states that among the key concepts that are part of cross-cultural awareness we find the following: 1-Individualism; which is the degree of individual and collective achievement within a given society, and it also indicates whether interpersonal relationships tend to be close or not. The ability for an exchange student to accept the high or low individualism ranking in comparison with his country’s ranking could be factor of his

adaptation in the receiving community. 2-Long term orientation; which indicates whether a society relies on traditional thoughts and beliefs or not; it implies also the degree of tolerance, and in comparison with his/her own incoming society, an exchange student can feel at ease and easily integrate within a new society or not. 3-Language; which is a very important part of a society's culture, and if an exchange student is not fluent in the language of the receiving country, it could be very difficult for him/her to integrate because most people don't make the effort to speak a foreign language in order to communicate with exchanges.

Cross-cultural awareness is also characterized by its different levels: The first level is characterized by the fact of having vague information and some stereotypes about another culture. For example, when coming to AUI, most exchange students don't know Morocco and may consider people living there as indigenous. At the second level, there is a contrast established between one's own culture and the other. The third level is characterized by an acceptance of the other culture. Finally, the fourth level is the one where "empathy" is achieved, which means that foreigners start seeing the other culture as "insiders" (Hanvey, 1982). According to the research, most of the time, exchange student don't pass the third level, but they cannot achieve the fourth level because they are in a country only for a short period of time.

To synthesize the results of the research, exchange students can difficultly integrate during the short exchange period because of many factors that prevent them from integration, such as the level of tolerance and the lack of cultural consciousness. Thus, the achievement of exchange programs' goals is challenged, even with the presence of some associations that try to help foreigners to integrate within the host community.

The next sections emphasize on the barriers that prevent exchange students from integration at the level of AUI, and the reason behind them.

Design

As stated previously in the research paper, the research questions are the following: “what prevents AUI exchange students from integrating within the AUI community? What role does culture play in this non integration?” To answer those questions, the research team needs concrete information gathered directly on the field. This information had to be gathered from the people concerned with the issue, which includes AUI students, staff, and faculty in order to evaluate the validity of the assumptions and the hypothesis stated by the team before. Concerning the data needed in the research topic, the team decided that the best way to gather relevant information was doing surveys and interviews, which means that the members of the team first did a pilot study in order to find the difficulties and misunderstandings that respondents might encounter when filling surveys, and to figure out the best way to overcome them. Thus, the research team used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The first one was used through interviewing people and relying on their experiences, and the second one by conducting surveys that gave meaningful statistics. Those statistics showed to what extent the team’s assumptions are true or false. This means that the study was a descriptive and analytical one which the team preceded by gathering data and giving the most relevant interpretation to them.

Subjects

There were many difficulties to overcome when distributing a survey, such as choosing the right time to talk to people or finding the correct way to talk to them in order to gain their collaboration and attention. Surveys were distributed at AUI to exchange students, Moroccan students, staff, and faculty. The whole mission was divided into two parts, the first one was for exchange students, and the second was for AUI students, faculty and staff. Also, the team surveyed both males and females in order to give an equal opportunity for the two genders to give their opinions which allowed for balanced points of view. The sample

included faculty members that the team members went to see in their offices, staff members from the enrollment and the library, and Moroccan students. Faculty members were chosen because they teach exchange students in their classes, so they can tell about their interaction in the classroom with Moroccans. AUI students were chosen randomly in the library, computer laboratories, and restaurant.

The number of exchange students supposed to be surveyed is 19 since the population size is 20. That sample size was chosen according to Krejcie and Morgan in the article "What sample size is "enough" in internet survey research". Even if the number 19 does not differ from the population size, the rule says that if the population size decrease the sample size should increase. However, only 15 exchange students could be surveyed because of time constraints. The sample size of the survey for the AUI community as a whole was chosen according to Gay and Diehl, (1992) in the same article, since they said: "for descriptive research the sample should be 10% of population. But if the population is small then 20% may be required". Therefore, the sample size was taken from the AUI community as a whole (students, staff, and faculty) which is approximately 1200; the sample size is 120, it was chosen because this was an adequate that led to trustworthy and consistent results. However, only 100 surveys were filled in.

Data Gathering tools

Two types of surveys were required. The first survey was addressed to the whole AUI community in order to obtain their opinions about the integration of exchange students, the level of achievement of exchange programs' goals, to what extent those programs are beneficial for the university and the students and what they believe should be done to improve the incorporation into the whole community. The second survey was for exchange students since they were asked specific questions about their experience, that Moroccan students were not required to answer. For example, the difficulties they encounter; the

benefits from their experience; and their suggestions for improving the environment to easily integrate in. Furthermore, they are more aware than anyone else of their real conditions.

Both types included both closed and open questions. The AUI community surveys included 2 closed and 3 open questions, while the exchange students' survey included 3 closed and 3 open questions.

Regarding the interviews, the project included four. The team interviewed both faculty and students. First, an Arabic teacher was expected to be interviewed, but he was not available. Consequently, AUI counselor was interviewed instead. Also, the previous director of the Office of International Programs was interviewed because he knows the kinds of problems that exchange students face. Then, the team interviewed two exchange students at AUI. Therefore, the questions for the two interviews were different. The team was looking for official information that could help reaching a general idea about the achievement of the exchange objectives. The first interview included four open questions asking faculty as professionals and experts about their perspectives toward exchange programs and their evaluation of the integration of exchange students. The second interview included seven open questions. The two exchange students were asked about the difficulties they have encountered with the campus services, such as trying to be understood by staff; and their interaction with Moroccan students in spaces not related to studies. Also, other questions focused on the stereotypes they had before and their personal experience to figure out the common ideas between them, and their suggestions to improve their status and reach a higher level of integration. The questions were objectively oriented and concise in order to reduce bias and make it easy for students and faculty to answer honestly. The purpose was to figure out both differences and similarities among those answers concerning the integration of foreign students with Moroccan ones.

Distributing surveys required taking many things into consideration, such as choosing

the right time and the right words to get people interested in the topic, and gain their cooperation. Therefore, the team discussed how the surveys would be distributed in order to get the highest rate of responses. The surveys were distributed in the restaurant in order to get responses from a maximum number of people, and in the library and the labs because people there are already concentrated and working so they could read the surveys carefully and answer them. Of course, some of the students welcomed answering and filling in surveys, and others did not fill them since they were reluctant to talk and give their opinions. Also, students complained that the questions were a little bit difficult or long, would take a lot of time since some questions required justifications (six questions: open, closed, and multiple choices). In addition, staff and faculty members asked for at least one day to have the surveys filled in, and the team members rarely had the surveys back completely filled. The team members were adequately prepared to answer any question about the topic.

Results

The research question, as already stated, is “what prevents AUI exchange students from integrating within the AUI community, and what role does culture play in this non integration?”. The surveys and interviews were conducted in order to check the validity of the team’s assumptions about the lack of integration of exchange students. Therefore, Moroccan students, staff, and faculty were asked, through surveys, to give their estimations about the issue, the main reason that may prevent exchange students from integrating, their vision of AUI exchange programs, and their propositions to improve those programs. Therefore, it took almost a week to complete the surveys and get approximately all of them back. After having the surveys’ results, the team conducted the interviews: two interviews with two exchange students, one with the AUI counselor, and the last one with the ex- director of the Office of International Programs. It was important to present the data gathered in the form of graphs and tables because the team used surveys to get information, so percentages needed to be

given. The results presented show that the most precise and specific answers were given by students because they are the ones primarily concerned with the issue. Surveys' results will be presented first, according to each category of respondents; AUI Moroccan students, exchange students, faculty, and staff. Then, interview results will be presented next, for both the faculty interviews and the exchange students' interviews.

This table contains the results for the first question in the two different surveys:

Figure1: Reasons that explain the lack of integration of exchange students in AUI

Reasons	Moroccan students	Exchange students	Staff	Faculty
Culture differences	39%	53%	53%	55%
Religion	13%	26%	26%	5%
Stereotypes	37%	20%	13%	29%
Tolerance of the host country towards other cultures	3%	0%	2%	6%
Differences in social environment(social activities and clubs offered by AUI)	8%	6.5%	6%	5%

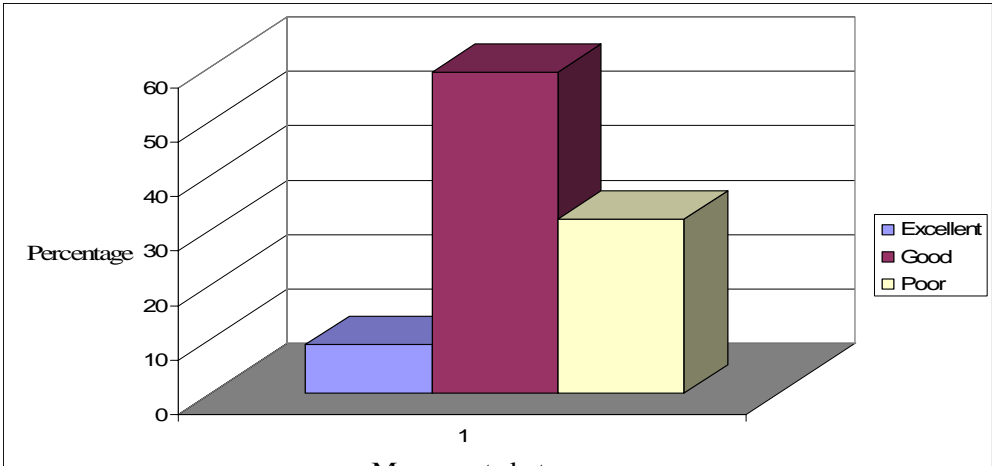
Moroccan students: N= 100

Exchange students: N=15

Staff: N= 20

Faculty: N=10

Figure2: level of integration of exchange students according to Moroccan students.



N= 100

The first open question in the surveys for the AUI community asked for the achievement of exchange programs. 49% of the students surveyed thought that the goals are not achieved. Half of these students blamed AUI because it does not provide enough opportunities for exchange and Moroccan students to increase interaction, such as organizing more social events. 30% of these students assumed that the exchange period is not enough in order for students to integrate, and the other 20% stated that it is not easy to get involved in an Arab culture.

51% of Moroccan students surveyed thought that the goals of exchange programs in AUI are achieved and they used different justifications. Some said that exchange students seem to be open to the Moroccan culture. Others thought that their willingness to discover Moroccan tradition is a sign that ensures the success of AUI exchange programs. Also, some students stated that gaining a new experience is in itself a big achievement.

In the second open question, that asked about whether exchange programs are beneficial to the university or not, 91% of Moroccan students considered that exchange programs are beneficial to AUI, and the benefits of exchange programs were divided into three categories. 65% of these students thought that these programs are beneficial for Moroccan students because, through them, they can learn about other cultures through individuals, practice their English, make new friends, and exchange ideas. They can benefit from these advantages either here at AUI, or if they go on an exchange experience. 15% of

Moroccan students represent the second category which considered international programs beneficial for exchange students themselves since they take advantages from their experiences. They discover the Moroccan social environment and have a concrete idea about Morocco. The remaining 20% of Moroccan students' portion believed that exchange programs are beneficial for AUI because the university takes advantage from the fact that the university is known abroad to higher its reputation.

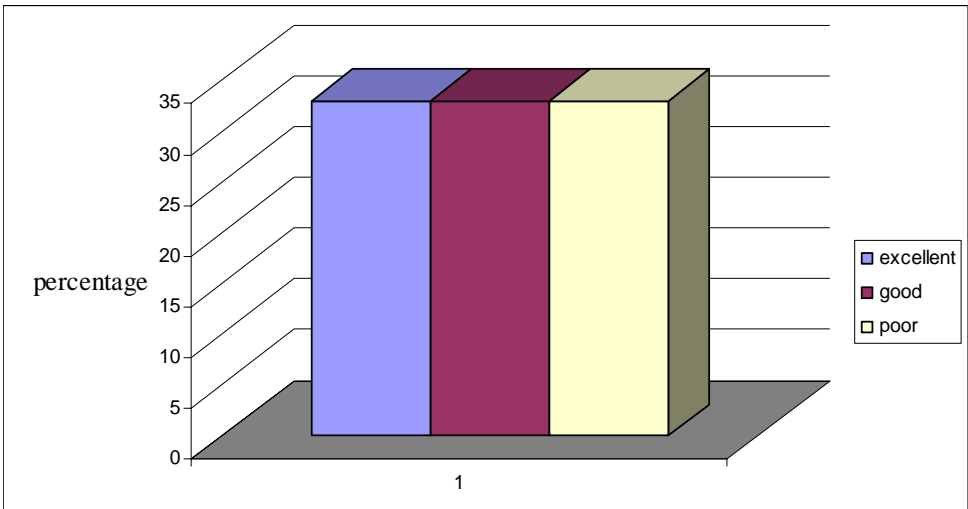
9% of AUI students did not consider exchange programs beneficial for AUI because the lack of integration of foreigners within the university prevents exchange programs from being beneficial. In addition, Moroccan students noticed that exchange students stay together most of the time, so they communicate with each more than with Moroccan students. Other students thought that exchange students already have stereotypes before coming to Morocco. Therefore, they deal with Moroccans in a distant way in order to avoid problems.

The third open question in the survey asked for suggestions for the purpose of improving AUI exchange programs. 70% suggested that more clubs and activities should be organized.

According to them, these activities give exchange and Moroccan students opportunities to interact. 10% of students thought that it would be a good thing if foreigners come to Morocco with their minds free of stereotypes. 20% of students gave a variety of suggestions; for example, exchange students should be oriented before coming to AUI, and provide background information for both Moroccan and exchange students about each other cultures.

The results of staff surveys are presented next.

Figure 3: the level of integration of exchange students according to staff members

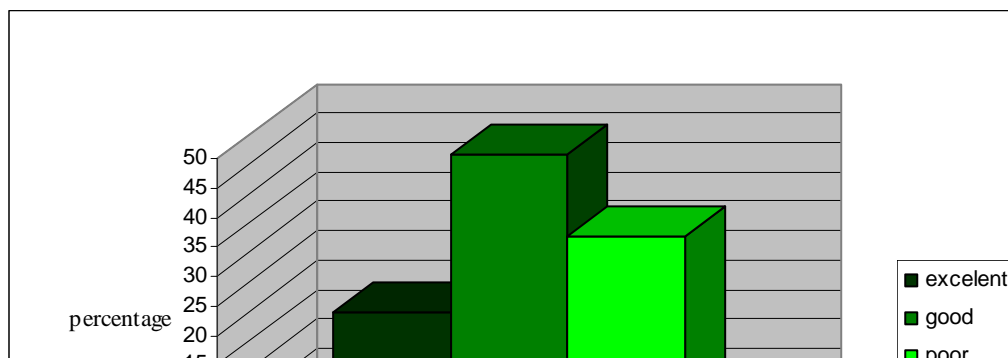


N= 20

Concerning the first open question, 40% of staff asked thought that the goals of international programs are met because exchange programs foster students' tolerance towards each others religion and culture. 26% thought that the goals of exchange programs are not achieved, mainly because foreign students coming to Morocco have a lot of stereotypes about the country and lack tolerance towards the culture. 33% had no opinion. Regarding question 2, 67% of AUI staff believed that exchange programs are beneficial to the university because they offer opportunity to students to have new experiences not only at the professional level but also at the social one, while 33% had no opinion about the issue. Finally, the staff gave a variety of suggestions to improve exchange programs. They proposed orientation sessions in both the home and the host country, creation of associations for exchange students with ambassadors to represent them, and a greater contact with Moroccan families in order to get to know more about the culture, because AUI is not really representative of the country's culture.

The results for exchange students' surveys are presented next.

Figure 3: level of integration of exchange students at AUI according to exchange students



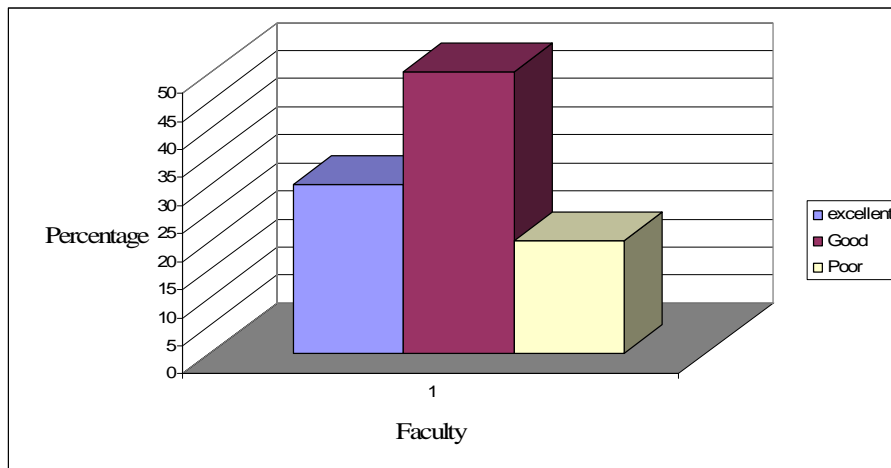
N=15

According to the surveys done with exchange students, the most important reason which prevents them from integrating within AUI is culture differences. The opinions are divided quite equally between exchange students who thought that the goals of exchange programs are not met and those who thought they are. The first category represented by 53% of the students, gave as main reasons for the lack of interaction between Moroccans and foreign students the fact that foreign students consider themselves as superior and stay only with exchange students as clicks. Also, AUI is not representative of the reality of Morocco. On the other hand, there are 47% of exchange students who thought that the goals of exchange programs are fully achieved because they are enjoying the country and the people, and they make new friends from another culture. Concerning their personal experience, 74% of exchange students are satisfied with their experience at AUI and think that it was beneficial to them because they are learning a new language, meeting new people and enjoying the country and its culture. However, 26% of them are not enjoying the experience mainly because of the language barriers and the lack of organization in the institutions. Among those students, 67% thought that exchange programs are beneficial for AUI and 33% thought they are not.

Finally, exchange students gave suggestions to improve the achievement of the exchange programs' goals among which appear: organizing more "ice-breaking" activities, having associations with ambassadors representing the foreign students, having meetings and group orientations at the home university so that they could have a realistic idea about Morocco before coming, and, finally, putting exchange students with Moroccan roommates instead of together.

The results of faculty surveys are presented next.

Figure 4: level of integration of exchange students according to AUI faculty.



N=10

Concerning faculty, they all think that the goals of exchange programs are achieved because students who go on exchange abroad, profit from that experience and become more sensitive to the needs of exchange students on campus. Moreover, they discover other cultures as well as others' thoughts about Moroccan culture in order to find out a way to reduce bias and try to present Morocco in a good image.

100% of AUI faculty also considered AUI exchange programs beneficial for AUI, for exchange students, and Moroccan students. Among the given justifications are that those students get a huge knowledge about diverse cultures; therefore, they will not face any problems dealing with other people if they go abroad for work or studies.

In order to improve AUI exchange programs, faculty suggested that activities and meetings should be organized to help exchange students get involved in Moroccan culture gradually. In addition, seminars should be organized in order to inform Moroccans about the importance of other cultures, such as celebrating international cousin days. Also, Moroccan students should share rooms with exchange students, and take them to their hometowns

Concerning the interviews, two exchange students and two faculty members were interviewed. The results of the interviews are presented here.

The first interview was conducted on November 14th, 2006 with George, an American exchange student in AUI where he is living his first exchange experience. He was asked if he is used to travel a lot because travelling may have an influence on his interaction with foreigners, but the answer was not really the case. He travelled abroad only two times to India, which is his country of origin. When he was asked to state whether his exchange experience was beneficial, the response was positively arguing that it allowed him to discover a new country, new people from a different culture and allowed him to learn about how they think about religion, politics, etc. Concerning the difficulties he faced in AUI, he said that language was the strongest one, since Moroccans are used to speak Arabic or French that exchange students do not understand. He added that his ignorance of the Moroccan traditions was also an obstacle, and the last difficulty he mentioned was the tendency of people, especially in selling, to cheat foreigners on prices, etc. When the stereotypes that exchange students had on Morocco were discussed whether they were true or false, the respondent stated that, according to what he read about the country, he thought that Moroccans are

liberals, not very conservative. His assumptions were confirmed through his observations, especially at the level of the university. The way of dressing of Moroccans, the music they listen to, the open relationships boys have with girls were some of the social aspects that proved the idea he had before coming to Morocco. Finally, George was asked about suggestions he can make to improve the exchange programs. He proposed more ice breaking activities, assigning a Moroccan ambassador for each exchange student, to help him/her in administrative and academic procedures during the semester. He insisted also on the importance of assigning Moroccan roommates for exchange students in order to maximize their interaction and help them integrate into the host community.

The second interview was with Robert, on November 14th, 2006. Robert is an American exchange student in AUI, where he is living his second exchange experience, after a first one in Scotland. He has travelled to many countries: Austria, Belgium, Belgium Germany, France, Denmark, Ireland and Czech. Robert does not think that his experience in AUI was beneficial for him, especially at the academic level, where he found weaknesses in terms of either material or teaching methods. Boredom was a principle difficulty he faced in AUI, since according to him there is enough work and activities on campus. Language was also a problem for Robert either on campus, where students speak Arabic even in the presence of foreign students, or off campus where most people do not speak English. Culturally speaking, the interviewee said that he feels himself considered to be cold and distant because, he does not speak a lot, needs more space and is not used to the touching Moroccans use during their conversations. When asked about the stereotypes he had on Morocco, Robert stated that he had an image of Moroccans as friendly people, which he found true. He was also right about the idea of the big differences between social classes in Morocco, and the cultural presence of bargaining. To improve the exchange programs, Robert suggested

creating more clubs, trying to avoid administrative problems foreign students face and giving more precise information to them in their home universities about the host ones.

The third interview was conducted with a faculty member, who is the former director of the Office of International Programs. One interviewer from the team conducted the interview a faculty member on November 10th, 2006. The purpose of this interview was to gather information from somebody who is an expert on the topic the team was studying. According to his experience, Dr Burgess stated that the level of integration of exchange students, not only at AUI, but in general, is bad: exchange students face a new culture that they are not familiar with; they stand as clicks which represent their own cultures. Also, foreign students, when coming to a country like Morocco, show arrogance and consider their culture as superior to the Moroccan one. Moreover, exchange students coming to AUI do not expect the university to be different from American universities where they mostly come from, and once they realize the reality, they start breaking the laws and this leads to problems. There are also other factors which contribute to the non integration of exchange students. The climate is quite difficult at Ifrane, and the Moroccan food is totally different from American food, so exchange students have stomach problems often not treated because exchange students do not trust Moroccan medicines.

Dr Burgess continued, saying that the great lack of integration of exchange students mostly comes from the foreign students themselves because when going to a new country and a new culture, they are often totally ignorant about it. He suggested orientation programs organized for students planning to go for an exchange both in the home country and in the host country. Thus, students would be aware of the differences that exist between the two countries so that when they arrive there, they are easily integrated into the whole community. Also, clubs must be made for the specific purpose of integrating exchanges within the community.

All the information that has been cited above does not mean that the goals of exchange programs are not achieved. Dr. Burgess specified that exchange programs are a great opportunity for both Moroccan and foreign students to go abroad, live in another culture, and enter a new job market. But, because promoting productive cross-cultural interaction is among the most important objectives of exchange programs, he considers that the goals are not completely met, and that a lot of improvements need to be done in order to better integrate students within a new community.

The AUI counselor was interviewed by two team members on November 17th 2006. The purpose of conducting that interview was to get the point of view of an expert about integration of exchange students. Because all AUI students consult the counselor when they have problems, and exchange students as well consult her in the same situations, the counselor deals directly and deeply with exchange students.

After giving the counselor a whole idea about what the team is working in, and the purposes of having that interview, she was asked about her evaluation of the integration of exchange students in AUI. She replied that it is poor because there are many factors that restrict it. For example, exchange students' personalities, and the amount of time they spend in AUI. In addition, she emphasized that the most important factor is their intentions and goals they hope to achieve by studying at AUI. Consequently, their goals reflect their willingness to integrate or not. Generally speaking, it is neither the responsibility of Moroccans nor exchange students.

The interviewee was also asked about some difficulties that exchange students encounter. The response was that language is one of the hardest obstacles they face, since it usually makes them avoid talking with other students, because their either cannot speak slang Arabic, or because others do not speak English fluently. Moreover, most exchange students have superiority complex, which prevents them from realizing the richness of the Moroccan

culture. Also, they feel they are more mature and independent because of the amount of traveling they have done and other experiences. Therefore, they think that there is a huge gap between them and Moroccan students.

The counselor explained that the goals of exchange programs are achieved because exchange students share their culture with Moroccan students and vice versa, even if there is a kind of culture shock between two kinds of students.

Finally, the counselor gave a suggestion that may improve exchange programs at AUI. She said that seminars should be done in order to find out Moroccan students and international students' perspectives. Then, nobody will be disappointed.

Discussion

According to the data gathered, it was found that the first assumption the members had before starting the research was, in a big part, false. The majority of the subjects showed that they think exchange students are integrated into the AUI community. Also, the results are representative of opinions of both AUI community (Moroccan students, faculty, and staff) and the exchange students. The outcome the team reached was that the majority believed that exchange students are integrated, but some modification needed to be done in order to improve and satisfy Moroccan and exchange students' needs. Also, in time, it will not longer be a problem to discuss since globalization and the intercultural immersion will tackle it gradually through time.

The information subjects gave about the main reasons of the lack of integration of exchange students were diverse. They showed that some AUI Moroccan students consider that the barriers limiting the integration of exchange students are related to culture differences and stereotypes. This might be explained by the huge differences students discover between Western and Moroccan culture, and also by what Moroccans notice as prejudices foreigners have before coming to Morocco.

According to what other Moroccan students said, the lack of integration is linked to the drastic change in the life style exchange students face when coming here. Another reason that aroused is that Moroccan students believe that language is of the main factors that contribute to the lack of integration. The way the team explained this idea is as follows: since Moroccan students usually speak slang Arabic or French, and most of exchange students speak only English, these latter may not feel comfortable communicating with Moroccans, and feel excluded from the conversation.

When asked about the level of integration of exchange students, the majority of Moroccan subjects, 68% of them, assumed that exchange students are well integrated in the campus community (good or excellent level of integration). This idea might be related to the presence of exchange students in many campus activities and their interactions with the local students.

However, the team assumed that some Moroccan students are not aware of the issues that concern exchange programs, since 25% of them did not fill in the survey's open questions. Also, there is a possibility that they were not motivated to write the long answers required by open questions. This phenomenon might be because some Moroccan students do not have enough interactions with exchange students or background information about the international programs.

For 53% of exchange students, the major cause of their lack of integration was the culture differences. As stated previously, the enormous distance that exists between the two cultures might explain this point of view. The second major reason, always according to exchange students, is religion. The ignorance of the other religion, the stereotypes constructed about it and the difference in religious beliefs could justify this position. Ramadan, for example, might illustrate how religion affects the intercultural interaction, through the gap

which is created by the situation of fasting Moroccans and non-fasting foreigner; which could create a situation of discomfort.

Concerning exchange students' results for the open questions, it can be noticed that there are definitely two extreme opinions parts: those who like and enjoy their experience in AUI and those who are really unsatisfied with it. Students, who have positive impression about their exchange experiences mainly justified their attitude by the idea of enjoying the discovering of a different country and culture. Some of them expressed their motivation to make new friends with different perspectives, and to learn Arabic. People of this group might have sociable personalities, which allow them to integrate easily in a foreign circle, or they may have a better understanding of the spirit of exchange programs. Those people are more likely to easily integrate within a foreign community, and therefore feel that the goals of exchange programs are fully achieved. That is why their responses to the open questions about the achievement and the benefit of exchange programs were positive. On the other hand, the second part of exchange students who did not appreciate the exchange experience had several reasons. For example, they find that rules in AUI are not appropriate, that there are not enough activities on campus, and that they did not find what they were expecting to be here. This approach of the exchange experience at AUI could be explained by being influenced by the stereotypes, by the more open rules system in the USA universities, such as the mixed dorms and their richer campus life in terms of activities. In addition, those students could be the kind of people who do not easily start a conversation or have tendency to be isolated. Those students are obviously less likely to integrate and therefore really benefit from the purpose of exchange programs. That is why their responses to the open questions were negative.

Regarding staff survey results, in general, the team observed that they are not really aware or concerned about the integration of exchange students at AUI, since many of the

surveys given to them were returned incomplete. However, those who responded to the surveys mostly thought that the reasons behind the lack of integration of foreign students are stereotypes about Moroccan culture and religion. This might be based on their distant observation of exchange students' behavior, given that most staff members do not have a direct and close contact with them.

The faculty members' points of view were not greatly different. 80% of the professors consider culture differences as the principle reason behind the lack of exchange students' integration. They assumed that the experience of exchange is beneficial at all the levels and that their goals are achieved. This reflects that observations faculty make reveal that the interaction between exchange and Moroccan students is good, and this, mainly depending on their observation of foreign students' behavior inside and sometimes outside the classroom.

In general, one can easily notice that there is a correlation between exchange and Moroccan students' results in one hand, and between staff and faculty results on the other hand. Quite the same percentage of both Moroccan and foreign students rated the level of integration of exchanges at AUI as good or excellent, and identified culture differences as being the main reason behind the lack of integration. Also, the responses about the achievement of exchange programs goals were quite similar.

On the other hand, staff and faculty members gave quite the same results concerning the level of integration and concerning the open questions about the achievement of exchange programs, since they thought that exchange programs are a good experience for both Moroccans and foreigners. This could be interpreted by the fact that students are more concerned with the issue than staff and faculty are. Also, staff and faculty have a limited contact with exchange students, while Moroccan students see the others everyday in the restaurant, the library, the laboratories, etc. thus, they might be the ones who could determine the real aspects of the integration of exchange students into AUI.

The subjects' suggestions for improving exchange programs at AUI were quite similar. Most of them believed that there is integration; however, it needs enhancements in order to achieve the highest level possible. The idea of creating more clubs and activities for ice breaking and for more interaction between exchange and Moroccans was the most frequent one. This is probably based on the common belief that extracurricular activities play a crucial role in getting people to know each other and to communicate. In addition, the creation of exchange students' associations, and more important orientation sessions seem to be necessarily in order to improve the programs.

The results of the two interviews with exchange students showed quite different points of view about the issue of integration. While George considers himself well integrated in the AUI community and is enjoying his residence in spite of all the obstacles he faced, Robert does not see his exchange experience at AUI as really beneficial to him. It might be due to the fact that Robert has already passed through a previous exchange experience which he liked, and in comparison, his experience in Morocco is not beneficial for him. Perhaps, experiencing a first exchange diminishes the exciting part of discovering a different country in the case of Robert. It might also be due to the sociable character of George, versus the reserved one of Robert. Another possible interpretation could be the fact that Robert is a Jew, unlike George who is Christian as are most of the foreign students in AUI. Thus, the lack of integration in the case of Robert might be due to the anti-Semitism most Moroccans feel about Jewish people.

Concerning the suggestions proposed to improve the exchange programs, both students had common ideas. They agreed that it is a good idea to create more clubs and ice breaking activities. This might be explained by the possibility that in their home universities, there were more rich and diverse activities than in AUI. Also, the activities organized at the level of AUI are maybe not enough including exchange students.

The interview conducted with the AUI counselor, has shown again that students who do not integrate are mainly the ones who are comparing what is happening in Morocco with their home country. This is what prevents them from enjoying their experience and discovering new things about Morocco. According to the counselor, the fact that a student integrates or not within the community is based on the individual personality. That is to say that we can not end up with the conclusion that foreign students are not open to other cultures, or that Moroccans are not tolerant towards foreigners; all this depends on how enthusiastic and excited the exchange student is about being in Morocco, as the counselor thoughts have conveyed. When Moroccans see that foreigners get interested in discovering their traditions and knowing their culture and are willing to be involved in it in order to better understand it, they show hospitality, which is actually one of Moroccans' qualities. Also, the integration depends of the goals with which each student comes. When asked about the possible goals that students could have about doing an exchange program, the counselor answered that they are very different. For example, students may come just to learn the language because of their studies' orientation.

Because of her position at AUI, the counselor is faced to different cases of students, especially exchange students who face some problems when first coming here. The counselor gave us a special case of one student who came to AUI only because of its library resources which are quite up to date with books and internet resources in the library. Moreover, foreign students have much more experience at the age of 22 or 23 than Moroccan students at the same age, according to what the counselor has said. Their self confidence comes probably from their rich experiences because they have already visited different places, earned their own money since the age of 16, and acquired certain autonomy. This might create a gap

between them and Moroccan students and creates difficulties among them to share the same ideas.

The last interview, conducted with the former director of the Office of International Programs, revealed results that are quite similar to those given by the counselor. Indeed, Dr Burgess does not think that the goals of exchange programs are achieved due to different reasons. Foreign students are most of the time completely ignorant about Morocco. Also, AUI tries to follow the American educational system, but it is not really the same one as adopted in the United States for example. Those things pose problems to exchange students and make them feel they are different. The results given by Dr. Burgess reinforce the interpretation given previously according to the counselor's results; which is that the level of integration of exchange students mainly depends on what they expect to find in Morocco, and what the reality is.

Among the suggestions given by Dr. Burgess were organizing orientation sessions principally in the home country, in order to give a realistic point of view of the country of exchange, and creation of more clubs taking care of exchange students' needs in terms of extra activities.

Conclusion

Based on the results found, the team could state that in general "cross-cultural awareness" poses a problem in its different aspects. That is to say that exchange students usually come from cultures that have moved to individualism. Morocco is a society which is still giving more importance to people as a group than as individuals. It is also related to "long term orientation" which indicates how much a society relies on traditions and cultural and religious beliefs. That is to say that the reason why foreign students have some difficulties to integrate is that the difference between their culture and the Moroccan one in terms of "cross-cultural awareness" is quite big. The Moroccan society relies greatly on traditions, and

Moroccans can sometimes have some wrong stereotypes about the western cultures. The problem that exchange students face is that AUI is not really representative of Morocco, and they can sometimes feel at ease at AUI but not elsewhere. Some students can easily deal with the difference and be interested on what Morocco is really like, and others do not know how to deal with Moroccans since they find the difference too big, and this starts from AUI.

After conducting this research, the team succeeded in answering the research question. In fact, the results showed that exchange students are integrated within the AUI community by the majority verdict. Thus, the assumption set at the beginning, which assumed that exchange students are not integrated at AUI, was disproved. However, it was found that culture plays a crucial role in the problems exchange students face to integrate, since 91% of the subjects stated that cultural differences are the main reason of the lack of integration.

Experts' opinions in the interviews have helped the group to learn various reasons of the lack of integration of exchange students which are related to origins, personality, and education, which means that the level of integration depends on the personality of each student. However, universities in general, and AUI in particular, should make more efforts to improve the achievement of exchange programs' goals, such as taking into consideration the real expectations of foreign students coming to AUI, and trying to higher the interaction between them and Moroccans, such by assigning Moroccan roommates for exchange students, and organizing activities that will brake the ice between the two sides.

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Appendix A

No,
why.....
.....

4. In general, do you think that exchange programs are beneficial to the AUI
 community?
Yes,
justify.....
.....

No,
justify.....
.....
.....

5. What do you suggest to improve the integration of exchange students at AUI?
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your time, have a nice day.



EXCHANGE STUDENTS SURVEY

This survey is done in the shape of a 1202 project. The topic is about the integration of exchange students. This survey is anonymous. It has been created to evaluate the level of integration of exchange students.

Major:

Gender: Male Female

Nationality:

1. How do you evaluate the level of your integration in AUI?

Excellent good poor

2. In your opinion; what is the main reason that may explain the lack of integration of exchange students?

Culture differences

Stereotypes

Religion.

Differences in students, faculty relations.

Integration between students and faculty.

Tolerance of the host country towards other cultures.

Differences in social environment (social activities and clubs offered at AUI).

Educational system

Other

.....

3. The goals of international programs is to expand international awareness, promote productive intercultural interaction, and foster tolerance and sensitivity in AUI students, faculty and administration Do you think that AUI goals of exchange programs are achieved?

Yes,

why.....

.....

.....

No,

why.....

.....
4. In general, do you think that exchange programs are beneficial to AUI?

Yes No

5. Has your experience at AUI been beneficial to you?

Yes, justify

.....

.....

No,

justify.....

.....

6. What do you suggest to improve the integration of exchange students at AUI?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for your time, have a nice day.

Exchange Students Interview

1. Where are you from?
2. Is it your first exchange experience?
3. Are you used to travel abroad?
4. Do you think exchange experience beneficial for you?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why?
5. What are the difficulties that you face?
6. Can you say that stereotypes that you have about morocco are true or false? Why?
7. What do you suggest to improve exchange programs?

Faculty Interview

1. According to your experience, how do you evaluate the integration of exchange students in AUI?
2. Do you think that goals of exchange programs in AUI are achieved?
3. What are the obstacles that exchange students encounter?
4. What do you suggest to improve AUI exchange programs?