

## International Student Experiences: Examining Acculturative Stress, Depression, Academic Success, Belonging, & Authenticity

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Several studies carried out have highlighted additional issues that international students face in college, that impact their success and health at US institutions. Researchers have highlighted the stressful transition, and cultural adjustments that international students need to respond to in their arrival in a new country with different norms and expectations<sup>1</sup>. Acculturation is the adaptation to new a new host culture, and acculturative stress stems from challenges faced in the process of attempting to acculturate<sup>2</sup>. Several studies have found that increased acculturative stress and challenges faced by international student makes them more susceptible to negative mental health outcomes, such as stress and depression<sup>3</sup>. In addition, these challenges can also potentially impact student experiences in other ways, such as their academic success, feelings of belonging, and feelings of authenticity. In recognizing these differences, it is important that counseling services in colleges are an accessible and effective resource to this population, to provide culturally competent counseling and support<sup>3</sup>.

This study examined international student experiences at Mount Holyoke through the lens of the acculturative stress framework, considering how acculturation, and Counseling Services' role as a potential intervention, affects international students' experiences. The study compared whether at Mount Holyoke, international students experienced more depression, lower sense of belonging, academic success, and authenticity than domestic students. In examining differences that may exist within the international student population, the study predicted that higher acculturative stress would be positively associated with depression and authenticity, but that it would be negatively associated with sense of belonging, and academic success. The study also collected qualitative data in the form of interviews with international students, which were then used to gain perspective on what some international students believe to be factors affecting their experiences here and their adjustment, as well as their attitudes around and/or experiences with Counseling Services.

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<sup>1</sup> Shalka, T. R. (2017). The impact of mentorship on leadership development outcomes of international students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 10(2), 136-148.

<sup>2</sup> Berry, J.W. (2003). Conceptual approaches to acculturation. In K.M. Chun, P.B. Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.), *Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, J., & Brown, L. (2013). The International student sojourn, identity conflict and threats to well-being. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 41(4), 395-413.