This academic year, the International Center formed a student retention and success task force that included key stakeholders from across the campus community. Task force objectives were to identify budget allocation needs and develop campus-wide strategies that effectively support success and retention of international students, particularly given the university’s goal of significantly increasing international student enrollment.

The task force, comprised of 17 faculty, staff and students (membership list attached), met throughout the year to report on existing campus-wide services for international students, discuss the extent to which the campus community supports international education and well being at Cal Poly, identify areas for improvement, and brainstorm possible solutions to ensure international student retention and success.

To inform the work of the task force, the committee designed a survey that sought to gain feedback from international students regarding their experiences. The survey addressed five themes commonly included in best practices for supporting international students at institutions of higher education: Academic Support, English Language Support, Social Support, Emotional Support and Well-Being, and Financial Support. The survey was sent to all of the 231 international students in degree and exchange programs on campus during Spring 2015. We received 47 responses for a 20% response rate.

Based on task force conversations and student survey results, the following action-items are recommended to increase international student retention and success at Cal Poly. It is important to note that institutional data on international student retention is still forthcoming and will likely better inform the recommendations put forward by the task force, but even without data, the task force confidently puts forward the following recommendations.
ACADEMIC SUPPORT

- Identify international students in PeopleSoft and PolyProfile for better ability to advise, provide outreach, etc.
- Facilitate inclusive classroom environments that encourage cross-cultural understanding and collaborative work; collaborate with CTLT in their faculty workshops on inclusive classrooms
- Provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff serving international students
- Collaborate with the advising community to offer specific advising for international students at the college-level and in the Mustang Success Center
- Develop an Academic Support Workshop for new International students ideally held at the beginning of the quarter (Wow, SOAR or the 1st and 2nd week of the quarter); work with CENG advising to create model workshop.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT

- Encourage international students to enroll in a one-unit supplemental instruction course(s)
- Provide three to five academic English courses through the Department of English to support matriculated international students in need of additional language support
- Train faculty and staff to support better students whose native language is not English
- Enhance the tutoring program offered through the Writing and Rhetoric Center
- Develop a conversation partner program with Modern Languages and Literatures

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

- Provide solutions to housing dilemmas for international students and scholars, as well as short-term visitors
- Develop a Hosting Program that includes a home stay program and encourages faculty and staff to host international students for holiday meals, offer dinner invitations or meet with students on campus for lunch or other activities
- Connect students outside the “international” context by developing community partnerships; develop volunteer and service-learning opportunities for international students in collaboration with Cal Poly alumni and community supporters
- Enhance peer-to-peer support programs such as the International peer contact (IPC) program supported by the International Center
- Link incoming international students to current international students, especially those from the same country.
- Offer and market more international student event programming; include opportunities for international students to share their cultures/languages.
- Design a website on which international students and local students can connect on housing, entertainment, etc.
- Showcase annually the positive practices of campus constituents to support retention and success of international education
• Emotional Support and Well-being
• Enhance the Campus Wellbeing program and market to international students
• Offer outreach sessions to explain support services to international students and encourage them to take advantage of them
• Train faculty to improve informal and formal faculty advising sessions
• Partner with the Cross-Cultural Center to design support programs
• Implement more multicultural-based training into counseling services
• Create a mentoring program with returning and new international students.
• Design a directory international students can utilize, especially when in distress

FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
• Improve Student Accounts processes so that they are more user-friendly
• Develop more international student work opportunities, both on campus and in the community, and advertise them
• Bridge cultural expectations in hiring/applying by creating greater awareness for campus employers of international student population
• Increase collaboration with financial aid and student accounts to consider how best to support international students in financial need
• Take advantage of the CSU International Fee Waiver
• Improve marketing of current opportunities and services to international students
• Create an award to recognize international student employees
• Market the Cal Poly Cares program for students in need

ALLOCATION OF BUDGET
In order to realize the above recommendations in a timely manner, the task force recommends working in close partnership with constituents across campus. Doing so may not require additional funding, but the task force believes it would be best to identify an individual within the International Center to oversee implementation. Members of the committee agree that ideally the International Center would hire a full-time student retention and success specialist to help achieve the goal of better supporting international students on campus. Revenue from the International Student Fee could fund the position as well as the costs associated with enhanced programming.

CONCLUSION
The retention and success task force wants to see international students and scholars integrated more fully into the campus living and learning environment. Cal Poly’s web presence should be friendlier to different international audiences, and we should strive to enhance community networks to create a more welcoming environment for international students and faculty. Doing so may also mobilize and engage our international alumni and alumni with international connections, which is essential for university advancement at the global level.
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