How Non-U.S. Business Students Can Overcome Barriers and Succeed in American Virtual Environments: Lessons from Teaching a Coursera MOOC

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Abstract—A coursera-based, open access course ("*The iMOOC102: Mastering American e-Learning*") is designed to prepare international business students to successfully integrate into virtual learning and work environments in American universities and corporations. The course is aimed at helping international students become familiar with and better integrate into American culture, the academic system, and professional contexts. Self-regulation and self-directedness are emphasized, as many international learners come from teacher-centered environments and are not used to student-centered pedagogies employed in many U.S.-style online courses and programs.

Index Terms—International business education, e-learning, cultural adjustment, virtual culture shock, virtual acculturation, barriers, competencies, coursera, MOOC.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years the rapid development of information communication technology has resulted in continued growth of international online learning programs [1]. Research has shown that participants of international online courses face significant barriers caused by cultural and linguistic differences, learning styles, and expectations [2]. While some researchers and practitioners argue for using universal designs and culturally-inclusive pedagogy [3], others recommend using transition, or bridging, courses that can help international online learners overcome barriers and succeed in the virtual environment [4], [5]. This paper describes an open access transition course that was developed in the State University of New York (SUNY) Empire State College and launched on Coursera in 2015.

"*The iMOOC: Mastering American e-Learning*" is an ongoing project; its goal is to develop an open access course and a range of supporting open education resources (OER) aimed at preparing international online learners to successfully transition to virtual learning and work environments in U.S. universities. The following sections are intended to: a) clarify the theoretical framework of the project; b) provide a taxonomy of barriers that international online learners face in U.S. online environments; c) develop a competency-based pedagogical framework for the course; d) based on the learning analytics, provide an overview of the

first pilot; e) discuss possible directions for continuing work.

II. WHAT IS AMERICAN e-LEARNING?

Virtual learning environments are heavily influenced by culture [6]. Not surprisingly, researchers often report about problems that foreign-born learners experience when taking online classes in U.S. universities [2], [7], [8]. To mitigate those problems, many advocate for the use of so called "universal, or culturally-inclusive, design" in online courses [2], [8] to lower cultural and contextual barriers. While universal design seems to be a much needed improvement, it may not be sufficient without adequate efforts on the learner's side. As old-age wisdom says, when in Rome, do what Romans do. In other words, in order to successfully study and work in the U.S., non-U.S.-born students and working professionals should learn how to overcome barriers to seamlessly navigate American online environments.

One way of helping non-native students and working professionals to successfully migrate into the U.S. online environment is to use transition, or bridging, courses [4], [5]. According to [9], a transition course is one that helps international online students become familiar with and better understand American culture and the academic system, learn about the use of virtual learning environments in American universities, refine critically important skills (communications skills, critical thinking, research, cross-cultural skills), practice some of the widely used in the U.S. educational technologies (such as electronic libraries, LMS, videoconferencing, e-portfolios, and wikis), learn about expected behaviors (time management), and adjust to student-centered pedagogies, open discussions and debates, teamwork, and academic integrity. It is anticipated that by taking a transition course non-native learners will remove or significantly lower the barriers and thus become better prepared for studying subsequent subject matter through online and face-to-face courses in American universities.

The target audience for transition courses may include (but not limited to) the following groups:
1) Remotely located, international online learners – either in organized cohorts or as individuals;
2) International students located outside of the U.S. and enrolled in dual degree programs established by their home institutions with U.S. universities;
3) International students preparing for departure to a U.S. educational institution;
4) Beginning international students that are already studying in U.S. campuses and looking for additional

support;

5) Recent immigrants to the U.S. or those who are considering employment with U.S.-based companies.

III. VIRTUAL CULTURE SHOCK

The theory of culture shock introduced by Oberg [10] and refined by cross-cultural psychologists [11] is very useful for understanding problems experienced by non-native learners in foreign virtual environments; also, it can be used as a guiding framework for developing alleviating strategies in transition courses [12]. Following the ABC model of culture shock described in [11], virtual culture shock can be defined as a situation where a non-native learner ("virtual sojourner") is suddenly exposed to a completely unfamiliar virtual setting and is wholly overwhelmed by it (This is the "A", the affective component of the model). Two other components (the "B" and the "C") are behavioral and cognitive; the cognitive component being the one that enables the individual to reflect on the situation, understand its root causes and consequences, and to take action. The behavioral component deals with the practicalities of instrumental adjustment helping the virtual sojourner adapt to the new online environment and learn how to seamlessly navigate and even thrive in it.

All components of the ABC model are interconnected and support each other. Before the behavioral (positive) component can be engaged, the affective (negative) signal should be received by the virtual sojourner and correctly interpreted as the need to adjust. In this context, a transition course can be seen as a form of cognitive-behavioral therapy [13] aimed at instrumental adjustment of the virtual sojourner to the new online environment. Virtual acculturation [9], the intended outcome of the transition, is to be achieved by walking the individual through the following steps: a) exposure to a situation of virtual culture shock; b) debriefing and analysis; c) competency building.

IV. VIRTUAL ACCULTURATION

According to [14], cultural adaptation is not an "outcome" of a given favorable condition; instead it is an evolutionary process that an individual undergoes vis-à-vis a new and unfamiliar environment. In the online environment, cultural adaptation ("virtual acculturation") can be defined as a state of instrumental adjustment of a non-native learner to the culturally- and contextually-defined online environment in another country [9] or virtual culture [15]. In the context of a transition course, virtual acculturation can be seen as the major learning goal with two subordinate learning objectives aimed at developing in virtual sojourners an ability to: a) recognize cultural, linguistic, technological, and other barriers that inhibit learning in the foreign online environment; b) build competencies helping overcome the barriers and effectively function in the new environment.

In a series of case studies, [9], [16, 17] described transition courses where a group of SUNY ESC and international faculty helped organized cohorts of non-U.S. business students achieve the above stated learning objectives by using scaffolding techniques, such as facilitated group studies, bilingual and bicultural instruction. The authors recommended that transition courses should be complemented by a) OERs accessible by students for the entire duration of their studies; b) freely available services supporting virtual acculturation.

V. WHY A COURSERA MOOC?

Massively open online courses (MOOCs) have great potential as an OER; also, they are increasingly used for remedial education [18]. Supported by two SUNY Innovative Instruction Technology Grants, *"The iMOOC: Mastering American e-Learning"* project is aimed at developing: a) a free MOOC to support transition courses in U.S. and international universities; b) a range of supporting open education resources (OER) available in an on-demand mode and providing virtual sojourners with continuing access to remedial tools of virtual acculturation, such as knowledge bases, tutorials, self-assessments, case studies, and forums. Coursera is chosen as a leading MOOC platform, with high reputation and world-wide access to learners [19].

VI. A TAXONOMY OF BARRIERS AND REQUIRED COMPETENCIES

The starting point of a transitional program is to create a comprehensive list of barriers and to identify competencies that are needed to overcome the barriers [20]. A taxonomy of barriers for non-native students in U.S. online environments originally proposed in [16] was updated for the iMOOC project and is presented in the appendix. The taxonomy describes 10 types of barriers; it also provides 69 diagnostic questions/statements to help pinpointing required competencies and measuring actual levels of proficiency.

VII. COURSE DESIGN

The above taxonomy of barriers and competencies was used as a guiding pedagogical framework for the backward design [21] of the course. The barriers and competencies were incorporated into six learning modules:

- Module 1: Introduction
- Module 2: Technology
- Module 3: Language and Culture
- Module 4: Communicating Ideas
- Module 5: The U.S. Academic System
- Module 6: Professional Contexts.

Following the AQF model of competency standards [22], each learning module was presented as a broad competency area and then divided into competency units and further broken down into competency elements. For example, the broad area of technology-related competencies was divided into four competency units, such as 1) Unit 1: The basics of U.S. e-learning technology; 2) Unit 2: Getting through, obtaining information, using systems; 3) Unit 3: Refining working skills; 4) Unit 4: Using e-learning infrastructure. Then, each unit was subdivided into elementary competencies. For example, Unit 4 included four elementary

competencies, namely: 4a) online learning centers; 4b) open education resources; 4c) e-portfolios; 4d) metaliteracies. Learning resources (instructional videos, videotaped interviews with students and faculty, short essays, and discussions) were created to help learners understand problems that non-native users face in U.S. e-learning environments and master the required competency elements.

Overall, course developers created 85 original videos, 45 content guides, 27 self-assessments, a concluding final paper assignment, and pre- and post-course comprehensive self-assessments based on a case study analysis. To capture the students' perspective, members of the production team went to Cyprus to interview a group of Middle Eastern business students taking regular, for-credit, online classes at SUNY ESC. Within the course there was a facility for any participant to record testimonials based on first-hand experiences in U.S. virtual environments. In addition, there were built-in moderated activities (discussions, graded assignments, video conferences); those activities were mostly available for use by supervised groups of students, but some of them were also open to all students.

VIII. THE FIRST PILOT (2015)

The first version of the iMOOC was developed by a SUNY ESC team of faculty and instructional designers; in March 2015 it was launched on Coursera as a tuition-free, certificate course. To get students, the course team relied on Coursera marketing department, but also reached out to the U.S. Department of State and SUNY Global Center. In addition to open enrollment, there were supervised groups of students in SUNY New Paltz and SUNY ESC programs in Greece and Panama. Additionally, there were several groups in Indonesia observed by local EducationUSA staff. The course length was 6 weeks, with additional optional modules. During March-May 2015, 6 faculty members from SUNY ESC facilitated course discussions.

According to the course learning analytics provided by Coursera, 4,887 students signed up for the course. The students represented 145 countries, with 21% from the U.S., 15% - China, 5% - India, 4% - Mexico, 3% - Russia, 3% - Indonesia, 3% - Panama, 2% - Brazil, 2% - Jordan, 2% - Canada, 2% - Peru. A relatively large proportion of learners from Indonesia and Panama were attributed to active marketing efforts in those countries.

Out of 4,887 students who initially signed up for the course, 3,071 students visited it, 1,840 watched a lecture, 628 browsed a discussion, and 423 submitted an exercise. Overall, there were 17,368 total streaming video views and 24,020 video downloads; 430 unique participants did 3,186 quiz submissions. 278 participants submitted 1,188 unique discussion posts in 388 threads; those posts received in total 6,902 views. 48 participants chose to get a course certificate and submitted final projects for peer-review; they also provided in total 164 peer-review evaluations; as a result, 40 course certificates were granted.

In the beginning of the course, the students were asked to clarify what topics were perceived by them as the most interesting in the course; 448 students responded to this question. The responses indicated that the course indeed captured attention of the intended target population. "How a non-U.S. student residing outside of the U.S. can gain knowledge and develop skills to succeed in online classes offered by a U.S. college or university" was selected by 45% of all respondents; "How a working professional residing outside of the U.S. can develop skills that are useful in working with or for a U.S. organization" – 24%; "How a U.S.–based working professional can develop a better understanding of virtual environments in a cross-cultural perspective" – 13%; "How an international (non-U.S.) student residing in the U.S.-based campus can develop skills for online studies" – 12%, "None of the above" – 6%.

Additional information obtained through the post-course course survey is presented in [23].

IX. EVALUATION STRATEGIES

To evaluate the first pilot results, the course development team used the following methods and tools:
- Built-in self-evaluations in learning modules;
- The final paper;
- Pre- and post-course comprehensive self-assessment;
- Content analysis of discussions;
- Post-course survey assessment.

A. Built-in Self-evaluations in Learning Modules

In the end of each learning module course participants were invited to take an optional self-assessment quiz to evaluate their level of proficiency in each of the corresponding competency elements; then, they were able to review and reflect on the results. Interestingly, not that many participants were found to be interested in using self-assessments. For example, in Module 2 there were 4 instructional videos (666, 627, 537 and 490 learners watched them), 4 self-assessments (202, 131, 113 and 105 learners used them) and 4 self-assessment debriefings (only 125, 94, 84 and 78 learners used them). Content wise, self-assessments were intended to help learners pinpoint their competency gaps in very concrete terms as the first step for self-improvement. For example, 72% of all respondents identified themselves as highly proficient in the Internet use in the home country environment based on their perceived ability to configure a browser, to use a search engine, or effectively use e-mail. At the same time, only 43% considered themselves highly proficient in a U.S virtual environment based on their perceived ability to use a localized version of software, or configure it by using instructions written in American English.

B. The Final Paper

The students that were interested in obtaining a course certificate were required to take all self-assessments and to use reflective learning journals. In the end of the course, they were asked to compile their notes into a coherent learning essay and submit it for peer review; also, to get a grade they needed to review at least 3 submissions of their classmates.

Like other Coursera courses, this course utilized the peer review process where final paper reviews were conducted by fellow students using a pre-designed rubric. The rubric required the students to grade their peers' work based on whether they were able to: 1) identify competency gaps and find their root causes; 2) identify critical tasks that could help

them adequately and accurately self-assess the level of proficiency; 3) identify specific goals for self-improvement; also, strategies and resources that could help reaching the specified goals; 4) develop a clear plan for self-improvement including measures for keeping themselves accountable.

Overall, 48 students submitted final papers and 40 of them obtained certificates. The highest average score (88%) was assigned to the section dealing with the identification of competency gaps. Also, the learners highly graded the ability of their peers to set up specific goals for self-improvement (79%). A lower grade (69%) assigned for an ability to articulate a contingency plan. In other words, learners were less sure about additional resources and developmental strategies to move forward in case their initial self-developmental plans wouldn't work.

C. Pre- and Post-Course Case Study Analysis

In the beginning and in the end of the course students were given fictitious, but highly realistic case studies for analysis. The cases presented typical situations of a novice, non-U.S.-native student in a regular online course at a U.S.-based university. The students were asked to self-evaluate their awareness of the required competencies and their ability to provide advice in the given situation based on their current understanding of American e-learning.

448 students completed the pre-course self-assessment and only 64 students completed the post-course self-assessment. In the beginning group only 7% of all respondents reported about their full awareness of related problems and another 27% indicated their partial awareness; in the completing group 48% reported about their full awareness and another 42% about their partial awareness. In relation to barriers for navigating American e-learning, the learners' awareness about barriers related to information technology increased from 69% to 89%, English language - from 67% to 85%, American Culture - from 55% to 86%, American educational system - from 44% to 82%, the organization of American online classroom - from 44% to 89%, Communication skills- from 60% to 89%, the U.S. professional contexts - from 40% to 82% , self-directed learning - from 70% to 90%.

D. Post-course Survey Assessment

The detailed results of the post-course assessment are reported and discussed in [23].

X. DISCUSSION

When discussing the course outcomes with educators involved in international online learning at Sloan-C (Orlando, 2015), COIL (NYC, 2015), and Reimagine Education (Philadelphia, 2015) conferences, the author was confronted with two alternative approaches to global learning. One approach is usually referred to as "universal design" [2], [8]; it recommends developers of international online courses to use a universal (= culture-neutral) design. Another approach can be labelled "collaborative international online learning" [24]; its proponents argue for developing globally networked and co-equal online courses as avenues for cross-cultural teamwork and collaboration. Virtual acculturation may seem to be at odds with the above approaches, but in reality in the world of global learning there is enough room for all three of

them. In situations where U.S.-based institutions develop MOOCs and other resources for global use there is certainly a need in a more culture-inclusive pedagogy and cross-cultural training for instructors ("teacher adjustment"). In situations where open classes are used for inter-institutional international collaboration and developing cross-cultural understanding between groups of students in two or more countries, there is a need in developing tools for cross-cultural communications ("mutual adjustment"). In situations where standing alone, non-native students or workers need to transition into the virtual learning or work environment in the host country; there is need in specific designs enabling virtual acculturation ("student adjustment").

Another theme that emerged at the presentation for NAFSA (Denver, 2016) is related to implementation of the iMOOC and the like courses. Upon arrival to the U.S., international students typically use support systems in their host institutions which rarely include online learning advising. One of the ideas that were discussed with international student advisors at NAFSA was using the iMOOC and the like courses as a pre-advising tool before international students or expatriate workers arrive in the U.S. The advantage of open online access is that the learning platform can be used and shared by many U.S. institutions regardless of the size of their international program – either distance learning, or on-campus, or both. Some institutions may find it useful to adopt the platform and build their own orientation and educational planning courses around it. It can also be used as a supplementary resource for on-campus international students. It can be further adopted by partner universities from abroad to complement their dual degree partnership programs with American universities.

XI. CONCLUSION

In the end of 2015 Coursera moved to a different mode of course delivery by eliminating all facilitated courses and converting existing courses into an on-demand mode. To update the course, the development team used another SUNY IITG grant; a new version of the course was launched in March 2016. Based on the input received from students, in the new version paper-based case studies were replaced with animations. Animations are used to present typical critical incidents where non-native students face problems in U.S.-based online classes and need to find a solution by acquiring necessary competencies.

APPENDIX: BARRIERS AND COMPETENCIES

A. Barrier 1B: Language

Description: The language of instruction is American English; communications are heavily text-based, with some audio and video components. Students are expected to be familiar with formats widely used in the American academia.

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:
1) Statement 1B1: I have a good command of written and spoken American English.
2) Statement 1B2: I am familiar with formats and

conventions used in American colleges.

3) Statement 1B3: I am aware of ways/strategies to further improve my American English.

B. Barrier 2B: Computer-Mediated, Virtual Learning Environment

Description: The instruction is computer-mediated and web-based; students are required to be computer literate, to have sufficient information management skills and to be proficient in electronic communications; in addition, they must know how to develop/use/refine their technical and e-communication skills in an English language learning and professional environment.

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:

1) Statement 2B1: I am a computer literate person (i.e., I know how to operate a personal computer, peripherals, software, multimedia, communication tools and I can solve basic problems by myself).

2) Statement 2B2: I am a literate Internet user (i.e., I know how to use web browsers, search engines).

3) Statement 2B3: I am familiar with and can use English language Internet resources and websites.

4) Statement 2B4: I have sufficient knowledge and skills to find and understand basic technical instructions written in English (in order, for example, to register for a course, to conduct a payment, to download software, to solve a technical problem).

5) Statement 2B5: I have developed skills for effective electronic communications (i.e., I know how to use electronic mail, send and receive files, back up my work, use communication formats and etiquette).

6) Statement 2B6: I am aware of major differences between traditional (face-to-face) and online, virtual learning environments that are based on electronic resources and computer-mediated communications. I am also aware of advantages/disadvantages of studying online and of ways/strategies to deal with related problems.

7) Statement 2B7: I am aware of ways/strategies to further improve my computer, information management and electronic communications skills in an English language learning and professional environment.

C. Barrier 3B: Technology and e-Learning

Description: The instruction is delivered over the Internet; students are required to have a PC, a reliable Internet access with sufficient bandwidth, tools for phone and video communications, software for use in an English language environment, and be capable of solving emerging problems with technology by using the College helpdesks, student support services and self-help tools.

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:

1) Statement 3B1: I have a personal computer with required characteristics and a reliable Internet access with sufficient bandwidth.

2) Statement 3B2: I can access and navigate web-based College and other resources located in the USA.

3) Statement 3B3: I have possessed necessary software and know how to us it in an English language environment (MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Adobe Reader, etc.).

4) Statement 3B4: I have possessed and can use tools for phone and video communications.

5) Statement 3B5: I am familiar with the use of one or several learning management systems (for example, Moodle, Blackboard, Sakai).

6) Statement 3B6: I am familiar with the use of electronic academic libraries, e-texts.

7) Statement 3B7: I know how to get into online classes in the College.

8) Statement 3B8: I am aware of ways/strategies to solve problems with technology by using the College helpdesks, tutorials, and self-paced courses.

D. Barrier 4B: Geographical Distance, Different Time Zones, Customs, Informational and Organizational Barriers

Description: Students take classes delivered from a remote location; so, they must be prepared to adjust to the circumstances. Students located abroad may face special regulations and even restrictions regarding outgoing/incoming international correspondence, parcels, currency transactions, access to web-resources and the use of licensed software; also, they have to absorb related costs (for example, custom clearance of books). Students from non-English speaking backgrounds have to provide official documents regarding their level of education and knowledge of English in the required format. To obtain necessary information about the College and its programs and to successfully get through the admission process, students must learn about how to navigate the College website and effectively communicate with relevant services.

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:

1) Statement 4B1: I am aware of the geographical distance between the College and my home location and potential problems that may be caused by it (different time zones, inconvenient office hours, server maintenance time, helpdesk schedules; also, longer book and mail delivery, the need in customs clearance, etc.). I am also aware of ways/strategies to mitigate/deal with those problems.

2) Statement 4B2: I have a valid postal address for international correspondence. I know how to send/receive international mail.

3) Statement 4B3: I know how to order and receive books from the U.S.

4) Statement 4B4: I know how to make international phone calls.

5) Statement 4B5: I know how to arrange international payments (using a wire transfer or a credit card).

6) Statement 4B6: I know how to take and obtain results of an official English language test and get them delivered to the admission office.

7) Statement 4B7: I know how to obtain an official, English language copy of the secondary school certificate and get it sent to the admissions office.

8) Statement 4B8: I know how to obtain an official, English language copy of university level courses taken in the home country (transcripts) and get them sent to the admissions office.

9) Statement 4B9: I know how to navigate the College website and obtain necessary information (for example,

I know how to find a contact person in the College who can help me).

10) Statement 4B10: I know how to properly write a letter requesting information/help from a College specialist (admissions officer, student services officer, helpdesk specialist, student adviser, disability officer – if needed, international office specialist, and instructor).

11) Statement 4B11: I know how to access the password-protected area of the website and use the following resources: New Student Orientation, Course Catalog, Registration, Bookstore, Library, Student Services and various helpdesks, International Office.

E. Barrier 5B: Academic Systems, Requirements and Routines

Description: Students study in an American college which is part of the American educational system; therefore, international students must learn about and adjust to that system. This would include learning about the organization of American higher education, typical academic procedures, regulations, requirements, roles and expectations, rights and responsibilities of all related parties and also about typical ways of doing things.

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:

1) Statement 5B1: I understand that American academic system is different from the one in my home country and I can clearly articulate the most salient differences.

2) Statement 5B2: I know basic facts about the American academic system (levels of educations, degrees awarded, accreditation, requirements for admission and completion, degree structure, grading system).

3) Statement 5B3: I am aware of basic academic procedures in American universities (admission, orientation, choice of degree program, and registration for courses, taking classes, assessment and grading, conflict resolution).

4) Statement 5B4: I am aware of basic academic requirements in American universities (attendance, academic honesty, time management).

5) Statement 5B5: I am aware of fundamental documents regulating academic life in American universities (undergraduate and graduate catalogs, student policies.

6) Statement 5B6: I am aware of the main points of contacts in the College, their functions and ways to reach them (dean's office, student services, and library).

7) Statement 5B7: I am aware of my student's rights and responsibilities and expected behavior.

8) Statement 5B8: I know where to find information about my degree program, courses, requirements, expected learning outcomes.

9) Statement 5B9: I know how to use College resources (library, LMS, e-portfolio, knowledge center, helpdesks, and degree planning tools).

10) Statement 5B10: I am aware of required competencies and skills (information management, communication, critical thinking).

F. Barrier 6B: Cultural and Societal Barriers

Description: The way teaching and learning is organized and performed in a particular American college is deeply rooted in the American culture and social life. To be successful in an American college, students have to learn about American cultural and societal backgrounds and contexts and how they define/shape instructional design, pedagogies, classroom structure, communications and behaviors. For example, culture defines the way students approach learning and interact with their student peers and instructors; societal factors define public discourse, what can and what can (should) not be publicly said (or written). The individualist American culture manifests itself in many ways in academia; for example, students are encouraged to be independent and self-directed. To succeed, international students have to understand the broad American cultural and societal environment and adjust to it.

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:

1) Statement 6B1: I understand and can broadly define the concept of culture and can articulate how cultural differences manifest themselves in higher education.

2) Statement 6B2: I am aware of the basic values and beliefs of the American society and I know that those cultural and societal values are reflected in the process of teaching and learning (rights and responsibilities, written rules; fairness; non-discrimination).

3) Statement 6B3: I know that students in American colleges are expected to be active, independent, self-directed learners capable of finding information, analyzing alternatives and making choices.

4) Statement 6B4: I know that students are expected to act proactively and register for courses, get books, get familiar with the schedule and the method and criteria of evaluation in advance and submit required work on-time.

5) Statement 6B5: I am aware of gradebook grading and the importance of time management.

6) Statement 6B6: I know that American professors do not expect their students to practice rote memorization; instead, they require students to find, critically analyze information and present findings in the required format.

7) Statement 6B7: I know that American students are encouraged to formulate their opinion and debate things to demonstrate their growing understanding; keeping silence to "save face" is not a good strategy in the American classroom.

8) Statement 6B8: I know that American online classes are designed to encourage interaction between students; students are often graded based on active participation, including leading discussions and team projects.

9) Statement 6B9: I know that American students are encouraged to publicly question their professors.

10) Statement 6B10: I know that American professors tend to treat all their students equally as if there were all Americans and may not know about teaching and learning practices in other countries.

11) Statement 6B11: I know that classroom communications are public and as such they are subject to certain conventions (etiquette, ethics).

12) Statement 6B12: I know that academic integrity is very important in the U.S. I am familiar with the relevant regulations/College documents and know how to comply with them.

13) Statement 6B13: I know where I can find materials to

learn more about American academic life.

G. Barrier 7B: Academic Writing

Description: In American academia, international students have to adjust to requirements for academic writing as it is based on well-established and agreed upon formats and conventions.

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:

1) Statement 7B1: I am aware of the critical importance of academic writing and ways/strategies to evaluate/develop/refine this skill.

H. Barrier 8B: Professional Contexts

Description: Taking classes/obtaining a qualification in an American college is aimed at preparing students for a professional career in the US; learning materials are based on the American professional practice, they reflect American workplace realities and are adjusted to professional requirements and expectations. Some American professional bodies even prescribe program contents (body of knowledge) and specify desired outcomes (graduate attributes). Students need to be aware of the fact that learning in an American college is designed with a professional context in mind and aligned with workplace requirements/practices; in order to successfully study a subject, prior to taking the desired course a student may need to take foundational, pre-requisite and/or co-requisite studies in order to get familiar with professional terminology, basic concepts, literature, and approaches commonly used in the US.

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:

1) Statement 8B1: I am aware of the fact that online courses in the College are developed based on the American experience and with the American job market in mind; as such, they reflect American workplace realities and are adjusted to professional requirements and expectations of American employers.

2) Statement 8B2: I understand that in order to successfully study a subject, prior to taking the desired course I may need to take foundational, pre-requisite and/or co-requisite studies in order to get familiar with professional terminology, basic concepts, literature, and approaches commonly used in the US.

3) Statement 8B3: I understand that some courses may require a higher level of English (for example, legal studies).

4) Statement 8B4: I understand that in order to successfully study some courses, I will need to learn about American practices in the field (for example, entrepreneurship, marketing, selling, etc.).

5) Statement 8B5: I know that in order to deeply understand some areas I have to get familiar with the requirements set by relevant professional bodies and associations (for example, state boards of accountants).

6) Statement 8B6: I know that on some occasions foundational knowledge may include courses normally taken in the US in high school (for example, American History, American Government).

7) Statement 8B7: I know that identifying gaps in students' preparation and obtaining prerequisite knowledge is a responsibility of the student and I am aware of

ways/strategies to obtain such knowledge.

I. Barrier 9B: Local Contexts

Description: Teaching and learning in an American college reflects local contexts, such as historical and current events, ways of doing things, sports, media, entertainment, etc. Other contexts may include specifics of studying in colleges with significant populations of adult students, military personnel, and minorities. International students should be aware of local contexts and how they affect teaching and learning (for example, lecturers may use American football to explain scientific concepts).

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:

1) Statement 9B1: I am aware of the fact that the College has developed its programs and online courses with mostly local, i.e. American, students in mind (for example, teaching materials and resources are American, examples are taken from the American experience and professors and students are mostly Americans).

2) Statement 9B2: I know that in order to fully understand topics studied with the use of the local (the American) context I have to be aware of that context.

3) Statement 9B3: In communications with American students and professors I can use local (American) context; in addition, I can articulate how the subject matter is (can be) seen in a different context.

J. Barrier 10B: Personal Characteristics and Self-management

Description: Studying in an online American college requires from a student a great deal of self-control, self-regulation and self-directedness; students are supposed to be capable of acting independently, setting learning goals, developing and implementing learning strategies, measuring progress and making corrections, reflecting on the results in a constructive way. To succeed in an online environment, a student must be aware of his/her personal characteristics, traits, experiences that may facilitate (or hinder) learning. Those include but are not limited to personal learning style and preferences, attitude, aptitude, motivation, maturity, age, gender, prior experience, metacognitive skills, metaliteracies, and cultural intelligence.

Diagnostic questions/statements for self-assessment:

1) Statement 10B1: I am aware of the fact that in order to succeed in the online environment it is necessary to be a self-regulated learner (i.e., to be capable to act independently, set learning goals, identify gaps in knowledge and skills, develop and implement learning strategies, measure progress and make corrections and reflect on the results in a constructive way).

2) Statement 10B2: I know how to use self-regulation techniques to guide my learning in the online environment.

3) Statement 10B3: I consider myself a self-directed learner.

4) Statement 10B4: I am a highly motivated student; I can clearly articulate the goal of my studying in the College and explain why it is important for my future career and self-improvement.

5) Statement 10B5: I am aware of my personal

characteristics and traits (such as personal learning style and preferences, attitude, aptitude, motivation, maturity, prior experience, metacognitive skills, metaliteracies, cultural intelligence) and know how those characteristics may facilitate (hinder) my learning in the virtual environment.

6) Statement 10B6: I firmly believe that I can successfully achieve my learning goals by studying in the online environment in an American university.

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