

Internationalisation-the Students Perspective

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About Christina:

Christina is a final year PhD of Loughborough University. She has been Global Development Officer of Loughborough Students Unions for 2 years. 18 months after she initiated “Lufbra’s Going Global” campaign, Loughborough Students Union has been awarded by National Union of Students as ‘Best International Students Union 2009’ and ‘Event of the Year 2009’ for International Students. Christina has met and persuaded David Cameron and Gordon Brown to globalise the whole UK Education sector to ensure the international experience of all UK students is part of their education experience.

In 2009, Christina, as an independent candidate, was elected as the first International student to sit on the position of NUS National Executive Block 15, since it is created in 1976. Christina now aims to globalise the experience of all 7 million students in the UK.

1. What does International Students Want?

Most international students pay such expensive fee to come to the UK to study are expecting this UK Education experience will enhance their employability, not only upon graduation to find a decent job, but also, for their life-long career promotions, both in the UK and back to their home country. For me, it is a little bit special, I don’t just want a better job back home in China when I finish my study here, I want more, I want to fully explore all kinds of available opportunities here to fully develop myself

and unleash all my potential to become a better person. Before entering Britain to study, like many international students I asked the question what's the best possible result one can get from one year taught Master's in Britain? A degree with distinction, a fully funded PhD offer by a world leading research department, a wellpaid fulltime job offer by a top company, a range of new opportunities to impress VIPs from various industries? I didn't know the answer 'til I achieved all of them in my first year studying here.

2. Intergration with English Students

When I was in China, many students like me, have the impression that when you go to the UK to study, you are always surrounded by many very approachable and friendly English native students here. You study together, eat together, play together. And in this way, as overseas students, your English can become really proficient in a very short time and you can learn as much as possible about the British Culture even if you are only here for one year Taught Masters.

But when I arrived in the UK in mid September 2006 to attend the 2 week pre-session course in Loughborough University to enhance my study skills, the real situation is not what I have expected. For the first 2 days arrived in the UK, there is very clear trend that all the Chinese students in the pre-session course tend to stict to each other all the time, although there are a number of other overseas students from other countries. At that moment, I just have the feeling that this will happen throughout my one year Master here. But for me, I cannot allow myself to spend such expensive fee to come to the UK only to mingle with all the Chinese all the time, without improving my English and learn as much as possible about the culture of the UK and other international students. What is the point? Therefore, I decided I will make every possible efforts to make friends with UK students and other international students, rather than confine myself in the small Chinese students community.

3. Where to improve my British Experience?

Students Union! I also got involved with Loughborough Students Union since day one I arrived in the UK. I have been heavily involved with Loughborough Students Union (LSU), also known as 'Lufbra'. For my first year, I have been a member of AIESEC (business training) and Action (community volunteer work). I joined Loughborough Students Union Television and was trained to become a television presenter and editor.

Although I got no idea how election would take place in the UK. But when I saw the email advertising the vancancy about Students Union Councillor in October 2006--my Second Month arrived in the UK, I took the opportunity and mobilise all the students I got to know in the first month to vote for me. And to my great surprise, I got elected with more than 100 votes, which is so exciting. But when I took office in Jan 2010 to

attend the first Loughborough Students Union Council Meeting, I was really scared. There are about 100 students in the council; all of them are UK Undergraduate. I turned out to be the only international student, the only ethnical minority, the only Asian there. I don't know anyone and nobody knows me. Everyone was happy chatting to each other and it seemed as if they knew each other very well and I was the only stranger there. Well, it doesn't matter. I also tried to raise a question at the first council, but was not successful because too many Councillors have raised their hands and I didn't get picked in the first place. Never mind, I didn't get chance to speak, but it will not stop me from emailing the Chair of Council about various recommendations I think should be put forward at the next council.

I don't know if they have ever got so many recommendations from one councillor, but what I noticed is that, my email is forwarded to all the Students Union Executives that year with their comments. And at the end of the email, the Chair of Council replied and said the whole committee will seriously consider all my recommendations at the next Council, which is really inspiring. So, from next council onwards, because I know nobody else in the Council, I decided to always sit behind the President of the Students Unions, talking to her whenever possible with all the great ideas I have got, rather than wasting my time tiddle my fingers in the council. And I think it works, because a few weeks later, I got an email directly from the President and asked my favour to help the first union organised international event—the Chinese New Year Celebration. I worked really hard on it with the Union which turned out to be a great success with more than 500 international students and UK students attended. Then, I was known to the whole Students Union Executive and they encouraged me to run for the newly created International Development Officer. I almost gave up this opportunity because I had not finished an academic deadline which is due the next day, so I was really thinking if I should waste my time go to attend the union council that night because I know my chance of winning was slight. I was the only international student, the only ethnical minority there, no councillors know me besides all the executives. But I still decide to give it a go, so I went there, did a spontaneous speech of 5 sentences which turned out to be very entertaining, I made the whole council laughing from the beginning to the end. And then councillors really love me and I got elected on the 6th month I arrived in the UK.

I am sure you might all know the story after that, I undertook that role for 2 years, working closely with Loughborough University to help all students to meet global challenges. 18 months after I initiated “Lufbra's Going Global” campaign, Loughborough Students Union has been awarded by National Union of Students as ‘Best International Students Union 2009’ and ‘Event of the Year 2009’ for International Students. As an independent candidate, I was elected as the first International student to sit on the position of NUS National Executive Block 15, since it is created in 1976, met and persuaded David Cameron, Gordon Brown on UK Education to globalise the whole UK Education Sector to ensure all UK students have the international experience as part of their course and etc.

4. Academic Support:

Before entering the UK, my parents really worried about my academic study. Because I am inexperienced on coursework writing but my MA in Media and Cultural

Analysis is assessed by academic writing, we have no exams. Also, my BA in English (International Business Oriented) gave little background information on media studies. With no work experience at all, I got no idea what media studies really mean. And my parents keep on asking me, are you sure you will be able to graduate from a completely new course at all? Honestly, I got no idea at that moment, and I am not confident at all. But I still got an MA with Distinction on one of Britain's leading media studies courses. What is the secret?

I am very lucky I am studying in Loughborough University, and they provide really all-rounded academic support to all students. We have free in-session English Course provided to all international students, helping them to improve their English in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Grammar and etc. There are many free lunch time course offered by the University Library, teaching students how to write academic essays, use online database, journals, e-learning, referencing, plagiarism, time-management, study skills and etc. Also, all the academic staff in the department are always ready to help. It is always easy to book appointment with all my professors to discuss things I don't really understand or just interested after lectures. By attending all the free academic supporting course and frequent in-depth discussion with all my professors, I got Distinction for my MA!

Another tip about improving oral English is that I attended all the public lectures available by different departments that year, no matter what they are talking about, and even if my English is really poor at that moment, I always make the effort to raise my hand to be the first audience to ask a question among many people I never met before. It is difficult at first, but through this way, my English does improve incredibly quickly during the first year I arrived here.

5. Employability

Since the first day I arrived in the UK, I was thinking about what I should do after this one year, and employability and PhD are 2 priorities for me at that moment. Therefore, throughout my first year, I attended all the employers' presentation in the Universities, talking to perspective employers from different sectors, getting to know more about various companies, their requirement, application process, improving my speaking English, getting some free food after the presentation and etc. Also, the Loughborough University Career Centre have also got free training course about how to find a job, application, interview and etc.

With CV and Cover Letter checked by professional career advisers, I started my job hunting experience in April 2007, with lots of company interested in the extensive students activities I have involved in the Students Unions. such as Zurich Professional, Milkround.com, RollsRoyce, Centrica, Barclays Capital, Morgan Stanley. In August 2007, before the end of my course, retail company Lidl gave me the contract Store Manager at £26,000 a year, but I declined it and accepted the fullyfunded PHD offer in the Civil and Building Engineering Department in Loughborough University to study the use of Second Life for better Architectural Design.