

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MISSION FIELDS IN OUR MIDST:

A MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAMS

AT HIGH SCHOOLS OF THE WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

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## ABSTRACT

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has a unique opportunity to proclaim the gospel to teens from around the world who enroll in its various high schools. In the effort to serve these students faithfully, operations at these high schools are adjusted to accommodate international students. Each school which conducts an international student program has the responsibility to foster relationships between international students and the host school family while being continually conscious of the academic, mental, and spiritual health of the international students. This project examines the international student programs at three WELS high schools: Fox Valley Lutheran High School, St. Croix Lutheran Academy, and Wisconsin Lutheran High School. This paper highlights the worthwhile methods being employed at each of these schools in order that this project might serve as an appropriate resource for a WELS preparatory or area Lutheran high school seeking to establish, improve, or expand its international student program.

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## INTRODUCTION

Students from around the world have been enrolling at the preparatory schools and area Lutheran high schools of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) for decades. This provides WELS with a unique opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20) on a world-wide scale without leaving home. With this opportunity come three factors: challenges, responsibilities, and blessings. First, schools are faced with the challenge of accommodating the international student (IS) population in the classroom. Secondly, schools have the responsibility to adjust various school operations and expend resources in order to host and faithfully care for students from various cultures. Finally, these schools' faculty and domestic students also experience the blessings of the resultant diversity of the student body as they have the chance to grow in their personal multi-cultural IQ and EQ.

This paper focuses on the second factor listed above—the responsibilities that come to WELS high schools which run an international student program (ISP). The writer sought to investigate how well the synodical high schools are achieving the responsibilities placed on them by hosting ISes. This paper is not a quantitative study: it does not focus on any numerical trends within the programs explored or how to recruit more ISes; rather, it is a qualitative study: it focuses on the international student experience while at a WELS high school. Specifically, this research explores the various practices and strategies currently being employed within the ISPs of three WELS area Lutheran high schools: Fox Valley Lutheran High School in Appleton, WI, St. Croix Lutheran Academy in West St. Paul, MN, and Wisconsin Lutheran High School in

Milwaukee, WI.<sup>1</sup>

The paper begins with a review of literature relevant to the study. The Literature Review introduces the topics of multi-cultural ministry, cultural orientation, multi-cultural education in a school, implications placed on a school that conducts multi-cultural ministry, and the challenges and blessings thereof. Next, an explanation of the researcher's methodology is given, followed by the findings from the three schools on a school-by-school basis. The following aspects of ISPs were explored at each school: host families or dormitory residence—whichever was applicable; the August orientation process; IS relationships with faculty and staff; the monitoring of IS academic, mental, and spiritual health; IS-tailored religion classes; IS relationships with domestic students; and the celebration of international culture within the school. After all findings are reported, recommendations and conclusions are given.

The researcher found that conducting an ISP at a WELS high school is a larger commitment that many may assume. The three schools involved in this study were each found to conduct a well-run program. Each school was found to employ strategies that were unique to that school alone. At the same time, it was found that certain facets of an ISP are being conducted in a similar way across all three schools. The model examples set by Fox Valley Lutheran, St. Croix Lutheran, and Wisconsin Lutheran and the blessings reaped by each program emphasize the importance of the international student ministry conducted across the synod. This paper highlights the worthwhile ISP methods being employed at each school previously mentioned in

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1. This sample selection of schools was not meant to suggest that an overview of these high schools in particular would give a summative portrayal of all WELS high schools. These schools were chosen because the researcher believes their programs for ISes are among the most developed across all WELS high schools and that what could be learned from these programs would be particularly beneficial for other schools which are seeking to expand or improve their ISP.

order that this project might serve as an appropriate resource for a WELS high school seeking to establish, improve, or expand its international student program.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has been conducted on many aspects of international education, not the least of which is the consideration of the various responsibilities which an ISP brings upon a school.

Researchers recommend that school administrators and educators must be ready to adapt operations in order to serve faithfully students from various cultures. Findings from relevant literature are presented below.

### **Challenges Facing a School that Conducts Multi-Cultural Education**

Sherwood Lingenfelter, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, understands that if an educator is going to serve people of another culture, he must learn how members of that culture think and act differently than members of his own culture. Those who serve must cure their “cultural blindness” and “begin as learners in the other culture.”<sup>2</sup> Lingenfelter speaks from the experience of having lived on the small Micronesian island of Yap, but his conclusions do not only apply for educators who themselves move into another culture. They also apply for educators who have students from another culture come to sit in their classrooms. He wrote, “In essence, we need to move from a position comfortable to us and our culture to a position approximating the goals of the culture to which we are sent”<sup>3</sup> (or, the cultures which come to us). He reminds the reader that this may not be comfortable, but it is necessary.

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2. Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: A Model for Effective Personal Relationships*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 10.

3. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 79.



Grey Davis, dormitory director and instructor of social studies at St. Croix Lutheran Academy in West St. Paul, MN, examined the multicultural education trends across a selection of WELS area Lutheran high schools. In his consideration of American schools at large, he concluded the following:

As American schools acquire a diverse student population, school leaders need to be aware of how the cultural bias of their teachers or schools may affect minority and international students ... Teachers can better relate to their students if they are correctly trained in their students' background (Akcaoglu & Arsal, 2017)... Teachers need to be actively participating in field visits to a multicultural setting in order to gain experience and apply it to their classrooms. The literature encourages school leaders to offer multicultural professional development to their staff which schools in this study did not consistently do.<sup>4</sup>

Davis highlighted the general need to equip multicultural educators by giving them opportunities for professional growth.

Dr. Todd Russ, president of St. Croix Lutheran, conducted research on life satisfaction trends in middle school and high school ISEs. He found that “middle and high school students need more support and guidance in handling the many changes happening in their lives socially, emotionally, and physically. They are in the cognitive developmental period of formal operations (Bastable & Dart, 2007; Crocetti, et al., 2016).”<sup>5</sup> For this reason, schools must implement extra measures to provide a healthy educational environment for ISEs, despite the cost and expenditure of resources.

Rev. Dr. Kenneth Fisher, president of Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, WI, researched the effects that a multi-ethnic student body has on recruiting efforts and

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4. Grey Davis, “Training Teachers to be Effective Multicultural Educators” (M.S.Ed. thesis, Martin Luther College, 2019), 7, 46.

5. Todd Russ, “A Study of Life Satisfaction and its Relationships with Acculturative Stress, Social Connectedness, and Perceived Social Support in International Students Attending Faith-based K-12 Schools” (D.Ed. diss., Bethel University, 2018), 29.

enrollment. He found that biased perceptions of a diverse student body are a significant reason many parents choose to send their children to another school. He wrote, “The benefits of diversity are often not fully understood until they are experienced.”<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, many parents view a diverse school body in a negative light.

## **Recognizing Cultural Backgrounds**

### Cultural Orientations

Schools with an ISP must constantly be mindful of the diverse cultural orientations that ISes bring with them to campus. Lingenfelter wrote, “*Culture* is the anthropologist’s label for the sum of the distinctive characteristics of a people’s way of life” and also “the conceptual design by which people order their lives, interpret their experiences, and evaluate the behavior of others.”<sup>7</sup> Culture is an integral part of a person’s identity. This has monumental implications for a teenage student studying in a culture not his own.

In his book, Lingenfelter evaluated how people from different cultures handle aspects of daily life differently: tensions develop over the issues of time, handling of crises, goals, self-worth, and vulnerability. As ISes interact with teachers and peers, it is easy for both sides to “talk past” one another and misinterpret both verbal and nonverbal cues. Lingenfelter explains:

A cultural cue is a specific signal or sign that people use to communicate the meaning of their behavior. Each culture has literally thousands of cues that signal a change of context and a corresponding need to follow the rules appropriate to the new context.... A failure to grasp the meaning of such cues results in misunderstandings, confusion, and

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6. Kenneth J. Fisher, “Benefits of Multi-Ethnic Diversity from a Majority Culture Perspective at a Christian High School in Voucher Program: A Study of Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin” (D.Min. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2018), 163–4.

7. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 5.

oftentimes interpersonal conflict... It is important, then, to recognize that culture, like language, is a powerful tool for communication and interaction.<sup>8</sup>

Since the majority of people spend their entire lives learning and living in one culture, multicultural education requires an intentional effort by educators to learn new cultures and new contexts.

I would like to highlight just one of the cultural tensions listed above, which perhaps has greatest implications in schools—the issue of time. Lingenfelter discussed a contrast between people who are time-oriented and task-oriented (generally, members of Western cultures) with those who are event-oriented and person-oriented (generally, members of Eastern cultures). The former are chiefly concerned about punctuality, sticking to a pre-determined schedule, and using time efficiently. The latter, on the other hand, are chiefly concerned about the completion of an activity regardless of time elapsed, the participation of those involved, and the interpersonal interaction provided by a group activity. Lingenfelter noted that the American educational system naturally favors and rewards the former group.<sup>9</sup> It is not difficult to imagine how the mixing of these two cultural orientations can create conflict in a school setting—in group projects, on athletic teams, in student government functions, or in any other number of ways.

This coincides with Rev. Leon Ehlert's words:

Our [American] culture tends to be task-oriented, not people-oriented. If you're not aware of the fact that other cultures are people-oriented, what can happen is, you can give the impression of not caring. Because from the [international] student's point of view it seems, "I have a problem right now, and your schedule is more important to you than I am." Now we go and we say, "Well, that's just being efficient," but that's a cultural bias.<sup>10</sup>

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8. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 6, 106.

9. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 26, 71.

10. Leon Ehlert, interview by author. Phone call, November 2, 2021.

Teachers who have ISes in their classrooms must be multi-culturally minded and do everything they can to rid themselves of cultural bias.

### Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures

In his book *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures*, missiologist Jayson Georges speaks about what he views as the three dominant culture types on the globe:

These three moral emotions [fear, shame, and guilt] have become the foundation for three types of culture: (1) *guilt-innocence cultures* are individualistic societies (mostly Western), where people who break the laws are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify a wrong, (2) *shame-honor cultures* describes collectivistic cultures (common in the East), where people are shamed for fulfilling group expectations seek to restore their honor before the community [*sic*],<sup>11</sup> and (3) *fear-power cultures* refers to animistic contexts (typically tribal), where people afraid of evil and harm pursue power over the spirit world through magical rituals.<sup>12</sup>

The majority of students and teachers in WELS high schools belong to the guilt-innocence culture and therefore are “guilt-innocence oriented” through and through. Since the majority of ISes in WELS high schools come from a shame-honor culture, faculty and staff must realize that these students consequently evaluate daily issues differently. For “shame-honor” students, to “save face” is significant to a much higher degree. Georges explains that while an American student generally thinks in terms of right and wrong, (“what I *did*”), a person from a shame-honor culture has concerns in a different sphere: “What does this say about me, about my family, or about my values? How does it change *who I am*?”<sup>13</sup>

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11. I believe this might be a wording or editing error in the text. The author seems to communicate the idea that in shame-honor cultures, *people who are shamed for not fulfilling group expectations seek to restore their honor before the community*. The author’s discussion about shame-honor cultures throughout the rest of the book is consistent with this understanding.

12. Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (Timē Press, 2017), 10–11. Place of publication not found.

13. Georges, *3D Gospel*, 22–23.

### Implications for Religion Classes

Georges's characterization of a "3D" gospel has clear implications for the religion classroom:

What would be an appropriate missiological approach to the three cultural orientations? How do people best encounter the gospel? As truth, as power, or as community? People's cultural orientation impacts how they will appreciate and receive the gospel. In Acts 26:18, Paul describes his mission to the Gentiles in 3D terms—"to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God (*power*), so that they might receive the forgiveness of sins (*innocence*) and a place among those who are sanctified by faith (*honor*) in Jesus." Paul's ministry presented a three-dimensional gospel. These three strands of the gospel never function in isolation, but the driving forces of a particular culture may warrant an emphasis on one approach above others.<sup>14</sup>

A student's cultural orientation affects not only how he views the world and interpersonal relationships, but also how he hears the words of Scripture. Georges speaks of the gospel as a "multi-faceted diamond" which rescues not only from guilt, but also from shame and fear. "We think the methods used to evangelize and make disciples in one context are universally applicable. If we show people the gospel through the wrong lens, it may be a challenge for them to see it."<sup>15</sup>

Georges asserts that a student's cultural orientation—more so than his individual personality—shapes the way he views the world, himself, and the idea of salvation. So, adjusting language in a religion classroom to fit the appropriate culture, while never compromising the message, "may be missiologically strategic for fulfilling the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations."<sup>16</sup> The religion departments at WELS high schools cannot dismiss the culture gap as though it were insignificant to an IS's ability to learn. The religion class aspect of ISPs is included in the research findings below.

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14. Georges, *3D Gospel*, 60–61.

15. Georges, *3D Gospel*, 55.

16. Georges, *3D Gospel*, 33.

### Implications for Monitoring International Student Health

Russ found cultural differences in general to have significant implications for an Eastern student studying in America—particularly how they affect an IS’s ability to receive the help they need:

Saving face is a powerful component of collectivistic societies and an important concept that U.S. schools need to understand when working with IS from Asian countries (Patron, 2014)... The loss of face means the individual could face humiliation and embarrassment when his or her action is viewed as culturally inappropriate (Wei et al., 2012). The collectivistic culture of many IS is so interdependent and intimately close that needs are not to be expressed individually. *Friends and members of an IS support network are expected to identify the needs for them* (Kim et al., 2008; Wei et al., 2012). If an individual has to ask for help, they are either too weak to handle the issue or lacking a social network, all of which can be viewed negatively. In many collectivistic cultures, the concept of questioning someone in authority, like a teacher, is culturally inappropriate (Hofstede, et al., 2010; Lanier, 2000; Meyer, 2014). This has significant implications for U.S. academic institutions.<sup>17</sup>

ISes from a collectivistic culture generally will not ask for whatever kind of help they need as quickly as students from an individualistic culture. Georges concurs with his distinction of guilt and shame cultures, as the point was made above: “While guilt says, ‘I *made* a mistake’; shame says, ‘I *am* a mistake.’ Since the problem is the actual person, the shamed individual is banished from the group. To avoid such rejection and isolation, people mask their shame from others.”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, all faculty and staff who are involved in the student life of ISes need always to be on the lookout for red flags concerning an IS’s academic, mental, or spiritual health. This aspect of ISPs is included in the research findings below.

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17. Russ, “International Students,” 32. Italicized emphasis by the author. Russ uses the abbreviation IS for “International Student(s).”

18. Georges, *3D Gospel*, 22–23.

### Implications for Fostering Relationships

The formation of relationships is critical to the well-being of ISes. Most students who come to study at the schools involved in this paper are coming from collectivistic cultures. They rely on and identify with relationships to a higher degree than Americans generally do. For that reason, schools with an ISP must make efforts to foster relationships between ISes and faculty, between ISes and domestic students, and among ISes themselves.

Lingenfelter saw the need for ministry leaders to make connections with those they serve: “Building relationships is central to ministry.... It is important to realize that, although we might be doing a work of love with our hands or heart or mind, unless we show people our love in a personal way by interacting with them as individuals, our work will mean nothing to them.”<sup>19</sup>

Russ also emphasized the significance of such relationships. He wrote, “Research identifies the importance of teachers as part of an IS social network as those relationships were identified as helpful in reducing academic stress (Sandhu, 1994). Kim and Kim (2013) extended the benefits of IS-teacher relationships ... also to include emotional needs. Teachers are often the bond needed for IS to attach to a school.”<sup>20</sup> Leaders at the schools involved in this study agree.<sup>21</sup>

Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of the WELS Board for Ministerial Education, highlighted the role of the religion teacher:

You understand that Lutheran teachers are ministers of the gospel. You know that the Lutheran school is Church, where the gospel is taught in truth and purity. You have come to a personal conviction about teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to every student. You have come to the understanding that the law applied in the structure of the classroom is primarily to bring a student to repentance. The Holy Spirit has given you *Privatseelsorge*,

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19. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 74–75.

20. Russ, “International Students,” 38.

21. As noted in the Findings chapter below, leaders from all three schools specifically emphasized the importance of the same type of relationship that Russ discussed: ISes are more likely to remain in contact after graduation and develop a positive association with the school if they developed a close relationship with one or more faculty members when they were a student.

a pastoral care for individual souls, and your view of the student as a soul to be cared for by the application of law and gospel is of greater value than anything else.<sup>22</sup>

The religion teacher has the responsibility both to proclaim law and gospel in the classroom and to apply it individually to students in counseling. Relationships open the door for this counseling.

Russ explored the impact of IS relationships with domestic students. He found that such relationships lead to “an increase in social support and lowering of acculturative stress ... Studies have found a positive connection between host country relationships and positive life satisfaction and social connectedness (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015).”<sup>23</sup> Russ found that IS relationships with other ISes from the same country (“co-national” friendships) are also healthy: “Initially, these relationships can help lower the effects of culture shock. Longer term, these relationships can provide support for those who have a stronger cultural identity and need the support of other co-nationals with similar cultural beliefs and practices (Wei et al., 2012).”<sup>24</sup> Russ also found there to be benefits of IS relationships with ISes from different countries (“multi-national” friendships). ISes from various countries can empathize with each other as they are all experiencing the same pressures and struggles of studying abroad, albeit from different countries of origin.<sup>25</sup>

Students who move across the world to attend high school face changes and pressures which may negatively affect their education. Russ explored the overall impact that acculturative stress, social connectedness, and perceived social support have on the life satisfaction of an IS. In his tested hypotheses, he found there to be a strong negative correlation between life satisfaction

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22. Paul T. Prange. “Luther Taught the Children—And So Do We” (paper presented at the Symposium on the Pastor as Teacher, Mequon, WI, 22 September 2015), 15.

23. Russ, “International Students,” 36.

24. Russ, “International Students,” 37.

25. Russ, “International Students,” 38.



and acculturative stress, a strong positive correlation between life satisfaction and social connectedness, a weak positive correlation between life satisfaction and perceived social support, a strong negative correlation between acculturative stress and social connectedness, and a weak negative correlation between acculturative stress and perceived social support.<sup>26</sup> It follows that a school can significantly increase the life satisfaction of ISes by facilitating the building of relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. Georges explains why this is important: “People in shame-honor cultures can meaningfully experience the gospel by encountering the divine and ecclesial community from within their social network.”<sup>27</sup> The relationship-building aspect of ISPs is included in the research findings below.

### **Implications for the Host School**

Many parents of ISes send their children overseas to give them an enriching experience that goes beyond the educational realm. But host schools also benefit from the diversity provided by an ISP. Fisher shared some of the blessings of multi-ethnic diversity at Wisconsin Lutheran High School. He wrote that attending a diverse high school “bring[s] advantages for college, career, and a smooth transition into a diverse world. This frames diversity in terms of the most important question that parents ask, ‘What will be best for my child?’”<sup>28</sup> Every student at every school is growing up in a diverse world and will more fully enter that diversity after graduating high school. Fisher said, “It is obvious that the school's role is to encourage the cultural responsiveness of our students for the future. The value placed on diversity is growing with each

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26. Russ, “International Students,” 61–69.

27. Georges, *3D Gospel*, 71.

28. Fisher, “Multi-Ethnic Diversity,” 161.

generation. It is hoped that over time, as each successive generation experiences personally the school's benefits of ethnic diversity, the perceptions [of a diverse student body] will grow more positive.”<sup>29</sup>

High school faculty and staff who are involved with the school’s ISP in any capacity enter a mission field every morning they step inside the school building. Lingenfelter said it well:

Missionaries and others who accept the challenge of cross-cultural ministries, however, must, by the nature of their task, become personally immersed with peoples who are different. Following the example of Christ means undergoing drastic personal and social reorientation.... [Cross-cultural workers] must enter a culture as if they were children again—helpless, dependent, and ignorant of everything from customs of eating and talking to patterns of work, play, and worship.<sup>30</sup>

Operating an ISP is no small endeavor. Resources are spent, time is dedicated, and teachers are committed to this type of relearning that Lingenfelter writes about.

Fisher stated in his conclusion that “for the school’s health in the area of diversity,” two critical steps must be taken in a school such as Wisconsin Lutheran (or Fox Valley or St. Croix): “One is the need to diversify the faculty and staff, and the other is the ongoing need to raise cross-cultural competencies and racial consciousness with the faculty and staff, as well as across the student body.”<sup>31</sup> Multi-cultural education for ISEs is a team effort that requires participation from every team member every day. This “100%” participation is necessary for a school to fulfill its multi-cultural mission.

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29. Fisher, “Multi-Ethnic Diversity,” 165.

30. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 108–9.

31. Fisher, “Multi-Ethnic Diversity,” 166.

## METHODOLOGY

The research conducted for this project was done in large part by interviews. I spoke with representatives from each of the three high schools to learn about each school's ISP. The goal was to talk to multiple members of the faculty or staff who were involved with the ISP in various ways. In general, I talked with the international coordinator, the school's president or principal, a pastor on staff, and/or a religion teacher or miscellaneous faculty member.

Each interviewee was initially contacted via email. I introduced myself, gave my reason for contacting them, and asked whether they would be willing to be interviewed for my thesis project. As each person replied and agreed to be interviewed, I scheduled a time for the interview and also sent them two documents: an "Informed Consent Form" and a questionnaire which I told them would form the structure of the interview.

The Informed Consent Form introduced the interviewee to the researcher and the researcher's project by giving a summary of the thesis's purpose. The interviewee was informed that the information he or she provided may be shared in the thesis project. The form asked each interviewee for two permissions. The first permission request was for the researcher to be allowed to use the interviewee's name in the project. The alternate choice was for the interviewee to remain anonymous, while still allowing the researcher to use the information provided in the interview. The second permission request was for the researcher to be allowed to record the conversation. Each permission request was completely voluntary. All interviewees

gave permission for the conversation to be recorded; nearly all interviewees gave permission for his or her name to be used in the project. Each interviewee signed and dated the form. A blank copy of this Informed Consent Form distributed to interviewees is found in Appendix 1.

Each interviewee was also sent a questionnaire in advance. They were told that they could be expected to be asked the included questions during the interview. I developed four different questionnaires, each being tailored specifically for use with the four distinct categories of faculty or staff members being interviewed. Those categories were determined by the nature of each interviewee's involvement with the ISP. The purpose for developing multiple questionnaires was so that each questionnaire would focus on topics that each category of faculty or staff members would be able to speak toward. The goal was to avoid wasting time or distracting from the research by asking anybody a question they could not answer due to their specific involvement with the program. Many questions did overlap between questionnaires. The four questionnaires used in this project (for Principals or Presidents; for International Coordinators; for Pastors or Religion Teachers; for Miscellaneous Faculty or Staff) can be found in appendices 2–5.

By sending the questionnaires to the interviewees ahead of time, I was hoping that each interviewee might read through the questions and think about answers before the interview. The purpose was to increase the productivity and efficiency of each interview. A few interviewees expressed appreciation for receiving the questionnaire in advance and specifically stated that they were glad to be able to think ahead about the issues at hand and write notes down before talking to me. In some cases, I could tell that certain interviewees had written down notes for each question ahead of time. Their fuller answers and more thoughtful input bore witness to that.

Most interviews were conducted by phone call; three were conducted in-person; one was conducted via a Zoom meeting; all were conducted one-on-one. For the phone calls, I used an app called TapeACall to record the conversation. The app also transcribed the conversation (for a monthly fee) which saved me time by making the conversation immediately available for reference and incorporation into the project. The in-person interviews and Zoom meeting were recorded with a simple voice recorder app.

## FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will first introduce each aspect of ISPs that this study explored. I will then present what I found Fox Valley Lutheran, St. Croix Lutheran, and Wisconsin Lutheran to be doing in regard to each aspect. Methods that have proved to exemplify a well-run program in this researcher's study will be highlighted.

### **Introduction to the Aspects Explored**

#### Host Families or Residence in the Dormitory

To set up ISes with host families who care for them is critical. A host family can “make or break” the study abroad experience. Significantly, it can also have a profound impact on the spiritual health of the student. The host family has the opportunity to model a Christian home for the student. The family can take the student to church with them, follow up on how religion classes are going, and encourage them to ask questions they have about Christianity. Monica Uhlenbrauck, international coordinator at Fox Valley Lutheran, noted that the host family has the unique opportunity to help the IS see the love of Jesus through all the little parts of daily life. They can provide support for the challenges of the day-to-day high school routine.<sup>32</sup> For WELS high schools which house ISes in a dormitory, a comfortable residence with dormitory staff who properly care for the students is likewise critical.

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32. Monica Uhlenbrauck, interview by author. Phone call, November 2, 2021.

## Orientation

A smooth orientation process is also critical to get ISes started on the right foot. The orientation day(s) may be the first contact an IS has with the school itself. All basic “need-to-know” items must be addressed in an effective way. Orientation sessions, presentations, activities, and printed resources will serve as a “survival guide” for American student life.

## International Student Relationships with Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff have the responsibility to foster a school environment where the overall health of ISes is appropriately monitored and cared for. This study examines what is being done in regard to the academic health, mental health, and spiritual health of the students.

### *Monitoring Academic Health*

Every teacher who has ISes in his or her classroom (not just religion classes) has a key role to play in monitoring their academic health. Of course, teachers are responsible for attending to the academic health of all their students, but their ISes may often require more attention and work. Teachers must realize that in many Eastern cultures it is sometimes viewed as disrespectful for students to raise their hand and ask a question of the teacher, as discussed in the Literature Review above. So, teachers will clearly communicate classroom procedures and expectations in order to encourage questions and general participation. They must also closely monitor their grades. If it becomes apparent that an IS is struggling with the course content, the teacher should schedule a meeting with the student, communicate with the ISP office, and discuss what can be done to help. If necessary, the IS can be assigned a student tutor. The ISP office can also play a role by consistently monitoring the grade cards of all ISes.

### ***Monitoring Mental Health***

Teachers and ISP staff also have a responsibility to monitor the mental health of ISes. School representatives must not forget that these students are teenagers traveling across the world, often alone, to live in a new place for an extended period of time and to attend school in a foreign environment. It is an inaccurate assumption to believe that the language barrier is the single largest factor contributing to the challenges of studying abroad. High school students who study abroad live in an unfamiliar home or dormitory and become immersed in an unfamiliar culture. They face pressure to acclimate to unfamiliar societal norms.<sup>33</sup> Even the introduction to unfamiliar food and an unfamiliar currency must be considered. These and other factors all combine to create what has come to be identified as “culture shock.” Culture shock—or “acculturative stress”—will affect a student’s mental health to one degree or another. Of course, ISes are prone to other mental health issues connected with being a high school student, just as any domestic student is. But with the added consideration of culture shock, it is crucial for teachers and staff to be on the lookout for warning signs that an IS is struggling.

### ***Monitoring Spiritual Health***

Finally, and most importantly, faculty and staff are responsible for monitoring the spiritual health of ISes. WELS high schools have the unique opportunity to share the gospel with people from around the world. This also makes the international programs of WELS high schools unique

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33. “When I pass someone on the sidewalk, do I say hello, or keep my eyes straight ahead?” “When I check out at the grocery store, do I make small talk with the cashier or just pay and go?” Most Americans would probably agree that it is acceptable both to say “hi” to someone in public and to make friendly conversation with the cashier. But students from certain European countries come from a culture where neither of those actions are normal or even deemed acceptable behavior. Unless ISes have been told otherwise, they may assume the same is true in their new home. This researcher spent one semester in Germany during college as a study abroad student. Before he left, he was told by his German professor that actions such as the examples above are much less acceptable in the German culture. The researcher, often through his mistakes, found this to be true. He can also attest to the acculturative stress caused by the unfamiliar city, language, educational structure, and homestay.



from any public school international program. Faculty members, especially pastors and other religion teachers, must build a relationship with each IS that enables them to evaluate the spiritual health of an IS. International coordinators, who perhaps form one of the closest relationships that an IS has, also have the responsibility to check in on their spiritual health.

### Religion Classes

The principal goal of the ISPs at all WELS high schools coincides with the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20). Of all of the ways the Holy Spirit may work to accomplish this mission among ISes, the religion classes may be among the biggest tools used. It is important for the schools to take advantage of the opportunity they have to present the gospel to ISes every day for the entire school year. In order to do that effectively, a separate religion curriculum which is tailored specifically for ISes may be implemented.

### International Student Relationships with Domestic Students

Critical among the factors that lead to a positive experience for ISes is their level of integration into the student body and school events. In general, ISes at WELS high schools are less involved in various school activities than domestic students. This is not a criticism of the students—it is natural that a teenager who travels overseas to a completely new home, culture, and language might be hesitant to involve himself in even more new experiences. That being said, a higher level of social connectedness has been shown to increase the life satisfaction of high school students, as discussed in connection with Russ’s dissertation above. Given this concern, the ISP at each school has the responsibility to encourage a higher level of interaction between ISes and domestic students. Each school involved in this study has taken measures to accomplish this.

### Celebration of International Culture

Finally, WELS high schools can take extra measures to make their ISes feel welcome and appreciated. One of the most effective ways this is done is by actively honoring or celebrating the home cultures of each nationality represented in the student body. The three schools involved in this study have also accomplished this in several ways.

### **Fox Valley Lutheran High School**

Fox Valley Lutheran High School (FVL) first hosted ISes in the 1970–71 school year. FVL was granted I–20 status in 2003, enabling IS enrollment to grow rapidly in the first decade of the 2000’s. Before long, FVL was hosting over fifty ISes every year.<sup>34</sup>

### Host Families

International students who attend FVL stay with host families. M. Uhlenbrauck, the international coordinator, explained that prospective host families fill out a basic application to share biographical information. She then does a home visit to meet with the family and see the environment in which the IS would be staying. M. Uhlenbrauck said, “I introduce them to the types of directions they should be ready to go with having an international student—things they can prepare for.... I tell them, ‘You are becoming a missionary in your own home ... that’s ultimately what this is.’”<sup>35</sup> Host families are encouraged to take their students to church with them and discuss the contents of the service with their student.

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34. Fox Valley Lutheran High School, “1970–2020: 50 Years of International Students at FVL,” *Legacy Summer 2021*. <https://legacy.fvlhs.org/summer-2021/50-years-of-international-students>.

35. M. Uhlenbrauck interview.

M. Uhlenbrauck conducts a host family orientation at FVL in early August before the school year begins. At this orientation, Rev. Brad Krause, who teaches one of the IS religion courses, will talk to the families about what he will be studying with the ISes. This helps make host families aware of the types of content the students will be introduced to. In addition, the orientation “takes them through how to be aware of mental health and culture shock, in an effort to try to set students and host families up for success.”<sup>36</sup>

Host families are contacted at least on a monthly basis. M. Uhlenbrauck shared that besides checking in every month, she calls host parents if there is any kind of concern or question. Hosts know they can reach out to her at any time. For increased communication, she will sometimes copy hosts in on emails that she sends to the students. If an IS talks to her about anything that would be considered a mental health issue, she will ask if she can share it with the student’s host family, so that they are also aware and able to help.

### Orientation

M. Uhlenbrauck explained the orientation day procedure for ISes, which takes place two days before the semester begins. A portion of this day involves routine orientation items, such as picking up personal laptops and taking ID pictures+. Other portions include sessions that are necessary for all new students on campus, such as learning how to log on to the computers in the media center, how to access their Skyward<sup>37</sup> account, and how to use the printers. The ISes will be guided to access and print their I-94 travel forms to ensure that their travel was documented correctly when they entered the United States.

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36. M. Uhlenbrauck interview.

37. Skyward is the online student portal utilized at FVL where students access their schedule and view their grades.

Throughout nearly the entire orientation day, each IS is accompanied by an American mentor from the American Mentor Program. This program will be further discussed below. The American mentor is constantly available to clarify instructions or answer questions. They also “have a time frame where the mentors will take their international students on a tour of the school. But then they also take them through each of their classes. They have their class schedule with them, and they sit down and explain to them how the schedule works ... they’ll walk them throughout the course of a day.”<sup>38</sup>

For a session of about an hour and a half, M. Uhlenbrauck will walk the ISes through helpful strategies for daily school life. She discusses with them logistical matters including how to get in touch with teachers via email, how to find out when teachers are available for office hours, how to find classrooms, and how to use their personal school planner book. Other matters involve more teaching, such as how to behave within the host family or when to ask questions in class—practical advice that the students need right away. M. Uhlenbrauck explains her rationale for an orientation day shaped like this one:

I want to give them some basic information to be able to get off the ground running the right direction, without overwhelming them too much ... I personally find it more valuable to teach them more of the things they can do when, for example, they go down to lunch, like helping them start a conversation with someone. “I want you to go up to them and say ‘Hi! My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I’m from \_\_\_\_\_.’” I try to teach them some of those things that will help them on day one of classes, rather than the nitty-gritty of what a typical orientation would involve for a student.<sup>39</sup>

Laura Gucinski, the former international coordinator at FVL, explained that it worked well to get the students’ class schedules set in advance, when they were still in their home country. They can rank their elective choices and the guidance counselors at FVL can finalize their schedule before

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38. M. Uhlenbrauck interview.

39. M. Uhlenbrauck interview.

orientation day.<sup>40</sup> M. Uhlenbrauck added that English placement tests, designed to determine a student's English class and certain other classes, is also done before orientation day in order to allow time for the sessions listed above. The orientation process gives ISes at FVL a practical jumpstart to navigating student life in an American high school.

## International Student Relationships with Faculty and Staff

### *Monitoring Academic Health*

M. Uhlenbrauck checks in with new ISes at least once every two weeks to monitor class progress in general. She said that they sit down and go through the student's Skyward account together to check on grades and talk about which classes are difficult, which classes they enjoy, or any other academic concerns. FVL also offers an Academic English class for ISes with lower English proficiency, designed to prepare them for the mainstream Language Arts course.

### *Monitoring Mental Health*

The one-on-one meetings between the international coordinator and each IS at FVL are instrumental for monitoring mental health. M. Uhlenbrauck gauges how each IS is feeling about their away-from-home experience: "In general, it helps the students just to know that I care and that I'm here to help them, but it also helps bring a lot of awareness to what's going on." The coordinator strives to discover any problem the IS might be experiencing. "Whenever they express things that are bothering them and potentially could be affecting things in the classroom, I ask them if they are willing to let me share a basic part of it, not all the details, with their

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40. Laura Gucinski, interview by author. Phone call, November 4, 2021.

teachers, just so that their teachers can have a better understanding on how to serve them.”<sup>41</sup> In this way, teachers become aware and able to understand, adjust, and help the student. This consequently serves as another checkpoint for monitoring academic health.

FVL also has a counselor from Christian Family Solutions (CFS) on campus several days per week. Any student who needs to talk to the counselor can do so.

### ***Monitoring Spiritual Health***

The spiritual health of ISes is monitored in large part by the teacher of whichever religion class they are enrolled in. Krause, who teaches the fundamental IS religion class, said, “I get together one-on-one with them at the end of the semester ... I try to get an idea of where they are in their faith, or in their belief in God. I ask what they’ve learned.”<sup>42</sup> He gives out a biographical survey at the beginning of the semester and is able to compare that with the notes he takes from each meeting at the end of the semester. In this way Krause develops a sort of “spiritual profile” for each IS. He said, “I share those notes with [the international coordinator] unless there’s something confidential, and with [the instructor of Life of Christ International] and the other teachers who will have them in class.” M. Uhlenbrauck noted about her regular check-ins with ISes: “[Those meetings] give me an opportunity to bring up religion class just like it’s another class, but it often opens the door for spiritual conversations with them.”<sup>43</sup> This is less intimidating than directly asking a student about his or her faith.

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41. M. Uhlenbrauck interview.

42. Brad Krause, interview by author. Phone call, November 3, 2021.

43. M. Uhlenbrauck interview.

FVL also monitors spiritual health by fostering a culture in which ISes are comfortable approaching the school’s pastors for counsel. Krause mentioned that the more the students get to know him, the more they will ask him questions either about the Bible or their own life. Rev. Leon Ehlert, who formerly taught at FVL, highlighted the importance of “friendship evangelism.” In his religion classroom with ISes he would regularly offer the students a chance to ask questions: “Every month we would spend half the class going around the room—‘I want you to tell me one thing, over the past month, that you don’t understand about America or FVL.’ And then they just got used to it.”<sup>44</sup> Ehlert said that once the students get used to sharing and discussing issues, they understand that in the eyes of the faculty, they are important as individuals. The pastors must “keep the door open” to encourage ISes to bring their questions, concerns, and personal struggles to them. In this way FVL’s pastors are more readily able to serve as the students’ spiritual shepherd.<sup>45</sup>

### Religion Classes

Krause has the privilege of teaching a religion class for nearly all the ISes at FVL. The average IS who is attending FVL for their first year will be enrolled in Introduction to Christianity, a semester-long religion class for new ISes. Krause explained that it resembles a Bible Information Class: the course begins with an introduction to the Bible, an introduction to the plan of

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44. Ehlert interview.

45. FVL Dean of Students Jeff Uhlenbrauck highlighted how FVL’s mission includes the goal to prepare students “for eternity.” He shared a story about how a Chinese student approached a pastor on staff and opened up about how he was struggling with the Bible. He said, “[The student] wants to believe but everything from his background says ‘no’ and [the pastor] just took an hour out of his time and talked with the student. The kid missed a class and was surprised when a whole hour had gone by... but our mission statement is ‘for eternity.’ Our pastors understand this. Missing their Language Arts class or whatever else—we’re okay with that, because this is the big picture here. If they go back home and they missed a class or two, but they have a love for their Savior, well, then it’s a win.”

salvation, and an overview of law and gospel. Those lessons are followed by a lesson on Creation, a brief survey of the Old Testament, a longer unit on the Commandments, an overview of the life of Christ, and at least an introduction to the sacraments. The course begins on a fundamental level. The instructor takes time to explain such vocabulary as “sin” and “grace.” This is basic terminology for life-long Christians, but the approach of the course assumes the students have a beginner-level knowledge of Christianity.

After taking Introduction to Christianity in the first semester, an IS will take a course called Life of Christ International during the second semester. Isaiah Degner has been the instructor of that course in recent years. The course examines stories from the gospels. Degner explained that while domestic students also take a Life of Christ course during their sophomore year, Life of Christ International covers about one-half to two-thirds of the content so that the stories about Christ can be studied more slowly and at a more developmental level.<sup>46</sup>

If an IS enrolls who speaks English very well and also understands the basic concepts of Christianity and the Bible, he or she may be placed in a religion class with domestic students and forego Introduction to Christianity and Life of Christ International. This may happen especially if this IS comes in as a junior or senior and will only be on campus for one or two years. Degner added, “We have had some international students come who are already in fellowship with us and are very advanced in their Christian faith. They’ll usually just jump right into the regular religion curriculum if their English allows for it.”

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46. Isaiah Degner, interview by author. Phone call, November 2, 2021.



About half of the ISes who start with Introduction to Christianity will mainstream into the regular curriculum the following semester and forego Life of Christ International. These students have demonstrated an ability that will allow them to keep up with the regular religion courses.<sup>47</sup>

### International Student Relationships with Domestic Students

In the fall of 2019, M. Uhlenbrauck initiated the American Mentor Program (AMP) at FVL. The AMP pairs each international student “mentee” with one domestic student who serves as an American mentor. In the spring of the previous school year, M. Uhlenbrauck uses an application process to select students who are qualified and willing to become an American mentor to an IS for the following year. These students interact with their mentee regularly throughout the school year.

M. Uhlenbrauck explained that the AMP has two main components. First, there is a monthly AMP activity that is mandatory for both the mentors and the international mentees. The dates for these monthly activities are chosen in February of the previous school year, taking into account the already-scheduled sports competitions and theater productions so that students have little to no excuse to miss the activity. Students involved in sports or drama will be excused from practice or rehearsal if necessary. The fact that all students are present is a critical piece of the AMP being a successful program—the ISes and their mentors are all engaging in an activity together. The activities are not burdensome time commitments; each lasts only an hour and

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47. Degner interview. For the average IS who enrolls as a freshman and completes four years at FVL, he or she will take Introduction to Christianity and Life of Christ International as a freshman, and then join domestic students the following year. They will take Old Testament as a sophomore (the regular freshman course), New Testament (a sophomore course) and Romans (a junior course) as a junior, and Ephesians and Christian Doctrine as a senior (both of which are the regular senior courses). That plan is adjusted appropriately for ISes who enroll as a sophomore, junior, or senior. There is no set rule; each student is placed according to their ability.

fifteen minutes.<sup>48</sup> M. Uhlenbrauck noted that some ISes might be hesitant to participate at first, but eventually admit they enjoy these activities. She is thankful that the school administration has supported this program and has made participation in it a top priority.

The second main component of the AMP is a once-per-semester activity between each IS and his or her American mentor. American mentors are responsible for arranging an activity to do with mentees outside of school.<sup>49</sup> It does not have to be one-on-one, which might be uncomfortable; pairs are encouraged to double up or find friends of the IS and invite them to participate as well. M. Uhlenbrauck noted that generally speaking, ISes are outgoing. Most like to try new activities. For those who are not as naturally outgoing, these activities might be more difficult but still beneficial.

Apart from these two components, American mentors are encouraged simply to be a friend to their mentee. FVL Dean of Students Jeff Uhlenbrauck explained, “If your family is doing some kind of special event, talk to your mentee about coming. If you’re going to a volleyball game or a basketball game, invite them to come with you. It’s making sure they have someone to sit with at lunch. As a matter of fact, try to get them to sit with *you* at lunch.”<sup>50</sup> J. Uhlenbrauck has noticed that ISes have become friends with more domestic students lately, and not only with those in the AMP. As Dean of Students, he appreciates the dual benefits of the

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48. Examples of monthly activities done at FVL include having a cookout, pumpkin carving, making Christmas ornaments and Christmas cookies, sledding, a game night with games that are easy to learn, Easter egg decorating, Minute to Win It games, and an end-of-year picnic with host families included. M. Uhlenbrauck noted that certain activities offer valuable opportunities for other faculty members to get involved. They can help out in some way—like being assigned to a Minute to Win It station—and have a chance to interact with the ISes outside of the classroom. For one activity, the entire group was invited to the school’s president’s house for a cookout and yard games before the Friday night football game.

49. Examples of these activities that have been done include going to the farmer’s market, going shopping for a homecoming dress, going to an apple orchard or corn maze, finding a costume and going trick-or-treating, ice skating, frisbee golfing at the nearby county park, and going on a camping trip with the mentor’s family.

50. Jeff Uhlenbrauck, interview by author. Phone call, November 2, 2021.

AMP: “It’s not only good for those international students. It’s great for our kids. It’s a two-way street. We get to learn from them too. Our kids get to have their eyes opened to another culture.”<sup>51</sup> He said that an effort is made to match up mentors and mentees in a way that will form a complementary relationship. The international office has the convenience to be selective with its American mentors because they have more volunteers apply to be mentors than are needed. In the 2021–22 school year, FVL has 33 ISes.<sup>52</sup> The overabundance of students who want to be involved speaks well toward the AMP.

M. Uhlenbrauck conducts two days of training sessions during the summer with all mentors. She said that part of these training sessions involves activities that help the domestic students understand what it is like to have to communicate in a foreign environment where one cannot use his or her first language. Students discuss some ways the mentors can be continually looking out for their mentee throughout the year. They also go over the different activities that will take place. Students become prepared to be a positive and active mentor.

J. Uhlenbrauck shared that he has noticed a positive difference in the last two school years since the AMP began in 2019. The level of IS involvement has climbed. He recalled how he would often see separate groups of ISes sticking to themselves for the majority of the school day, but today the students are more integrated overall. M. Uhlenbrauck elaborates upon the overall goal of the program:

The goal is that these international students are more incorporated into our student body, and it doesn’t seem like we have the student body, and then you have the “side” student body of international students. They are just part of our student body. I think the mentor

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51. J. Uhlenbrauck shared how a domestic student recently traveled to Spain during the summer and spent two weeks with one of her former IS mentees. “She missed her and she got an opportunity to go experience her culture.” This underscores Fisher’s comments in the Literature Review concerning the benefits of enrolling in a diverse student body.

52. This number is lower than the average number in the last five years due to COVID–19’s impact.

program has really helped change that culture and has gotten students to be more aware of how they can help integrate our international students.<sup>53</sup>

J. Uhlenbrauck said the AMP “has done a world of good” for the integration of the students.

This author graduated from FVL in 2014. While he and his classmates did get to know certain ISes fairly well, he remembers noticing how most ISes tended to stick together in their own cohorts.<sup>54</sup> Everything he has learned in this study from the representatives at FVL has suggested that today it is a different story. ISes are becoming more involved in various school activities.<sup>55</sup> M. Uhlenbrauck mentioned some of this year’s senior ISes “have noticed a complete change in how the student body accepts international students compared to when they were freshman. That is cool to hear. That effect has been the goal.”

### Celebration of International Culture

Laura Gucinski explained how FVL has sought to highlight and celebrate the cultures of the IS population. When she was the coordinator of the ISP, she implemented “International Student Week, which coincides with the national International Education Week. We always have a whole

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53. One faculty member adds this valuable consideration: even if it is an IS’s preference to interact only with people from their own language and culture, their parents might prefer otherwise. Surveys sent to IS parents by FVL leaders indicate that many are dissatisfied if their child does not become integrated into the student body—“One of their parents’ big goals for them was that they become fluent in English and get to know people from the United States, and so on. So, we were actually doing a disservice to our program by allowing [the opposite].” Part of the program’s goal is to serve the students’ families by encouraging and helping the students to experience American culture and learn English. The AMP helps to accomplish this goal.

54. I do not want to give the impression that I think this is an essentially negative tendency. After all, American students tend to do the same. They stick to their own “cliques.” It is even more natural for ISes to cling to people they relate to. These co-national and multi-national friendships are even healthy, as discussed in the Literature Review. But it was also reported in the Literature Review that a higher level of social connectedness has proven to increase the quality of one’s high school experience.

55. Degner included that even giving the students roles in Student Council and the Peer Leadership Group are two simple yet effective steps that are being taken. Peer Leadership Group is a group of students who display leadership qualities and coordinate various school-wide events throughout the school year.

‘spirit week’ for them, we try to have some presentations after chapel, we have some extra ethnic foods available ... some extra activities after school, and that would all be followed at the end by Culture and Cuisine.”<sup>56</sup> The international office places little signs or flags on the students’ lockers or give gift bags. The goal is to make it an enjoyable week tailored to the ISes.

Culture and Cuisine is an evening dinner event hosted by the ISP office and all ISes. The ISes make an ethnic food that they eat in their home country and bring it to share. It resembles a potluck. Domestic students and IS host families are encouraged to attend. Some ISes provide entertainment or give presentations on their home culture.

Gucinski mentioned that another way FVL celebrates the ISes is by hanging the flags of each country that has been represented at the school. This began in 2008, the first year that Culture and Cuisine was implemented. The flags hang along one of the walls in the “commons,” which is the large cafeteria room. The flags are visible to many visitors who use the commons entrance for basketball games. As of November 2021, forty-four flags line the wall. Each time FVL hosts a student from a new country, a flag is added to the wall.

### **St. Croix Lutheran Academy**

#### Residence in the Dormitory

One of the biggest differences between the ISPs at FVL and St. Croix Lutheran Academy (SCL) is the housing accommodation. At SCL, almost all ISes reside in the school’s dormitory. In uncommon cases where an IS happens to have local relatives, the student may live with them instead. In the average pre-COVID school year, SCL’s enrollment has been around 500, with

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56. Gucinski interview.

about 150 students living in the dorm. Of those living in the dorm, 125 are ISes and twenty-five are domestic students.<sup>57</sup> ISes at SCL have the unique opportunity to integrate into American culture through their constant interaction with domestic student neighbors in the dorm. Each dormitory student has one roommate.<sup>58</sup>

Dormitory life is overseen by Grey Davis, who currently holds the role of dormitory director. Six supervisors also live on site in the dormitory, who tend to the daily needs of the students. At least two supervisors are on duty at all times. An additional dormitory student advisor manages medical matters and communication between students and parents.<sup>59</sup>

### Orientation

SCL's international coordinator Hannah Schmiede explained that the orientation process begins as soon as an IS is accepted to the school. Each new IS is connected with an "ambassador," a returning IS from the same country who can answer questions and walk the new student through the orientation process. Students arrive one week before school starts. They meet their ambassador and also a student mentor. Orientation consists of three days of different activities which serve as a "crash course" on what new ISes need to know to be set up for success in an American school. ISes are given a chance to address aspects of high school that might be difficult for a study abroad student.

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57. Hannah Schmiede, interview by author. Zoom meeting, November 2, 2021.

58. In the 2021–22 school year, SCL hosts about ninety ISes. As is the case with all three schools in this study, the number is lower than average due to COVID's impact both on IS recruitment and the overall feasibility of studying abroad. Fortunately, these schools see indications that they are steadily regaining students and will, Lord-willing, climb back up to pre-COVID numbers.

59. Grey Davis, interview by author. Phone call, November 3, 2021.

To accomplish this, orientation sessions include the following: a welcome from the school president and international coordinator; ice breakers and general school orientation; religion class placement; technology training; dormitory orientation; a dinner with American mentors; an emotional well-being seminar with CFS and Rev. David Huebner; sessions such as “Being a Successful Student,” “Healthy Living Choices and Medical Care,” and “Meet Your Academic Advisor;” an introduction to the mentor program activities; class schedule orientation; a cookout and bonfire; and opportunities to visit local stores for dormitory and athletic needs.<sup>60</sup>

SCL also hosts an English camp in late July. Many students arrive early to participate. Schmiede explains that this camp is like an extended orientation where students study English and participate in other activities that help them integrate into American culture. All in all, ISes have ample opportunity to begin the cultural adjustment process before classes begin.

#### International Student Relationships with Faculty and Staff

##### ***Monitoring Academic Health***

Schmiede explained certain steps that are taken at SCL to provide an academically healthy environment for ISes. Three levels of English as a Second Language (ESL) are offered at SCL. Each IS is evaluated and either placed into one of the three ESL levels or mainstreamed into the regular English class. In this way, ISes are given the chance to learn English at their specific skill level and improve communication skills for living abroad, all while getting credit for it.

Schmiede stressed that SCL places heavy focus on effective multi-cultural education. School leaders work with teachers to make them aware of basic educational strategies. Simply to

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60. St. Croix Lutheran Academy, “Dormitory Fall Orientation—Student Schedule,” West St. Paul, 2021.

avoid using background knowledge that many ISes do not have is just one crucial step. Schmiede shared how SCL seeks to encourage IS class participation:

One thing we've tried to work on with our teachers over the years is that in American classrooms, speaking up in class and being part of the class discussion is really important [for international students]. An international student probably hasn't come from a classroom like that. If we want them to participate by speaking up in class discussion, we give them ways to do that: let them write it down first; let them talk to a partner first. Remember that there are a lot of ways to participate in class. It doesn't necessarily mean you're the one volunteering answers in class. It's said that "introverts think so they can speak, and extroverts speak so they can think," and so just because a kid isn't volunteering answers doesn't mean he isn't participating. Those kind of classroom adjustments are important, to make sure international students aren't being looked down upon, or that we think they're not engaged in the class when they actually are.<sup>61</sup>

Teachers must try to build up the confidence of an IS in the classroom by making class participation easy and as unthreatening as possible. Schmiede shared a document that is used when orienting new faculty to prepare them for having ISes in class. The document, found in Appendix 6, contains useful suggestions for guarding against unfair biases and misconceptions.

Davis said that achieving faculty "buy-in" is a critical step to meeting the academic needs of students from different countries. Each member of the faculty must realize that running an effective multi-cultural classroom requires extra efforts to be made and new strategies to be implemented. The faculty will occasionally read a book on multi-cultural education as a part of professional development. In the 2021–22 school year, a pilot group of about fifteen faculty members are participating in a workshop with the director of the Friends Network. Davis is enthusiastic about equipping teachers to accommodate ISes in the classroom: "That doesn't mean we change our values. But it's changing how we approach certain situations and how we approach linking together two very different ways in which people were brought up in the world." Richard Gibson, who serves SCL as high school principal, stated the importance of

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61. Schmiede interview.



avoiding cultural bias: “You might have a very intelligent international student, but it doesn’t always show because he’s dealing with a second language.... We have to make sure that the fact that they’re learning English doesn’t cause us to misinterpret how well they’re grasping [class] concepts.”<sup>62</sup> Rev. David Huebner, who serves SCL as a religion and world languages instructor and as Guidance director, shared that the Learning Resource Center works with both ISes and domestic students in determining when extra time is needed for tests or certain assignments.<sup>63</sup> To achieve effective multi-cultural education is not easy, but it is necessary to serve ISes faithfully in the classroom.

### ***Monitoring Mental Health***

To help monitor mental health, ISes along with domestic students have access to CFS on campus, as well as pastoral counseling or one-on-one counseling with another faculty or staff member.<sup>64</sup> The head of the Guidance Department meets regularly with the dorm staff to talk about students individually, and then he also meets with those international or domestic dorm students who may be experiencing issues.<sup>65</sup> Gibson noted the importance of helping the dorm staff to appreciate what cultural changes ISes are going through, and being able to watch for those who are struggling. The dorm supervisors have the most interaction with ISes. Gibson also said, “The other part is making sure that all of our faculty and staff understand the difference between integration and assimilation. We are not trying to assimilate international students ...

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62. Richard Gibson, interview by author. Phone call, November 4, 2021.

63. David Huebner, interview by author. Phone call, November 10, 2021.

64. Davis interview.

65. Gibson interview.

For a long time, people have thought, ‘Well, we just have to make them more American, and then they’ll feel okay,’ and that’s not what our job is.” The job, rather, is to help ISes maintain a healthy balance between their home culture and identity with their new cultural experience.

### *Monitoring Spiritual Health*

Schmiege stressed the relationship between religion teachers and ISes as being integral to monitoring spiritual health. The average size of an IS religion class is about ten, which allows for a more personal and individualized connection between teacher and student. Opportunities for additional spiritual counseling may be realized in these classes.

Huebner said that for additional spiritual growth, optional Bible classes are offered on campus. Chapel services are every school day and are required for students. Transportation is provided to church services at local WELS congregations on the weekends. Huebner also said that he wants to maximize opportunities for pastor-student spiritual counseling:

I’m trying to intentionalize that and make sure that I do try to touch base with all the international kids. I want them to know that there’s somebody there that cares about them if they ever need to talk about anything... We’ll also do an afternoon or evening Bible study with kids that want to learn more. It’s kind of a pre-baptism class, we call it... What I want to do is just continue to build the relationships.<sup>66</sup>

Huebner stated that the Holy Spirit does his work in the way he sees fit. These relationships help ISes who want to learn more do so in a comfortable environment.

### Religion Classes

Huebner explained that in the IS religion curriculum at SCL, two separate courses are offered: Bible Knowledge 1 and Bible Knowledge 2. When new ISes arrive on campus for orientation,

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66. Huebner interview.

Huebner will sit down with each one individually for about a half an hour and gauge their knowledge of Christianity with a placement test.<sup>67</sup> ISes who have little to no knowledge of Christianity or no experience in a Christian school will be enrolled in Bible Knowledge 1 for their first year. Those who are more familiar with Christianity or the Bible may start with Bible Knowledge 2. Those who come from a Christian background or even a WELS-affiliated school may be mainstreamed right away. Religion class placement operates on a need-by-need basis, not only at the start of a student's first year but also beyond that. Huebner said,

Part of [their placement] has to do with their English level. If their English level is really weak, and they're still struggling with that after a year, I'll for sure put them in the Bible Knowledge 2 class [for their second year]. If their English is decent and they seem to be catching on to what we're talking about and really grasping the material—maybe not in their heart yet, but they're getting it with their head—then I might move them into Religion 10, or Religion 11, or whatever grade they're in.<sup>68</sup> I'll mainstream them if it seems like it's the best fit for that student.

One of the reasons it is so important to build a relationship with each IS is that it will help place these students in the religion class that will best help them grow in their knowledge of the Bible.

### International Student Relationships with Domestic Students

SCL takes a variety of measures to foster relationships between ISes and domestic students. One way is to encourage involvement in various student groups. Student groups at SCL that see heavy IS involvement are the speech team, Esports (developed especially with IS in mind), the math team, the robotics team, a clay target group, bowling, and drone racing. In athletics, girls'

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67. The placement test contains simple questions such as “What does it mean when we say we believe in the Triune God?” or “Who are Adam and Eve?” Huebner will also ask if they have previously attended a Christian school. He assures the students that there is no pressure; he simply wants to start the student in the most appropriate class.

68. Generally speaking, Religion 9 covers Old Testament, Religion 10 studies Life of Christ, Religion 11 includes Acts, Romans, and some doctrine, and Religion 12 introduces comparative religions and more challenging topics.

tennis has most IS participation.<sup>69</sup> Schmiede said that SCL also organizes volunteer groups: “For kids who live in dorms, it’s harder to get out and get service hours. So, we have someone who sources volunteer opportunities and arranges volunteer groups for dorm students.” Schmiede concluded that a school must actively make integration possible and comfortable:

We’re successful when all of the options have been put in front of [the international students], and they’ve been welcomed to a point where they think, “Yeah, I could be a part of that if I wanted to.” To me, success is not that they join everything, or that an international student is sitting with a domestic student at lunch, but that they don’t feel a barrier to that.

As with domestic students, some ISes will not be interested in as many co-curriculars or various school activities. It varies personality by personality, and while school leaders would love to see ISes participate in many aspects of school life, they are careful not to push too hard.

SCL runs an American Mentor Program (AMP) similar to FVL’s. Schmiede shared that each IS is paired up with one American student who will serve as the IS’s mentor throughout the year. The American mentors apply the previous spring, and chosen mentors are encouraged to contact their mentee during the summer. Davis said that the American mentors help prepare the dorm for new ISes. They also help with orientation. The entire group has an event once per month, mandatory for all mentors and mentees.<sup>70</sup> Schmiede said that the American mentors are also encouraged to invite their mentee along for other activities and to invite them to their house for one weekend per year. The international office has invited the parents of the American mentors for a dinner where they can meet the ISes, which further grows the bond between

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69. Schmiede interview; Davis interview.

70. The mentor program activities for the 2021–22 school year include the following: August: meet your mentor; September: cookout at a park; October: Sever’s Corn Maze and Farm Market; November: badminton tournament; December: Christmas party; February: sledding; March: Easter egg hunt; April: disc golf; May: end-of-year ethnic food picnic.

mentor and mentee. All those interviewed at SCL noted that the program has had a positive impact on the average IS.

Davis said that within the AMP are leaders of the group called “global leaders,” who help coordinate the program and organize the monthly activities. The global leaders work to show the entire student body how important it is to form relationships with ISes. SCL also runs an Ambassador Program (referred to under “Orientation” above) which pairs up each new IS with a returning IS from the same country. The ambassador can help the new IS navigate student life in America as someone from his own specific country and culture.

Huebner stressed the significance that a positive mentor-mentee relationship can have. He shared a story about how a recent IS from Japan was mentored by a girl in her class who invited her to her house on a regular basis. They became close friends. In the spring of that school year, the Japanese student was baptized and asked her mentor to be her sponsor.

#### Celebration of International Culture

Leaders at SCL realize the importance of recognizing the culture of their ISes and giving those students a chance to share their culture with the student body. Schmiege shared that during homecoming each fall, ISes will march in the homecoming parade carrying their country’s flag. They are encouraged to wear their culture’s traditional dress. Each December there is a special chapel service called “Christmas Around the World” during which ISes talk about Christmas traditions in their country.

The biggest and most extensive celebration of international culture is the International Festival. Gibson explains what happens at the festival:

We have a whole program for our entire student body. They move from station to station, where ISes from each country have set up an exhibit. The kids from those countries are

presenting and celebrating their home culture. Kids will get a passport for when they move from one station to the next, prizes are given out, and the international students really work hard to share food, games, family life, and pop culture. At the same time, we also invite those international students to present something, sort of like a talent show.<sup>71</sup>

This talent show takes place in the auditorium. It may involve music, skits, or anything that demonstrates a student's home culture. Students attend a half day of classes and spend the second half of the day enjoying the festival.

Huebner shared that before the year begins, ISes are encouraged to bring from home their traditional clothing, favorite recipes, or whatever aspect of their home culture they want to share during the festival—whatever they want to use to demonstrate to the student body what their culture is about. The festival takes so much energy and effort, Huebner said, that it occurs just every other year because the kids put so much work into it. In the years opposite, a day is designated about once per month where a certain country is featured and two or three of the students from that country will have an assembly and present their culture for the students.

Gibson noted how both of these events, especially the International Festival, lead the American students to become enthusiastic about international culture. They enjoy learning as the ISes share a part of their home. Huebner emphasized the incredible opportunity this event is, not only for ISes but also for domestic students: "It's just really a neat spectacle. People learn a ton about the other cultures and it's just a neat time to blend together and have the American kids learn from that. It's the highlight of the year."<sup>72</sup> He said that faculty also have a chance to become involved by being a "liaison" for one of the countries. Each liaison will help by obtaining ingredients for an ethnic dish, cooking, setting up the station, or anything else. A time for the festival is chosen to take place in between other major school events to ensure that

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71. Gibson interview.

72. Huebner interview.

students have time to prepare. Huebner credited Tammy Leyrer with being the “brains and work” behind initially making the International Festival a reality.

Finally, much like FVL, SCL hangs a flag in their commons from every country that has been represented at the school. As of November 2021, fifty-six flags line the wall.

### **Wisconsin Lutheran High School**

Wisconsin Lutheran High School (WL) first hosted ISes in the early 1970’s. After gaining approval from the Student & Exchange Visitor Program in 2006, IS enrollment began growing rapidly after 2010.<sup>73</sup> Today, the ISP at WL consists of the program director (Eric Duwe), an international admissions director (Tammy Leyrer), one of the school’s admissions counselors, a dean of residential life, and a residential student advisor, who oversees programs, wellness, and services for ISes. Leyrer mentioned that her work mainly involves recruiting students. Pre-COVID, she would travel three times per year to different countries to recruit students for WL. While that is not yet possible to the extent that it had been pre-COVID, she works to recruit students online and participates in education fairs.<sup>74</sup>

#### **Host Families and Residence in the Dormitory**

Duwe shared that in the average pre-COVID year, around 80% of ISes would stay in the campus dormitory, and the rest would stay with a host family. In the 2021–22 school year, WL hosts about sixty ISes and all but six of them are in the dormitory.<sup>75</sup>

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73. Wisconsin Lutheran High School, “WLHS International Program,” Milwaukee, 2021.

74. Tammy Leyrer, interview by author. Phone call, November 9, 2021.

75. Eric Duwe, interview by author. Personal interview, Milwaukee, November 5, 2021.

To find year-long host families for the few ISes who do not live in the dormitory is an important part of Duwe's job. He said that he partly relies on communications through local WELS congregations to recruit host families: "We selected four congregations in our conference that are higher targets, that we think would be really good ones to supply [host families] if possible."<sup>76</sup> Families who are interested fill out an application, and then WL leaders conduct an interview, a home visit, and a background check as part of the selection process.

Duwe explained that an orientation session takes place at WL in early August for new host families. The purpose is to prepare families for the considerations they will need to make when hosting an IS. They are encouraged to reach out to returning host families for practical advice and answers to questions. WL will sometimes host an ice cream social in September for host families so they can connect with one another and hear about programs taking place during the year for ISes. Duwe regularly connects with host families throughout the year, especially notifying them by email when the ISP has upcoming events. ISes who stay in the school dormitory are under the care of the dean of residential life, the residential student advisor, and part-time dormitory supervisors.

### Orientation

Duwe shared that ISes arrive about one week in advance of the first day of the semester. They have a window of time to arrive and move into the dorm, followed by several days of orientation activities. Sessions include the following: a welcome from the principal, the president, and ISP staff; a school tour; introductions to technology, meal accounts, the Guidance office, and school policies; a school day walkthrough; a meet and greet activity with American mentors; a kick-off

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76. Duwe interview.



event with any family members who are present; a “How To Be a Successful International Student” workshop; an introduction to Christian school environment; religion and English placement testing; a “Do You Know Wisconsin” activity; a trip to the State Fair; and a city tour. A day-long orientation process for family members of ISes also takes place.<sup>77</sup>

WL’s orientation for ISes includes a healthy taste both of school orientation and American culture. First-year American students who are staying in the dorm will participate in the State Fair and city trips, offering all dorm students a chance to get to know each other. “We try to get them to feel as confident as possible, and as prepared as they can be for day one.”<sup>78</sup>

#### International Student Relationships with Faculty and Staff

Duwe shared that an orientation takes place for new faculty and staff at the start of every year, designed to help them learn how to serve ISes. This is followed by a “coffee talk” about one month into the school year to check in and provide a chance for any needed support.

#### *Monitoring Academic Health*

Duwe acknowledged that the teachers’ management of the classroom is an integral part of facilitating IS integration, and that even arranging a seating chart that enables ISes regularly to interact and work with domestic students can help. “The teacher is the leader for building classroom culture that recognizes and meets the international students where they’re at,” Duwe said. “What’s best for international students in the classroom is often best for all students.”<sup>79</sup>

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77. Wisconsin Lutheran High School, “New International Student Orientation—Fall 2021,” Milwaukee, 2021.

78. Duwe interview.

79. Duwe interview.

Leyrer said that she remains mindful of the fact that some ISes may be shy about speaking in class, either because they know little about the topic or because of their English proficiency. As was discussed in the Literature Review, members of shame-honor cultures may remain quiet in order to save face. So, Leyrer fosters a classroom environment where an IS can feel confident. She said, “I want them to feel like they know each other and that they can trust each other. I push them to get involved by doing some cooperative group work, which gets them to speak to each other.”<sup>80</sup> Rev. Heath Butler, who teaches religion at WL, noted that some ISes are more talkative and some are more reserved, based on personality. He said that group work is an effective way to get certain ISes to open up and participate in a lower-pressure environment.<sup>81</sup>

It was mentioned that ISes take an English test during orientation. Duwe said that for those whose English proficiency is low enough, they may be required to take English Language Learner (ELL) classes. There are three ELL levels. Much like at SCL, ISes at WL have the opportunity to learn English starting at an appropriate level while getting credit for it.

To further monitor IS academic health, Leyrer makes sure to keep parents involved; she makes a connection with IS parents during recruitment but also sends them a report on their child’s academic and social well-being at least twice per year. Parents are also taught how to access their child’s information on the school’s online portal.

### ***Monitoring Mental Health***

Leaders at WL highlighted how the COVID pandemic has illuminated and heightened the need for mental wellness care. Duwe reported that beginning in the 2020–21 school year, WL

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80. Leyrer interview.

81. Heath Butler, interview by author. Personal interview, Milwaukee, November 5, 2021.

instituted a screening process done through CFS for dormitory students: “It's a two-step process. There's a survey, and then there's a one-on-one interview with a CFS counselor.”<sup>82</sup> Duwe explained that if a student gets “flagged” in the screening process, one person on WL’s staff who serves as the process coordinator will schedule follow-up appointments with CFS and communicate with the student’s family if need be. In addition to this process, WL makes CFS counseling available to all students on a need basis.

An anonymous staff member at WL (“Interviewee A”) commented on how ISes and domestic students have resources available for mental health care, through both CFS and the student services office:

[CFS has] been on campus to meet with the international students individually, to check in with them on their mental health. The three counselors that are here all have their Master’s degree in specific-to-school counseling. So that brings a level of professionalism to the office, where they're able to handle some of the minor things that are going on with the mental health issues that our students are facing. But then they're also knowledgeable enough in their profession to know when to refer those out for more professional help.<sup>83</sup>

Interviewee A said that CFS is also willing to do virtual meetings with students. Either way, students can be linked with a CFS counselor and schedule appointments. Butler added that one of the school’s counselors has put together a resilience program that helps students to identify anxiety or stress: “Just yesterday [the session] was, ‘In the crisis moment, what do you do?’”<sup>84</sup>

Duwe added that another checkpoint for IS mental health is accomplished simply through relationships:

Every student finds their trusted adult in a different person. I'm that trusted adult for some students, especially the ones that I took through the admissions process; they've known me since day one. Tammy [Leyrer] is that person for some, because we split up the

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82. Duwe interview.

83. Interviewee A. Anonymous interview by author. Phone call, November 3, 2021.

84. Butler interview.

recruitment fields, so we shepherd different students in that way. The dorm supervisors are key players in this too; they're really the ones that see the day-to-day grind of the students in an unguarded way, where they're letting their hair fly a little bit more—I don't see that as much on the school side. Some students are very comfortable going to student services [Guidance] for that trusted adult. We have three full-time counselors here ... who get to know the students for the academic scheduling and college application stuff, but also their role is to do some of the mental wellness care. Sometimes that gets moved over to CFS when it gets to be a larger need. And different international students just start to develop very trusting relationships with different teachers.<sup>85</sup>

As discussed in the Literature Review, Russ found that positive relationships are critical for IS well-being; a student from an Eastern collectivistic culture tends to rely on a sense of community more than the average student from a Western individualistic culture. Faculty and staff can play a significant role in forming those relationships.

### ***Monitoring Spiritual Health***

In many ways, the spiritual health of ISes at WL is monitored by the same means that mental health is monitored—CFS availability and student-faculty relationships. Butler added that WL has recently been working with Grace Lutheran Church in downtown Milwaukee, in the attempts to get another pastor available to shepherd students who are living away from home. Finally, WL offers to transport dormitory students to church services on weekends. Chinese students know that they can attend a Chinese worship service at St. John's in Wauwatosa.<sup>86</sup>

### Religion Classes

Similarly to FVL and SCL, WL has developed a separate religion curriculum for ISes. It consists of a year-long Introduction to Christianity course, followed by a semester-long Foundations of

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85. Duwe interview.

86. Butler interview.

Christianity course. By means of the religion course placement test which occurs during orientation, WL leaders will determine the most appropriate starting point for each individual IS.

Most ISes begin by taking Introduction to Christianity. As with Introduction to Christianity at FVL and Bible Knowledge 1 at SCL, Introduction to Christianity at WL starts at a fundamental level.<sup>87</sup> ISes who have little to no Bible knowledge or Christian background will start with this course, and then proceed to Foundations of Christianity in their third semester. The Foundations course assumes that students have at least the background of the Introduction course; it covers much of the Old Testament.<sup>88</sup> ISes who enroll with enough background knowledge may begin with the Foundations course. Once completing this course, students will be mainstreamed into religion classes with domestic students. ISes who enroll with a sufficient background in Christianity or knowledge of the Bible may begin in the mainstream courses. In the end, each IS's path through the religion curriculum is tailored to his or her specific case.<sup>89</sup>

#### International Student Relationships with Domestic Students

Leyrer coordinates an American Mentor Program (AMP) at WL which is similar to the corresponding programs at FVL and SCL. Duwe shared that an application process for mentors takes place in April and May of the previous school year. The ISP office looks for American

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87. The course begins by examining questions such as "Who is God?" and "Where did the Bible come from?" and topics such as Creation, law and gospel, the image of God and the Fall, the promise of the Savior, Jesus' work on Earth, the Christian church, the Reformation, and the sacraments. Leyrer interview.

88. Wisconsin Lutheran High School, "Foundations of Christianity: Syllabus," Milwaukee, 2021. Topics covered include the three articles of the Apostle's Creed, Creation through the patriarchs, the Exodus and entry into Canaan, the United Kingdom of Israel and the Divided Kingdom of Israel, the exile and return, and selected prophets. The syllabus states that the course purpose is that "Students will build on the foundation of what they already know about themselves, Jesus and the Bible by exploring the Old Testament together and search for God's timeless truths that can make their faith in Jesus deeper, braver and stronger. Students who complete the course are placed into Life of Christ."

89. Duwe interview.

students who are committed to being an encouraging mentor, who participate in school activities, and who are considered by the faculty to be in good standing. The office then does everything possible to pair an American mentor with an IS who might share interests (sports, prospective careers, etc.) or otherwise be a natural fit. Selected mentors are encouraged to reach out to their mentee during the summer and especially in the first few weeks of the school year. As noted above, mentors are involved with their mentees during orientation in August. The AMP has a once-per-month required activity involving all mentors and mentees. Duwe said that this is usually a cultural activity, but it can be a general mixer too.<sup>90</sup> Duwe has noticed that the AMP has been “pivotal for ... making the international students feel comfortable with peers.”

Within the AMP is a smaller administrative student group called the Global Leadership Team, consisting of ten students—five international and five domestic. The team meets with Leyrer once or twice per month; their function is to coordinate the monthly activities of the AMP and to encourage all American mentors to be interacting consistently with their mentees outside of the regular AMP activities.

Interviewee A noted that even outside of the AMP, ISes are strongly encouraged to be a part of the whole school community and to attend various activities and events. School leaders observe that many become involved in co-curriculars including band, Esports, and Culture Club.<sup>91</sup> WL has also allowed students to develop proposals for their own clubs. Duwe said that ISes have taken the lead in developing a Debate Club, a Badminton Club, a Green Club, and a Rubik’s Cube Club.

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90. Examples of activities include a pumpkin decorating competition, a badminton tournament, a snow tubing outing, and Easter egg decorating.

91. Culture Club leads the school in celebrating cultures of specific countries or regions of the world, including celebrations already recognized in the U.S. such as Hispanic Heritage Month and Black History Month.

ISes also have opportunities to form relationships with domestic students during holidays. Three times every year—for the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and spring breaks—the ISP office arranges to get all ISes out of the dorm and into the home of a short-term host family. In this way, ISes are able to get a taste of American holiday celebrations, adding to their overall cultural experiences while studying abroad.

### Celebration of International Culture

The ISP at WL takes steps to recognize the cultures represented at the school. Duwe described some of the events that take place during International Education Week:

On Monday we have an international tea party after school, and we invite all the international students. We invite the faculty and the staff for a mixer.... We'll have a few students from lesser-represented countries in our school do a presentation of highlights about their country and their culture, to make our school more aware of that. There'll be some cultural performances there too. We'll have an international dress up day—we tell everyone to wear something that represents an international culture they appreciate.... We have a language table day, for two days, where we have students who speak different languages at a table up in the upper lobby and people can learn how to say some different phrases in those languages. And we thought, how do we incorporate this into worship and chapel? We have international students that are coming from our Lutheran fellowship from different countries. And so, for example, we're going to have one day where there's going to be a Chinese song sung, and then another day where there's going to be a Thai song sung, and another day where our Korean students are going to sing a Korean song, and then a different reader or lector every day reading the lesson in their home language. It's really great when all of the American students get to see what it's like to listen to a different language.<sup>92</sup>

The ISP also coordinates a Lunar New Year celebration coinciding with the Lunar New Year calendar. Finally, like FVL and SCL, WL hangs flags in their commons from every country that has been represented at the school. As of December 2021, forty-two flags line the wall.

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92. Duwe interview.

## CONCLUSION

### **Recommendations**

A WELS high school which is seeking to establish an effective ISP must consider these questions before committing to the project: Is it feasible for our school? Do we have sufficient staff and resources? Are all faculty and staff prepared to be fully committed to the effort? Rev. Paul Prange highlighted various considerations that must be taken across different areas of a school's administration:

In the area of curriculum, an ALHS [area Lutheran high school] may have to allow international students to audit classes until their English is good enough to be in the regular grading system. In the area of extracurriculars, an ALHS may have to add programs in order to allow international students to demonstrate skill in areas of which Americans are unaware. In the area of facilities, an ALHS may have to designate or add spaces specifically for international students to feel comfortable. In the area of personnel, an ALHS may have to add support staff to help with special international student needs. In the area of finance, an ALHS may have to make some initial investments before an international student program pays for itself. In the area of technology, an ALHS may have to add special secure sections on its website to accommodate the needs of international parents who do not speak English or who may come under threat if it is discovered that they have students in the US.<sup>93</sup>

These factors (among others) must be fully evaluated before a school begins to undertake an ISP. One thing this researcher wants to highlight is that through his conversations with school leaders, it became evident that one of the most important steps to be taken is not a new policy or activity; rather, it is an attitude. The school board, the administration office, and all school leaders must back the program with an evangelistic passion. It is critical that everyone—from the faculty room to the business office to the athletic department—support the goals of the ISP.

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93. Paul T. Prange, email sent to the author. November 22, 2021.



A WELS high school which is seeking to expand or improve the quality of its ISP can learn valuable tactics and principles from FVL, SCL, and WL. Highlights at FVL include the model for regular meetings between ISes and the international coordinator, the support offered to the program by school leaders, and the extensive effort to set up ISes with quality host families who will take the student to their WELS home congregation on weekends. Highlights from SCL and WL include the comprehensive, multiple day orientation conducted in August and the elaborate international festival that each school conducts to celebrate international culture.

Throughout this study, the researcher became convinced that every WELS high school which operates an ISP should run an American Mentor Program similar to the ones described in this paper. A majority of interviewees said without hesitation that the most important part of their international program was the AMP. The integration benefits for ISes are invaluable to the effectiveness of the ISP.

Throughout my research, my attention was drawn to a few ideas that would be worth a school's consideration. First, could a WELS high school incorporate an intramural program? School leaders noted that many ISes would like to participate in sports, particularly basketball, but do not make the team. An intramural program (volleyball, basketball, and/or badminton) would open up participation and serve as an excellent way for ISes to get to know more domestic students.<sup>94</sup>

Secondly, I recommend that one of the school's pastors has "international student pastor" added to his list of duties. This pastor will make an intentional effort to build relationships with each IS and be their spiritual counselor. He might be given release time to make this manageable. This recommendation is related to the next: IS counseling with a pastor on the faculty should be

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94. Limitation of athletic facilities, priority of interscholastic teams for practice time, and transportation dependence are factors that make this difficult.

proactive rather than reactive. I recommend that each IS be scheduled to meet with a pastor once per month.<sup>95</sup> Even though it was found that each school in this study has developed excellent religion courses through which a pastor or religion teacher is able to form a relationship with ISes, and though counseling situations do arise in this way, not every IS will take advantage of it. Regularly scheduled meetings will take time out of teachers' schedules but will ensure contact with every IS, provide another checkpoint for monitoring academic, mental, and spiritual health, and of course lend opportunities for one-on-one evangelizing.

Finally, one more recommendation is that WELS high schools which conduct an ISP do everything they can to provide ISes with continued spiritual support after they graduate, especially those who were confirmed before graduating. This takes intentional effort, and this takes time. But it can be done in two separate ways—from inside the school, and from outside the school. From inside the school, certain faculty members can take it upon themselves to maintain communication and a meaningful relationship with certain ISes whom they may have gotten to know particularly well. School leaders at FVL, SCL, and WL mentioned that this has been done at some level. Fisher talked about how certain faculty members at WL form close relationships with certain ISes and take it upon themselves to keep in touch with them and serve as a spiritual support system. He said school leaders would like to see that system implemented into a fuller and more organized program.<sup>96</sup> Another idea offered by a pastor at FVL is that one pastor on staff could be given release time to send emails and make phone calls, continually working through a list of graduated ISes whose contact the school still has on record. Prange

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95. The time required for this may be too much for one pastor. If the high school has multiple pastors on the faculty, they could split up the ISes and each take a share. If there are 0–1 pastors on the faculty, other religion teachers can do this. They could either rotate groups of ISes by quarter or semester so that they have contact with every IS, or they could keep the same group all year in order to build deeper relationships with students in their group. If necessary, pastors and/or religion teachers can reduce meeting frequency to once per quarter or semester.

96. Kenneth J. Fisher, interview by author. Personal interview, Milwaukee, November 5, 2021.

added, “Since the best way to stay in touch varies so widely from student to student, the ideal responsible person should be flexible and persistent.”<sup>97</sup>

From outside the school, WELS high schools can assist the synod in keeping in touch with these students. WELS has an expansive campus ministry (CM) with pastors dedicated to serving our high school graduates, including international students. The high schools simply need to supply the contact information of those students to the campus ministry committee (CMC). Rev. Dan Lindner, CM mission counselor, said in an interview that the CMC is ready and eager to receive these students onto their radar, connect with them, and serve them with the gospel in whatever way possible. He said, “Just make sure that exchange of information is happening.”<sup>98</sup> If ISes are continuing to an American college, the information goes to the CMC. If ISes are going home or somewhere else, the information can get passed along to the WELS Joint Mission Council or Diaspora Ministry Facilitators, who will do what they can to connect the student to the closest ministry in that student’s location, and even to a group of people from the same country. The goal is to “pass the baton” so that representatives in the synod can keep track of graduated ISes and continue to serve them wherever they go.<sup>99</sup> But this takes communication, and this is where WELS high schools can do their part by passing students’ information (as allowed) to the CMC.

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97. Prange email correspondence.

98. Dan Lindner, interview by author. Phone call, December 5, 2021.

99. Lindner interview.

### Closing Thoughts

“Our cultural prison is a comfortable place to be.”<sup>100</sup> It certainly is. But if students from around the globe step out of their “cultural prison” to enroll in a WELS high school, the faculty and staff who welcome them must also step out of theirs. A multi-cultural context is the context of their ministry.

The purpose of this thesis has been to study what makes up an effective international student program. The more effective the program, the more able the school is to provide a quality Christian education and healthy environment for ISes. It is in this environment that the faculty proclaims the gospel every day. The more the school leaders work together toward that end, the better the school serves the mission of our Lord who “wants all people to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4, NIV)—people “from every nation, tribe, people, and language” (Rev 7:9).

All three schools in this study were found to be operating excellent ISPs. In my conversations with school leaders, one word stuck out over and over: *relationships*. It became apparent that these schools are passionate and intentional about building relationships with ISes, a step which is critical for effective international ministry. Gibson noted, “We’re here to get them to feel comfortable being in this culture, so that when we have a chance to share Jesus with them, they feel comfortable with that—that Jesus isn’t an American Jesus, he’s a Jesus for them.”<sup>101</sup> Our ministry—whether a pastor serving a home mission start or a high school faculty serving international students—is about planting seeds; God determines how those seeds might grow. God asks his workers to be faithful with the opportunities they have to proclaim the gospel, and the Holy Spirit is the one who makes those seeds grow into faith (1 Cor 3:5–9).

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100. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 108.

101. Gibson interview.

WELS high schools must work to maintain a school identity that includes in its core an international ministry. The flags that line the walls of the commons at these three schools serve as a perpetual reminder of that identity. Lord-willing, more flags will be added to these walls as the years go on. It is truly by the grace of God that WELS gets to proclaim the gospel to students from around the world without leaving home. May the Lord of the harvest continue to work through these means to grow his kingdom, according to his will and for his glory.

### **For Further Study**

Certain opportunities for additional research fell outside the scope of this paper, including the following questions. They would be possible starting points for continuing this study.

- What strategies for international student recruitment have worked best for our schools?
- One consideration this paper lacked was interviews with our school's international students themselves. In their evaluation, what is done well? What could be improved?
- How can we equip international students who return home after graduation to share the gospel in their language with their families and other people in their hometown?

## APPENDIX 1. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. My name is Collin Wenzel, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I am conducting this study as part of my senior thesis project, in which I am investigating and evaluating this statement: *“The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has a unique opportunity to proclaim the gospel to teens from around the world who enroll at our various Lutheran high schools. In the effort to serve these students well, operations at these high schools are adjusted to accommodate international students. Each international student program has the responsibility to provide an educational environment conscious of the academic, psychological, and spiritual needs of the international student population.”*

You have been invited to participate in this research because I believe that you can provide valuable information on the topic. I will be asking you questions about the operation of the international student program at your high school, some general and some more specific based on the nature of your involvement in the program.

Your involvement in this research may be shared in the following way: The information you provide may be summarized, paraphrased, or quoted to help formulate a picture of your school’s international student program, which will be included in my thesis. If you agree to the audio recording of the interview, the recording will be deleted after the research project is completed.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any or all questions. You may fully withdraw from the interview at any time and information that you provided will not be reported in the research.

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“By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study under the conditions described.”

Check one:

- You may use my name in your study.
- You may use the information I provide, but I wish to remain anonymous.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

“I furthermore agree to the audio recording of this interview and understand that the recording will be deleted upon completion of the research project.” \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

## APPENDIX 2. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWEES: PRINCIPALS OR PRESIDENTS

What kind of orientation takes place for international students (ISes)?

To what extent do ISes become integrated into the full range of student life?

How does the school celebrate or honor the culture of ISes? (International Education Week, etc.)

Is there any system in place to check in with the mental, academic, and spiritual health of ISes?

How has the mission of the school been modified to accommodate ISes?

Does the inclusion of ISes fall under the umbrella of the school's overall mission statement, and are admission standards developed accordingly?

In your evaluation, what is done especially well when it comes to your school's operation of the IS program?

In your evaluation, what could be done better when it comes to your school's operation of the IS program?

To your knowledge, what is the spiritual support system after graduation for those IS who come to faith at your school?

To your knowledge, how has the scope of the IS program changed over the years? Have objectives shifted or remained the same?

## APPENDIX 3. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWEES: INTERNATIONAL COORDINATORS

### *Student life and mentoring*

- What kind of orientation takes place for international students (ISes)?
- Does the school have extra-curriculars developed specifically with IS participation in mind?
- Is it routine that ISes meet with the school's pastor(s) at the start of the year?
- Is it routine that ISes meet with the school's pastor(s) throughout the year?
- Is it routine to connect ISes to local congregations?
- Is there any sort of "buddy system" in which ISes are matched up with a domestic student to whom they are encouraged to go with questions, concerns, etc.?
- To what extent do ISes become integrated into the full range of student life?

### *Curriculum*

- How does the IS curriculum differ from the domestic students' curriculum?
- Is there a separate religion curriculum for ISes?
- Are any of the following accommodations provided for ISes? Translators, US Customary conversions, extra time for assignments upon request, annotated or simplified texts, alternative assessment options, etc.

### *Host families*

- How are host families chosen?
- What kind of orientation takes place for host families?
- Do you check in with these families throughout the year?

### *Alumni relations*

- What efforts are made to keep in touch with graduated ISes?

### *General*

- How have you had to modify the mission of the school to accommodate ISes?
- Does the inclusion of ISes fall under the umbrella of the school's overall mission statement, and are admission standards developed accordingly?
- In your evaluation, what is done especially well when it comes to your school's operation of the IS program?
- In your evaluation, what could be done better when it comes to your school's operation of the IS program?
- To your knowledge, what is the spiritual support system after graduation for those ISes who come to faith at your school?

### *Miscellaneous*

- How many people work in the IS program? What do the different positions entail?
- To your knowledge, how has the scope of the IS program changed over the years? Have objectives shifted or remained the same?



## APPENDIX 4. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWEES: PASTORS OR RELIGION TEACHERS

### *Curriculum*

- Is there a separate religion curriculum for international students (ISes)?
  - Is it mandatory for all ISes?
  - How many IS-g geared religion courses are there (1 year, 2+ years)?
    - If only 1 course, do they join in the regular religion courses after their first year?
  - Does it work the same for ISes who come in with little to no knowledge of Christianity as it does for ISes who come in with more advanced knowledge?
- Are any of the following accommodations provided for ISes? Translators, US Customary conversions, extra time for certain assignments, annotated or simplified texts, alternative assessment options, etc.

### *Mentoring*

- Is it routine that ISes meet with the school's pastor(s) at the start of the year, to touch base about what is taught at the school and what Christian conduct expectations are?
- Is it routine that ISes meet with the school's pastor(s) throughout the year?
- Is it routine to connect ISes to local congregations?
- Is there any sort of "buddy system" in which ISes are matched up with a domestic student to whom they are encouraged to go with questions, concerns, etc.?

### *General*

- In your evaluation, what is done especially well when it comes to your school's operation of the IS program?
- In your evaluation, what could be done better when it comes to your school's operation of the IS program?
- To your knowledge, what is the spiritual support system after graduation for those ISes who come to faith at your school?

APPENDIX 5. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWEES: MISCELLANEOUS FACULTY  
OR STAFF

To what extent do international students (ISes) become integrated into the full range of student life?

Does the school have extra-curriculars developed specifically with IS participation in mind?

Is there any sort of “buddy system” in which ISes are matched up with a domestic student to whom they are encouraged to go with questions, concerns, etc.?

Is there any system in place to check in with the mental, academic, and spiritual health of ISes?

In your evaluation, what is done especially well when it comes to your school’s operation of the IS program?

In your evaluation, what could be done better when it comes to your school’s operation of the IS program?

To your knowledge, what is the spiritual support system after graduation for those ISes who come to faith at your school?

To your knowledge, how has the scope of the IS program changed over the years? Have objectives shifted or remained the same?

## APPENDIX 6. CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL AND ELL STUDENTS

GOAL: Minister to the needs of ALL students.

In the context of International and ELL students: Help students be successful in our classroom

*Note: this does not mean turning all students into American students*

### Common Frustrations

- “This kid won’t talk in class. I know he is stuck but he won’t ask questions.”
- “She just copies her answers out of the book or from a friend; it’s never her own thinking.”
- “He won’t work with his group - he just copies whatever the others put down.”
- “He sleeps every day in class, doesn’t do his homework, but all of a sudden he pays attention during test review.”
- “He gets help from his friends but not from me.”
- “She doesn’t take deadlines seriously.”
- “She only cares about her grade, not that she’s understanding the material.”

### Considerations

- What is the role of the teacher and student in their culture?
- What is the role of homework in their culture?
- How often and in what capacity have they worked as a group before?
- What are the cultural norms around time?
- What are the cultural norms around plagiarism?
- How are our cultures rubbing against each other in this circumstance?

### Strategies

1. Build relationships with all students.
2. Proactive Measures
  - a. Provide accommodations (conversation charts, translations of texts, use of Google Translate, extra time, completed study guides, etc.) - this is NOT “dumbing it down” for them.
  - b. Evaluate assessments - every assessment is an assessment of reading at some level; are you evaluating the learning target only?
  - c. Allow ample time for students to form answers before speaking (allowing students to write out their answer before calling on someone is helpful).
  - d. Create roles for each member when in groups.
  - e. Have opportunities for students to ask questions privately (circulate during work time, before/after school, email, Google Chat, etc.).
3. Reactive Measures
  - a. Seek first to understand. Assume the students are trying to succeed and are not being malicious.
  - b. Speak to the student one-on-one if possible.
  - c. Create clear expectations and a plan for success. (Retakes, class behavior, homework check-ins, etc.)
  - d. Get insight from other teachers with more experience.

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