

# HOSTING A SHORT-TERM VISITING PROGRAM FOR INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS AND PRACTITIONERS: TIPS AND LESSONS LEARNED

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*With this narrative, the authors have provided an empowering and culturally sensitive model for hosting a short-term visiting program in the U.S. for international social work students and practitioners by adopting the Generalist Intervention Model. Detailed guidelines for organizing such an event are delineated. Also reflected are what the authors learned as hosting coordinators for twelve visiting programs for Korean baccalaureate, masters, and post-masters level social work visitors.*

As "the globalized and knowledge-based economy of the 21st century" becomes the locomotive power to internationalization in higher education (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, p. 5), international social work is one of the emerging fields in the profession. To keep abreast with this trend, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) mandates that international social work content be covered in social work education (2002). As of August 2007, we found that at least 22 social work programs offered various study abroad programs (CSWE, 2007). Most of the programs are short-term visiting programs. A handful of reports are currently available to share with organizers' or participants' learning experiences from the programs (Boyle & Cervantes, 2000; Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999; Cronin, 2005; Mirsky & Barasch, 2004; Rehr, Rosenberg, & Blumenfield, 1993). All of the experiences were outbound short-term exchange programs of American social work students or practitioners in foreign countries and designed to prepare the participants for more culturally diversified practice settings.

Yet, we found that it is not common knowledge among social work educators to know how to create and host international social work visitors in this country. This may be attributed to a relatively small number of social work programs that are currently involved in inbound visiting programs.

Therefore, there is a critical need to share information about hosting international short-term visiting programs. To help other educators host a successful visiting program, we would like to share our various experiences of hosting 12 short-term exchange programs in the United States during the past eight years.

The hosting institution, where we organized the 12 visiting programs, offers an M.S.W. degree program in Korea. Because of the presence in the country, our institution was frequently contacted by individuals or universities in Korea to establish short-term exchange programs. One of us has been the Director of Field Education for more than a decade at the institution and travels to Korea at least twice per year to facilitate field education for local Korean M.S.W. students. Another of us is a Korean native and was the Coordinator of Continuing Education for the university. Since we had strong working relationships with local communities and social service agencies and are familiar with Korean culture and language, it was a natural fit for us to organize and run the twelve programs. The third author of this paper is another Korean native and helped us run some of the program.

All of the visitors were from Korea and varied in educational levels from bachelors through post-masters. Age, gender, religion, financial capacity, language ability, academic concentrations, interests in cultural immersion, and, most of all, their educational needs were



also quite diverse. To guide various prospective exchange program organizers hosting diverse visitors, we applied the Generalist Intervention Model (GIM) by Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2002) as a model for hosting a short-term visiting program. We chose GIM for the following advantages. First, since its introduction as one of the earliest teaching models of generalist social work practice (Landon, 1995, p. 1105), GIM is widely known to social work educators. Second, as the progenitors of GIM proudly emphasize, the model is very applicable, yet streamlined, to any practice setting (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002, p. 4). Third, its seven stages are based upon the assessment of client strengths (p. 28). We learned from 12 different hosting experiences that visitors should not be considered passive learners. They can be active learners and in actuality often made salient comments that provided insightful perspectives to the organizational personnel during the agency visits. To engender visitors' maximum capacities during a short visit, their strengths need to be identified and utilized. GIM's emphasis on strengths is very applicable to hosting a short-term visiting program. Its seven stages include engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, termination, and follow-up. Fourth, we believe its emphasis on working "with" not "at" clients is very appropriate to designing a visiting program. By following the seven stages, we will delineate what needs to be done in each stage as well as other practical issues that need to be considered.



### **Stage 1: Engagement**

The first stage in GIM is to engage with clients. During this stage, establishing communication and a relationship are two major subtasks (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002, p. 31). Due to the institution's presence in Korea, it was relatively less challenging for us

to engage and establish relationships with the international visitors. The visiting institutions contacted us informally or the administrative decision makers at our institution formally to initiate discussion.

We learned that obtaining formal administrative support is the most important task of the relationship building process. If a visiting institution formally contacts administrative decision makers at a hosting university or there is a pre-established relationship between the two institutions, it is less challenging. However, when a visiting institution informally contacts a faculty member at the hosting university through a personal network, the visiting institution must be advised to formally contact administrative decision makers at the hosting institution to secure administrative approval. The approval can take the form of a formal letter to participate in assisting with the process or may involve a memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the two partners. We learned that administrators are often concerned about legal, financial and workload issues of involved faculty or staff members. Formal letters and MOAs worked like contracts delineating responsibilities of each institution. If an MOA is needed, the hosting and visiting universities' legal departments may be required to be involved in the process. Therefore, securing the approval for the program may take longer.

During the engagement stage, we learned from early experiences that corresponding coordinators on behalf of the two institutions must be identified and their communication channels must be secured. Since the coordinators are very critical for a successful visiting program, they should have ease of communication with each other. Since at least one of us is fluent in Korean, it was less challenging for us to communicate with corresponding coordinators in Korea. We learned that it is a good idea to share cell phone numbers and personal email addresses of the coordinators, as well as office numbers and school email accounts. Since there is a 14-hour time difference between Korea and where we are located, using an office phone turned out to be very ineffective for both parties.



## **Stage 2: Assessment**

After securing clear communication channels between the two parties, we assessed the visitors' educational needs, demographic composition, and financial arrangements. As assessment in professional social work practice is fundamental to a "focus or direction" for practitioners and their clients (Cournoyer, 2005, p. 267), understanding the visitors' educational needs was the most important guideline in establishing a hosting program. We realized from the twelve programs that demographically homogeneous groups can have very diversified educational needs. While some visitors desired greater cultural immersion in the U.S., others wanted to observe and learn how American social service agencies were handling the same issues that they had in common with Korea. Even within a group that wanted more visits to different social service agencies, interests of the group members were very diversified as there are various social work fields. Assessing the educational needs can be easily accomplished by directly asking what visitors would like to accomplish during their visits. Sometimes visiting teams inquired of us what educational opportunities they would be able to have during their visits because they lacked knowledge about the region they would be visiting in the U.S.

We also learned that knowing the financial limitations of visitors can guide the length of a visiting program and determine where they can stay during the visit. Some of them were financially affluent enough to stay in the U.S. for longer than a month, travel to different locations, and try various cultural immersion experiences, while less affluent visitors saved money for a long time to pay for their airplane tickets to the U.S. For those who were financially less affluent, having a complete cultural immersion experience, such as dining out or attending a cultural performance, was very challenging.

Interestingly, we noticed that all of the 12 groups without exception designated someone internally to function as the treasurer and collect travel expenditure fees from each member in addition to the official program fees. Then, the treasurer paid for common expenses

from the fees. The common expenses included drinking water, gifts for hosting agencies, film, batteries, stationery items, and even sometimes meals. Some groups purchased daily necessities and wore identical clothes, such as matching shirts for their members. Instead of individually purchasing those items, the treasurer always paid for them and equally distributed the cost of the purchase to each member so that there would be some equality among the visitors.

Learning from early groups, we realized, as we worked with the groups, how important it was to have demographic information about the visitors in advance. The information was needed to reserve a place to stay as early as possible and to ensure a smoother hosting program. For example, we noticed that some non-traditional students felt uncomfortable sharing their rooms with younger or more traditional students. In their eyes, younger students "did not think maturely and behaved in selfish ways." Also, younger and more traditional students expressed their uneasiness to us about being roommates with the older participants. We learned that, due to a cultural norm to respect older people, the younger participants felt pressure to show respect to the non-traditional students and were very reluctant to ask their non-traditional roommates to perform house keeping-type chores.

Regarding different cultural norms, we can never forget the unexpected tension within a team of practitioners because of different gender expectations. They were all in their forties or older. When they had a chance to fix a meal during their long visit, male participants expected female participants to cook and female participants became very indignant about the male practitioners' traditional gender expectations.

As we reflect back on our experiences from working with the past twelve programs, assessing the visitors' educational level was another critical step. Undergraduate, masters and post-masters visitors had quite different needs. Undergraduate students wanted to meet more frontline social workers and their clients and have cultural immersion experiences for a longer period. Masters level students or post-masters practitioners



expressed more desire to us to visit macro-oriented agencies such as the United Way and governmental agencies. This difference was due to the fact that the latter groups held supervisory or administrative positions in their fields.

We also learned that assessing the visitors' fluency in written or spoken English is another important subtask at this stage. All of the twelve groups were in need of interpreters. Even though some groups had a couple of fluent English communicators, the rest of the group members relied heavily upon interpreters for everything from ordering breakfast to paying for dinner. The interpreters were required to be knowledgeable of both American and Korean social-work systems.

### **Stage 3: Planning**

Based upon the assessed educational and other personal needs of the visitors from the second stage, the planning process can begin. Because assessed needs are being translated to program goals and objectives to specific itinerary (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2002), we think that the planning stage is the most critical for a successful visiting program. This stage includes deciding the length of a visiting program, choosing a season, setting up schedules, arranging agencies, estimating the budget, recruiting visitors, reserving hotels and classrooms, hiring interpreters and drivers, connecting the same ethnic immigrants, obtaining visas, advising on appropriate gifts, purchasing airplane tickets and travelers' insurance, and specifying the rendezvous location at the airport. When deciding the listed items above, GIM's principle of "working with" clients should be applied and visitors should be a part of the decision making process.

### **Length and Season**

We recommend that the length of a program be determined by three main factors: visitors' educational needs, financial capability, and available time. The previous 12 programs varied from one week to one month. The one-week programs were mostly for Masters of Social Work (M.S.W.) students or post-M.S.W. practitioners. Since many of them had their jobs and duties in Korea, they were unable

to stay long in the U.S. Their schedules included cultural immersion experiences at a minimal level. In contrast, some groups of Bachelors of Social Work (B.S.W.) students stayed in the U.S. for a whole month. Their itineraries included not only social service agencies or programs, but also tourist sites and various cultural immersion experiences in different cities. Staying for such a long time in the U.S. requires financial resources and release from duties in Korea. Therefore, a one-month visiting program may be extremely challenging for non-traditional M.S.W.-level students or practitioners. Because one month is the most commonly allowed duration on entry visa stamps, any program longer than a month will require complicated legal attention and would appear more like a semester-long exchange program.

As the authors reflected back on the past twelve programs, while a week-long program was more feasible for many visitors, the one-week programs were always too short. With the 14-hour time difference between Korea and where we are located, we frequently observed the visitors' symptoms of jetlag and learned that they needed at least a couple of days for the adjustment of their body clocks. As soon as they became adjusted, they had to return to Korea.

Another important decision is the selection of the right season. In Korea, we knew that winter break is very long and lasts about three months, while summer break is relatively short and lasts about one and half months. There is no spring break. Therefore, we organized some of the early programs in the winter, but having visitors in the winter caused some difficulties. Even though our university is located in a relatively mild climate, airline connections were delayed in other cities in the U.S. When our university started the spring semester, we experienced some difficulty with hiring the necessary support staff to help the visitors. Another constraint of having the visiting program in the spring semester was the lack of availability of school dorms for visitors. This type of accommodation was often preferred by undergraduate visitors who wanted to experience American college life.



Therefore, we chose summer for many of the 12 visiting programs. Since summer break usually starts at the end of June and lasts until mid-August in Korea, July is a good month for the visitors. We found that the most significant benefit of hosting visitors in the summer was the fact that we were able to spend more time with the visitors, which was extremely difficult during early spring semesters. In addition to more flexibility in our schedules, there were more university resources available, such as classrooms, supporting staff, school dorms, and other facilities. We recall that fewer flight delays were another advantage of summer. Hosting visitors in July also added unexpected cultural immersion experiences to the visitors' itinerary: the Independence Day. Yet, we also realized that one downside of hosting visitors during the summer was the unavailability of observing what school social workers do in the secondary education system.

### **Developing Itinerary**

When the length of a visiting program and the date are selected, a detailed itinerary must be developed. Due to language barriers and transportation issues, most of the twelve programs were a mixture of social service agency visits, cultural immersion experiences, and volunteer activities. One of the major lessons learned from our experiences was a result of the mistake that we made setting a schedule that was too busy for the first visiting program. When we established the schedule for the first group, both we and the visitors were very excited and shared many different ideas about what they could do in two weeks. As a result, at least three agency visits were arranged on a single day. The schedule turned out to be very overwhelming to us as well as to the visitors. Later, we realized that one visit per morning and one in the afternoon would be sufficient. Also, due to jetlag, it became obvious to us that we should avoid heavy scheduling at the beginning of a visiting program.

Another important lesson we learned was overemphasizing academic aspects of their visit. From the first program, we became aware that coming to the U.S. was a huge

financial investment for some visitors and got anxious about designing a less rigorous academic program. We placed more emphasis on ensuring that the visitors could get as much as possible for their investment. Therefore, we established an academically oriented schedule with little fun. When the tentative schedule was sent to the visitors, they also welcomed such an intensive and academically oriented schedule. As we have routinely reflected back on the schedules with the visitors during the formal evaluations, some visitors suggested a less rigorous academic orientation for future programs. Since the initial experience, we began to include cultural immersion experiences and volunteer activities in a single visiting program.

When social service agencies are contacted, the agencies should be informed of the goals of the visitors, the number of the visitors, and their educational backgrounds. Another tip for a visiting program organizer is to remind the agencies that an interpreter will be utilized. We learned that using an interpreter was an extremely rare occasion for most agency staff. Because of the lack of this type of experience, the staff did not know it would take twice as long to deliver the same message. Also, it seemed to be a challenge for some of the staff to frequently pause to give the interpreter time to translate.

We recommend that the first day's schedule include a brief orientation after check-in. After the brief orientation, dinner and going to bed early will be good for visitors so that they will be refreshed the next day. On the second day, a formal orientation explaining the entire schedule should be the first priority. During the orientation, information about the hosting university, community, and agencies can be explained. Another must during the orientation is to explain state-level governmental agencies and their roles in social welfare. We realized that many well-known acronyms and the like that are common knowledge to Americans were huge barriers to visitors' learning during agency visits. When the hosting agency staff used acronyms, we asked the representatives to explain what the acronyms meant to the visitors. However, the requests sometimes turned out to be a poor



idea because they interrupted the flow of the presentation. Our dilemma was the visitors had a difficult time understanding the presentation when the acronyms were explained after the presentation. Therefore, we explained in advance during the formal orientation what commonly used acronyms stood for and what was the focus of the agency work. Such a tactic turned out to be very effective.

Another important component of the second day is to let one of the hosting institution's staff formally greet the visitors. That gives the visitors a sense of being welcomed. Also, it may be a good idea to arrange a private meeting between a visiting faculty chaperone and the hosting institution's representative. Even though they might have communicated before the visit via phone calls or emails, the private meeting will be their first time to meet each other in person. By having the in-person meeting, they can build a mutually beneficial relationship and briefly discuss future visits.

Another common component of scheduling is to have an evaluation time the day before the visitors' departure. Celebrating the success of the visiting program is a good idea after the evaluation. Other important component is to remind the visitors of their departure schedule and explain the hotel checkout process.

### **Reservations**

Speaking of reservations, a space for orientation, receptions, or lectures should be reserved as early as possible. A computer lab is another item on the reservation list. We learned various reasons for reserving a computer lab. First, Korea has a different semester schedule. Usually, student visitors came to the U.S. right after ending their semester in Korea, without any chance to check their grades. They were very anxious to know their final grades from the semester. Second, recent visiting teams used the Internet daily to share their activities with their non-visiting classmates in Korea. The teams sometimes received questions from their classmates in Korea and asked questions of us or hosting agencies. Third, they used web hard drives for data archival. We vividly

remember the first teams that stayed in the U.S. for a month had many boxes of documents, educational materials, and film cartridges. Today, web hard drives have replaced some of the boxes and film cartridges. Fourth, it was more economical for visitors. Internet connections at hotels are expensive. Therefore, the visitors consistently expressed their need for a computer lab at the hosting institution.

Another important stop for the visitors was a place where they could purchase souvenirs for family members, friends, and colleagues. Since many of the visitors were financially or emotionally supported by their friends and colleagues as well as their families, they wanted to express their gratitude to the supporters. We also learned that, in Korean culture, a traveler is expected to bring gifts to people within their networks after an international trip. So, time for shopping is considered a sign of thoughtfulness from the hosting coordinator.

### **Empowerment**

We highly recommend that opportunities be provided to visitors with various interactions with clients and volunteer work to empower them. The first undergraduate visitors requested that the group have a chance to visit an alternative school in a rural area. The school was the last opportunity for its students to stay in the school system. The students were suspended at their original schools for various reasons and on probation after being adjudicated. Through multiple communications, we were cautioned by the point of contact at the school that the students could be very violent. As all of the visitors were female, we urged our visitors to take extra safety precautions. When the visitors arrived at the school, they received another orientation about the school and its students from a social worker there. It was apparent that the visitors became very anxious about meeting students at the school after multiple warnings. We also saw the school principal and resource officer in a classroom reminding their students of the code of conduct and the consequences of failure to follow the code during the meeting with the visiting students.



When both groups met together in a classroom, the school principal, resource officers, teachers, and even the superintendent of the rural community were also present. At the beginning, it was so serious that no one talked on either side. We could have heard a pin drop. But the silence did not last long. The alternative school students began asking questions, such as the geographic location of Korea. When questions about movies and music were asked, the hosting students were surprised to find that American and Korean students listen to the same music or watch the same movies. After identifying the commonalities, each side asked the other side to sing or dance together. Some of the hosting students wanted to see some Korean martial arts. Luckily one of the visiting students held a black belt in tae kwondo and performed some basic movements. All of a sudden, we realized that the visitors and hosting students mutually enjoyed the meeting without any incident.

After the meeting, to our surprise, the school principal expressed that some of the hosting students would like to have lunch with the visiting students and asked whether or not that would be possible. It was unplanned and unexpected. The principal added that many of the school's students were from low-income families and had never been outside of their rural hometowns. For some of the students, it was their first time to see Asians and hear a foreign language spoken from foreigners. When we translated the request to the visiting students, they also welcomed another opportunity to meet the students at the alternative school.

After the visit to the alternative school, the visiting students expressed that they felt empowered by contributing to the alternative school students' learning about the larger world. Some added that they were not just visitors, but social workers helping the school's students. Because of the feedback, we included different alternative schools in rural areas in other visiting groups' schedules. We heard constantly about the sense of empowerment that was gained from these experiences from all of the groups.

Similar feedback was expressed to us among visiting students after their visits to a local food bank. As mentioned earlier, language barriers and relatively short visiting periods made visiting students passive rather than active in various helping processes. Volunteering at the local food bank was a more proactive learning opportunity for undergraduate visitors. After learning how the food bank was operated, the visiting undergraduate students volunteered at the food bank. They salvaged various donated food and produce, and distributed them to persons in need. This volunteer experience did not require fluent English, but still gave the visiting students a sense of helping others.

### **Budgeting**

Another critical component of the planning stage is to set up a good budget. Depending upon the visitors' educational needs and their length of stay, a budget can vary widely. One of the major items on a budget is airplane tickets. Since all of the twelve visiting program participants purchased their tickets in Korea, we did not have to include the airfare in the budget. For the twelve programs, the major budget items included accommodation, meals, translators, and transportation.

Regarding accommodations, we learned various ways to economize a budget. When some groups of the visitors stayed in New York for two weeks, they used room-and-board or home-stay houses. The houses offered two advantages: they were inexpensive and provide cultural immersion experiences. Using such an option may be available only in a larger city where reliable public transportation is established. One concern of using this form of accommodation is having less oversight of visiting students when they are dispersed across a city after their daily schedule is completed. Therefore, we recommend other hosting organizers to get a safety liability contract with visitors if they are scattered around a city.

What we strongly recommend is a suite hotel with a kitchen and laundry room in each unit. Some visitors stayed for two weeks or longer, so having a laundry facility within each suite was very convenient. Using a school



dorm and cafeteria is another option. Regardless of the type of accommodation, reservations should be made as early as possible.

The next item on the budget list is hiring interpreters and securing transportation. We learned that interpreters are another key to a successful program, because visitors listen to what the interpreters explain to them, not what the hosting agency staff tells them. The interpreters and transportation should be available from early in the morning through late night until everyone returns to their rooms. Since one of us is bilingual, the author worked as an interpreter and driver for the twelve programs. That was another way to reduce the overall budget.

To streamline the budget, our recommended size of visitors is thirteen. A 15-passenger van can hold thirteen visitors, one driver, and one interpreter. If a group's size is fourteen or more, there should be another vehicle. When airplane tickets are purchased as a group, the thirteenth ticket is free. The savings from the free ticket can decrease the individual ticket price. Since many schools require 15-passenger van drivers to take a special driving training, the training should be taken at the earliest convenient time. Also, we learned that sometimes using a private rental company could be another option if bureaucratic policies need to be avoided. Whether a state or private vehicle is used, the reservation for the vehicle is one of the first things to do.

Another tip to minimize the budget is to use community resources. Local Korean-American communities have been a great resource for visitors. When we introduced the visitors to local Korean-Americans, they supplied many daily necessities to the visitors during the visitors' long stay in the U.S., and some even paid for dinners for the visitors. Mutually, the visitors provided updates about news and trends in Korea. The local Korean-Americans repeated their hospitality for almost every group.

Another community resource was a local visitors' center. When we contacted the center, it provided us with local maps, trinkets, and information about the community in

professionally prepared tote bags. Sometimes, our university's visitors center gave them official campus tours and free or discount coupons for beverages and souvenirs.

#### Other Trivial but Important Items

One of the most frequently asked questions of us from visitors was what gifts they should present to the hosting university and agencies. It is a cultural norm in both countries to present a gift to express appreciation. However, because of possible cultural differences, visitors always asked which gift would be appropriate and how many gifts should be prepared. Therefore, the hosting coordinator should be straightforward about it.

An important duty of the hosting coordinator is to get a letter of invitation from an institution's representative for the visitors' easy visa approval. When applying for a visa as a university-sponsored group, it is much easier for visitors to obtain a U.S. visa than individually applying for a visa. Even though an invitation letter is not a determining factor of visa approval, it will certainly add more credibility to the visitors' applications. Visitors must apply plenty of time in advance. If some members are denied U.S. entry, applying in advance will give the team enough time to recruit new members.

Travelers' insurance is another requirement for visitors. There are many inexpensive travelers' insurance programs with good coverage. Sickness or injury during their stay in the U.S. could be very expensive. Therefore, it is a good idea for the hosting coordinator to remind visitors of the importance of the insurance.

Another practical tip we learned from the past twelve programs is to include contact names of hosting agencies, their telephone numbers, maps or directions to the agencies, and webpage addresses on the finalized schedule. This practice turned out to be very useful especially when we forgot to bring the information with us, at least some of the visitors had the information. More importantly, the visitors were able to get information about the agencies in advance through web searches.



When everything is in place and the visitors are about to leave for the U.S., the hosting coordinator should designate a place where he or she can meet the visitors at the airport. In the event of a possible delay, the hosting coordinator must have the flight schedules of all visitors. The information will allow the coordinator to track where the visitors are until they arrive at their final destination. It is also a good idea to prepare two vehicles for airport pickup to help transport luggage, even if the number of visitors is less than thirteen.

#### **Stage 4: Implementation**

##### **Making a Demand for Work: Study the Hosting Agencies**

We learned that a visiting program's implementation stage starts even before the visitors' arrival at the airport. After a tentative schedule is set up based upon the needs of the visitors, the hosting coordinator must place certain expectations on the visitors. When a tentative schedule is sent to the coordinator of the visiting group, the schedule must contain the web addresses of the hosting agencies they will visit during their stay. That way, they can look the agencies up on the web and gain a working knowledge of them. Because their visit to each agency will be relatively short, it is impossible for the visitors to learn every aspect of the agency during the visit. Therefore, it is important for visitors to have advance background information about the agency in order to make the visit more productive and effectual.

##### **Making a Demand for Work: Identifying Internal Assets**

Another area to be addressed is to identify and utilize group participants' strengths. As mentioned previously, our visitors made a positive impact upon rural troubled teens. Some groups prepared songs and dances for nursing home residents. It did not take a huge effort for visitors to prepare the songs and dances; the matter was to identify who had what strengths within the team. Even though some groups did not think they had any talents, they realized they had a huge asset by simply being from a different culture and society. We recall many visitors being asked to share how Korea

handles the same issues. They became very enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge. Even though we have not tried yet, it may be a good idea for visitors to offer cultural training for some hosting agencies in the U.S.

##### **Making a Demand for Work: Team Building and Labor Division**

The most important demand from the hosting institution is for team building and a clear division of labor among the visitors. It is an apparent need for visitors to have pre-entry meetings to build relationships with each other and to prepare for their visit. During the meetings, a clear labor division regarding various operational duties should be established among the visitors. The duties include: an internal team leader, a treasurer, an archivist, and a photographer. We experienced teams with clear labor divisions and those without any labor division. Some of the well-organized teams divided themselves into subgroups according to areas of interests, and conducted literature reviews about the areas. Those teams were very well prepared for agency visits. In contrast, one team without labor division even contacted us after returning to Korea to get pamphlets and other information about agencies they had visited.

##### **Before Arrival**

The hosting coordinator becomes very busy right before the visitors' arrival. Several administrative actions should be taken. The coordinator should send a reminder to all hosting agency representatives, translators, and drivers. Enough pens, notepads, copies of the finalized schedules, handouts for orientations, name badges, and parking passes should be ready. One practical tip from our experiences is to have a receipt-collecting folder for reimbursement. If any expenses occur during the visit, all receipts should be kept. By placing a receipt-collecting folder in the official vehicle for the visiting group, it will be easy to collect all of the receipts. Also, the dean or director and other administrative staff must have a copy of the finalized schedule so that they know where the visitors are at all times. Another miscellaneous tip is to set up



an "out-of-office" message on voice mail and email accounts.

### **After Arrival**

The hosting coordinator should get to the airport in advance and check any flight delays or changes on the day of visitors' arrival. Because visitors may arrive earlier than the estimated arrival time, it is always a good practice to be at the airport at least thirty minutes in advance. Because international visitors often have excess baggage, it is necessary to have a second vehicle to transport the passengers and their luggage if there are more than ten visitors. When visitors arrive, a brief introduction of the hosting coordinator is appropriate. After all luggage has arrived, they can go to the accommodation facility where they will stay throughout their visit. We learned that pre-check-in was a good idea to expedite the visitors getting settled into their rooms.

We also learned that it was advantageous to have all visitors' room numbers and phone numbers for emergency contact when they check into their rooms. Right before the check-in process, we gave a brief orientation about the accommodation. After everyone settles into their rooms, we take everyone out for dinner, which is also used as an opportunity to let them know about the second day's schedule, the hosting coordinators' emergency contact numbers, and the mandatory use of seatbelts at all times inside of the vehicle.

We began the second day with an orientation about the overall schedule. The orientation provided the chance to get to know each visitor in person. As mentioned earlier, the orientation can include information about the hosting institution and community, federal and state governments, and other major social-service programs. We learned that we should inform visitors of getting permission before taking pictures and videotaping agencies or clients. Even though most of the visiting groups were aware of confidentiality and got permission before taking pictures, we often had to remind the visitors of the need to protect clients.

On the last day, everyone should check out of their accommodations as early as

possible. A pre-checkout will expedite the procedure. Again, it is a good idea to arrange another vehicle to transport the visitors and their luggage to the airport. Before the checkout, all invoices or receipts must be given to the visitors so that outstanding balances can be paid.

### **Culturally Sensitive Approaches for Both**

Gaining cultural competence was identified as a major benefit of a short-term international program by previous studies (Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999; Colling & Wilson, 1998; Cronin, 2005). We also learned some of Korea's cultural norms from implementing twelve different visiting programs. In this section, we would like to share some of the lessons we learned from the norms not mentioned in previous sections to help prospective hosts avoid some of our mistakes. First, introduce a faculty chaperone of the visiting team to the hosting agency representative with his or her permission. For some of the earliest visiting programs, we rushed to the main focus of their visit without introducing the faculty chaperone at the beginning of the visit. Later, a faculty chaperone informed us that it was a culturally sensitive practice to introduce faculty chaperones at the beginning of each visit. After the feedback, we began to introduce faculty chaperones to the agency representatives first, but some chaperones did not feel comfortable being introduced in front of their students because the chaperones were unable to respond back to the agency representatives in English. From the experience, we learned that it is a good idea to introduce a faculty chaperone if he or she feels comfortable.

Second, visitors should be advised that sensitive information about clients must be asked of hosting agency representative after meeting the clients, instead of during the meeting with the clients. Some students became enthusiastic and asked very personal questions of the clients. When such a question was asked in Korean, we advised the students in Korean to ask the questions in the absence of the clients. This worked well to protect clients, but not all the time. We painfully



remember one visitor, whose English was good enough to communicate with Americans, but not enough to sensitively communicate with American clients. The visitor used a labeling and stereotypical term in English to refer to some clients. This made us and the hosting agency representative uncomfortable, so the hosting agency representative interrupted the question. Since then, we have always included topics about when and how to ask sensitive questions as a part of an orientation.

#### **Stage 5: Evaluation**

Evaluation is a necessity in order to improve future programs. We used the last afternoon before the visitors' departure for the evaluation. Several times we hosted picnics, which turned out to be another cultural immersion experience for visitors and a chance to share their ideas about what they learned from the visiting program and what needed to change for future programs. We included two major topics in the evaluation: feedback about agencies they had visited, and feedback about the overall operation of the visiting program. Based upon the feedback, we removed or added certain agencies on other visiting teams' schedules, as well as made appropriate schedule changes.

In addition to the evaluation time in the U.S., most of the twelve teams published after-visit reports when they returned to Korea. We learned that those reports were required by their financial supporters or educational institutions. The reports contained additional information about what they learned from the agencies and services they had visited during their trip to the U.S. By reading the description, we were indirectly able to measure their level of understanding about the agencies and services.

#### **Stages 6 and 7: Termination/Follow-up**

Departure is one of the steps in the termination process. Due to the tightened security procedures, we learned that it is a good idea to wait until everyone passes through the security gate. After their departure, report to the hosting institution officials about the successful ending of the visiting program. Sending a letter or card of appreciation to the

hosting agency representatives is a very nice final touch of the current program and a good foundation for future programs.

#### **Conclusion**

We always found that hosting an international visiting program was very challenging. After each program, we experienced complete exhaustion. However, rewards from the job exceeded the fatigue. The most precious reward to us was the change among the visitors. We noticed one very salient theme among the visitors' post-visit reports: how the visits broadened their horizons, especially the undergraduate students. Most of the students were not from so-called "prestigious" universities. Before their visits, many students had thought that studying in the U.S. was possible only for graduates of prestigious universities, and that they were excluded from the opportunity. Being hosted by an American university helped them break through the glass ceiling of academic cliques and see another opportunity for their future. Actually, some visitors came back to the U.S. for their master's degree after their undergraduate degrees were completed in Korea.

Increased self-esteem was another common theme in their formal reports. We would like to remind readers of the fact that such a change in self-esteem is barely reported in outbound visiting programs by American students. We believe that this unique benefit is related to a sense of breaking the previously mentioned glass ceiling and sense of empowerment gained through their visit.

These visiting programs challenged some of the students' pre-existing beliefs about the American child-welfare system. One need that was consistently expressed to us by our visitors was to learn about this system. To meet the need, we included the state or county Department of Social Services or various school social work programs to their itineraries. Yet, to our puzzlement, students studying child-welfare reported their frustration about not seeing any child welfare agencies. Later, we found out through various conversations that what they meant by child-welfare agencies was day-care centers or preschools. Some of



the students shared that they became confused and frustrated by learning that what they were studying in Korea under the name of "child welfare" was not a social work field, but early-childhood education.

We learned that their confusion was a reflection of the overall social work profession's identity in Korea. Their social work faculty chaperones carefully explained why the students had become confused and frustrated. After the military dictatorship ended in the early 1990s, presidents with no military backgrounds were elected in Korea. One of the most common election promises was to enhance the well-being of Koreans through better social-welfare systems. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 made the country more aware of the limitations of personal care systems; consequently there was more consensus about greater governmental involvement in individuals' welfare. Due to these reasons, social workers' jobs exponentially increased while the country's unemployment rate skyrocketed. Therefore, the social work profession became very popular in Korea during the late 1990s. In this process, many non-social work disciplines such as home economics and early childhood education changed their names to "family welfare" or "child welfare" departments so that their graduates would have more opportunities for employment. Therefore, the students' confusion was a small scaled version of the country's confusion.

We also sensed from visitor feedback that Korea has been changing very quickly by adopting new welfare systems. About eight years ago, when the first visitors came, they were impressed by many social service programs and agencies that they did not have in Korea (especially services for homeless people, various domestic violence programs, continuum of care services for the older citizens, hospice, and food bank systems), but later groups expressed that they had similar programs.

As we reflect back, the twelve visiting programs were mutual learning opportunities for us and our visitors. We learned that globalization has been a national motto in Korea since the early 1990s. The country's

willingness to learn about other countries has resulted in sending many visiting teams from various disciplines abroad. The Korean Association of Social Workers also began to deploy its members to foreign countries during the same period (Korean Association of Social Workers). The visitors from the past twelve programs informed us that Korea is eclectically adopting welfare service systems and skills from Europe, Japan, and the United States of America. We believe that the country already has or will have a lot of programs from which American social workers can learn if the country remains eager to improve by learning from others. Unfortunately, we sometimes feel that believing the U.S. is the most advanced country blocks some of our American students from learning how other countries approach the same social issues. After witnessing personal changes among many visitors from the past 12 programs and sensing fast eclectic changes in Korea, we strongly believe that sending American students and practitioners abroad with open minds will eventually enhance many of our social welfare systems and enhance our clients' well-being.

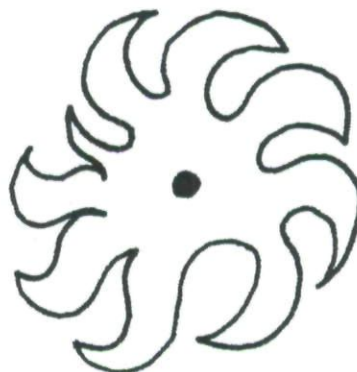
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