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### IDENTIFYING & SUPPORTING VULNERABLE CAMPUS POPULATIONS IN TIMES OF CRISIS ACROSS

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#### **Identifying and Supporting Vulnerable Campus Populations in times of Crisis Across the Local-Global Continuum**

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#### **Introduction**

This article will use the COVID-19 pandemic to contextualize international learners as a vulnerable campus population, and recommend promising practices for emergency preparedness that helps reduce these vulnerabilities.

### **The Local-Global Continuum**

The local-global continuum helps us to understand that phenomena can have both local and global implications (Darian-Smith and McCarty, 2017). It is useful for understanding how conditions observed locally are not unique to the local context but provide an awareness of similar circumstances globally. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an issue that has both local and global implications. For instance, it has illuminated existing health disparities among minoritized communities in the United States, an outcome of structural racism. Egede and Walker (2020) explained that structural racism encompasses “the ways in which societies foster discrimination through mutually reinforcing inequitable systems” (para 2). In their reporting of the COVID-19 crisis, Human Rights Watch (2020) described the contextual factors related to structural racism that is experienced in communities of color: It shows up in discriminatory healthcare outcomes (Keshavan, 2020), disproportionate policing of Black and Brown individuals leading to increased detention and exposure to the virus (Green & Gaston-Hawkins, 2020), insufficient access to water for Native Americans (Baek, 2020), greater percentage of “COVID essential” workers of color in occupations requiring close contact with others (Chambers, 2020), and poor perinatal outcomes for mothers of color (CDC, 2019). These *local* health-related realities underscore how minoritized populations, often underrepresented in policy and planning in the United States *and abroad*, have experienced deepened disparities during the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Campus Crisis: Impact to Global Education**

Campus crisis management scholars classify crises into three levels: critical incidents, campus emergencies, and disasters. COVID-19 registers as a disaster, and thus has caused significant disruption to campus operations. Most crises only interrupt business locally, but COVID-19’s global impact makes it a larger crisis than most educators will experience in their entire careers.

In past disasters, we have witnessed nations come to each other’s aid. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, every nation is impacted; thus, placing the response focus squarely on domestic populations and needs, rather than international support. Instead of opening borders, the pandemic has justified the closing of borders. This uniform international response not only dictates which people can access college campuses, but guides decisions about

campus operations as the crisis continues. As COVID-19 began to disrupt operations, the initial campus responses—and the scramble to remedy the unintended consequences of that response—uncovered the most vulnerable subpopulations within higher education.

For instance, at the outset, attention was turned to where COVID-19 was first detected in China. Initial concern quickly led to xenophobic targeting of students of Asian descent (White, 2020). Those perceived to have Chinese ancestry experienced “verbal harassment, shunning, and physical assault” (Noel, 2020, p. 3) in the United States and across the globe. Further, COVID-19 has been referred to as “Chinese flu” and “Wuhan virus” by the U.S. president. These incidences have contributed to the othering and stigmatization of students of Asian descent (Lau, 2020; Reny and Barreto, 2020).

The pandemic has led to a critical juncture for the practice of global education, *domestically and internationally*, during a crisis (Altbach and deWit, 2020). The move to online instruction revealed the depth of educational inequities experienced by students across the globe (Bassett, 2020) who did not have access to personal computers, WIFI, and other resources necessary for academic success. Student mobility was affected; students studying abroad had to contend with travel restrictions and border closings (Al Jazeera, 2020), suspension of visa services in the U.S. (NAFSA, 2020), and government procedures for the repatriation of students or support for international students who decided to remain in their host countries (Marinoni and van’t Land, 2020). As these restrictions continue for the foreseeable future, approaches to international student recruitment will be changed in the United States, especially in light of the frenzy caused by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s now-rescinded decision that newly admitted international students would not be allowed to enter the country if their Fall 2020 courses were taught entirely online (Stuart and Sands, 2020).

## **Vulnerable Student Populations in U.S. Higher Education**

There are two ways to view vulnerability within U.S. higher education as related to the COVID-19 response. The first is through the extensive scholarship on college-going students, their barriers to collegiate access, and their disparate campus-based academic and social experiences. This literature highlights students who are demographically marginal within the U.S. higher education system. This includes Black students, indigenous students, and other students with non-dominant racial and ethnic identities, international students, first-generation college goers, those who identify as LGBTQ+ or religious minorities, and students with disabilities, among other non-dominant

subpopulations. Many of the challenges that marginalized students face related to college matriculation are exacerbated in times of emergency. Identifying student struggles in times of normal operation helps institutional leaders to identify concerns that are likely to surface during emergency operations.

The second way to identify vulnerable students is using the same social vulnerability measures used in disaster response (Flanagan, 2011). Made for use with the general population in any locale, social vulnerability encompasses multiple socioeconomic and demographic factors that are known to influence people's ability and willingness to heed emergency warnings and instructions. While there are some factors institutions already record, like those related to socioeconomic status, disability, and race and ethnicity, there are others that may be harder to track, like family composition, language proficiency, type of housing, and transportation access.

Although institutions may not have all of these data points about their students, they have enough information on the campus climate and the student population to identify students with identity markers that are marginal in the campus environment. These are the students whose experiences administrators need to take into account when working on emergency management plans.

### **Lessons Learned**

In the context of global education, COVID-19 has revealed new challenges and opportunities. Rather than waiting for a return to what was true before, we should view this "new normal" as an opportunity for reimagining the global education profession during and post-crisis.

As the new academic year begins, global education staff, indeed the entire institution, must update strategic plans and conduct analyses of existing units and services to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and trends (SWOTT) uncovered by COVID-19, including stakeholder impacts. Attention should focus on social justice implications, remote experiential learning and training, research productivity, international student recruitment and admission, and employee livelihood among other key issues.

Institutional decisions will need to be made regarding education abroad programs as there are still considerable border restrictions for most of the world. Given the competencies gained from possessing global perspectives, campus based global education practitioners should incorporate more "internationalization at a distance"

(Mittelmeier, Rienties, Gunter, and Raghuram, 2020) activities in their curricular and co-curricular offerings. For example, they can leverage the virtual opening of borders (Sallent, 2020) to provide increased access to faraway places that might not have been accessible to some students pre-COVID-19.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic is a complex crisis that has disproportionately affected minoritized subpopulations, especially international students, and an array of institutional structures within higher education. Understanding the local-global continuum provides us with perspective to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on global education practices and the related implications for this work and for those served by educators across borders.

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