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Global at URI: International Exchange Students Within URI's 21st Century Learning Environment

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The focus of my Honors Capstone project was to highlight the existing methodologies in place for the inclusion of bi-lateral exchange international students in the undergraduate community of the University of Rhode Island (URI). I aimed to provide a comprehensive review of existing academic and non-academic structures devoted to the globalization efforts at URI and their impact in order to evaluate the 21st century 24/7 learning environment that is in place for bi-lateral international exchange students.

Within the University of Rhode Island's Academic Strategic Plan for 2017-2021, there is an initiative to advance and prioritize the internationalization of the University and to nurture a global presence. To push this initiative forward, URI is expanding efforts to successfully provide comprehensive support and inclusion services of enrolled international undergraduate students through advising, peer support, and programming efforts. Through student surveys, and bi-lateral international exchange student interviews, I found that to aid in the combined efforts to increase domestic students engaging in international education experiences and the inclusion of international students within the URI defined learning environment, it is important to strengthen inclusive cross-cultural interactions on campus.

My initial findings address a need to promote a more proactive interventional approach that can be taken to integrate international students further within the URI community. The surveys reported that 42% of the 200 URI home students felt that they did not have the opportunity to interact with international students on campus. Additionally, bi-lateral international exchange students reported feelings of isolation - *"in our international house, there weren't programs where Americans came to us. We had to put in a lot more effort on our own to make it happen"*.

The surveys also highlighted that there is an interest from URI home students to have cross-cultural activities with international students. From the interviews, bi-lateral international exchange students also displayed an interest in sharing these types of experiences with URI home students. *"My culture is very different from American culture and I wanted to learn more about the culture here which made me interested in interactions with American students"*. A peer advising program that exists within the University's current internationalization efforts is the Peer Ambassador Program operated through the Office of International Education. This program matches URI home students who have previously studied abroad with newly arrived international students and prioritizes international students' initial integration to the URI campus. In the interviews, a student reported *"other URI institutions helped me find my way but the Peer Ambassador Program was the one that support me the most"*. I suggest, based from these interview findings that restructuring the program to be better utilized as an outlet, may improve positive outcomes of student academic life and cultural competencies through social interaction.

Due to the limitations of my research, I was not able to provide a comprehensive review of all the structures devoted to the existing globalization efforts at URI. However, from the completed surveys and interviews with bi-lateral exchange students, I gained insight on how bi-lateral exchange students at the University of Rhode Island feel within this 21st century 24/7 learning environment. With this knowledge, I aim to suggest potential recommendations to the Office of International Education that may advance the internationalization efforts for future international undergraduate students coming on exchange to the University of Rhode Island. Moving

forward, I believe the University of Rhode Island should conduct qualitative studies on the efficiency and feasibility of existing programming efforts that promote international interaction through the Global Strategies & Academic Partnerships Office and Office of International Education to promote effective programs within the URI 21st century 24/7 learning environment.