

## Third Culture Kids/Global Nomads - College Choice and Reentry

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## Who are Third Culture Kids (TCKs)?

- First defined by R.H. Useem in the 1960s as those who have grown up in different places around the world because of their parent's work. The term has evolved over the years to include all children who accompany their parents into another culture, whether domestically or globally. I specifically adopt R.H. Useem's original definition of this term.
- Third culture kids are represented by all nationalities. A child of an Ecuadorian couple who live in Japan has similar characteristics to a child of a U.S. American couple who live in Kenya. This is limited to third culture kids who are U.S. citizens.<sup>2</sup>

## Sara's Background Interest

- Students at the University of Chicago
  - International student orientation
  - In the residence halls
- NAFSA: Association of International Educators
  - Global Nomads Special Interest Group
- Readings of books, essays and articles
- Love of international travel, cross-cultural issues, and interest in transition to college issues.

3

## Lynne's Background Interest

- Born and raised in Bombay, India. Bicultural with "tap roots" there and in Colorado, Arizona
- Learned about GN/TCK's in 1989 at 1<sup>st</sup> Global Nomad Conference, Washington, DC with Norma McCaig, David Pollock and Barbara Schaeti
- Personal adjustment concerns in U.S. boarding school and university led to interest in the topic

## Lynne's Experience from the field

- Realization that U.S. high school and University admissions counselors are generally uninformed but interested
- Large global and mobile market of GN/TCK's looking for suitable universities worldwide
- Suggestions for attracting these students to your campus to make it more welcoming

## Sara's Research Questions

1. What factors influence the college choice decision of U.S. TCKs?
2. What expectations and challenges do U.S. TCKs predict they will face during their reentry into the U.S. and more specifically their transition into a U.S. higher education institution?
3. What role does the overseas international schools' college counselor play in U.S. TCKs' college choice process and in forming their college expectations?
4. What advice and suggestions do U.S. TCKs offer their high school teachers, counselors and/or advisors regarding the college choice process?
5. What advice and suggestions do U.S. TCKs offer to college admission personnel and other institutional support personnel regarding the college choice process?

6

### Findings: Influencing Factors in the College Choice Decision of U.S. TCKs

- Parents - biggest source of influence
- Friends- also influenced aspects
- Overseas location influenced every student
  - Justin said, "Here it's like they make students think big, real big, like you can go to Europe or Australia or the States."
  - Samuel said, "Just being able to see the number of opportunities that I have anywhere, because I can pretty much go anywhere. Being at [this] school allows me to go to [home] if I elect to. Staying here in [the host country] allows me to be in [the host country] or any other Latin American country."

7

### Findings: Influencing Factors in the College Choice Decision of U.S. TCKs

- Internet- most common way to gather information
  - School 'B' Counselor said, "Good news, it's there and you can access pretty well any college you want. The bad news is there is such a bewildering array of universities that some kids find it daunting...To begin narrowing down that vast field is quite scary for some kids."
- College counselor- extremely important role to the students

8

### Findings: Influencing Factors in the College Choice Decision of U.S. TCKs

- Campus visits- viewed as important, though not all students were able to make them (7 visited at least one)
  - Patricia said, "It's kind of far for me to go visit any of my colleges, which was kind of hard. I would like to know what the environment was like more."
- Academic major availability- another influencing factor
- Familiar Location- All students had at least one familiar location in their college choice set and most ended up choosing a familiar location as their final destination.
  - Nicole said, "I still have family in Chicago, my grandma, cousins, and all that, so I figured with the big move from [the host country] it would be nice...to have another support system around me for the big change."

9

### Findings: Transition to College

- Range of responses regarding:
  - leaving the host country and returning to the U.S.
    - Christine said, "I don't know anything else besides [the host country]" - she had lived in the host country since 2nd grade.
    - Nicole said, "I'm sad to leave [the host country] because I feel like it's my home, but it's good to know I have all the friends I need over there and stuff, so it's not going to be just completely new. But, I know it's going to take time to get adjusted, but I've had to do it before."
  - graduating from high school and going to college
- Most had made general preparations to leave for college.
- Nearly all thought their schools did nothing to prepare them for the transition.

10

### Findings: College Expectations

- Most students associated college with increased independence.
- Specific examples of expectations for classes, living arrangements, extracurricular activities, and friends were vague, though realistic.
  - Students expected more choice in regards to classes and that the classes would be larger and harder.
  - All but one student predicted they would be involved in extracurricular activities.
  - All but one student expected making new friends.
  - Most had not received housing assignments or roommates yet, so predictions were vague.
- Students placed importance on the college orientation program and its content.
  - Should cover everything the college thought they needed to know.

11

### Findings: Challenges Predicted with Reentry and Transition to College

- Predicting challenges was easy for the students.
- Most recognized adjustment issues would be a challenge.
- Most worried about having to "live the American life" again.
  - Yvonne said, "I'm a bit behind on things going on in the States. I'm a little more aware on the news going on around the world, but a little behind for the States."
  - Nicole said, reflecting on her reentry in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, "It was just a year. Right when I had finally gotten into the swing of things, then it was time to come back again."
  - Justin said he felt "disconnected from the social scene" in the U.S.
  - Yolanda said, "It's hard to adapt yourself even if you have done it a lot of times...I think that is the hardest thing, trying to, I guess, fit in again, being a part of something you haven't lived in your whole life."

12

## Findings: Challenges Predicted with Reentry and Transition to College

- Daniel said, "Just relearning it, and fulfilling the expectations of what you are suppose to do there and what you aren't suppose to do [will be a challenge]."
- Christine said it would be hard "getting back in the routine...of living an American life."
- Samuel said, "I don't know what it's like to live there, because I left when I was really young, so I'm not really sure what it's like to live there as a grown-up."
- Victor said, "Just adapting to a new, different place is the most challenging."
- Academic issues challenges mentioned: putting individual effort into work, procrastination, managing ADD, academic workload
- Independence as another challenge. (Need for family support.)

13

## 4 Major Conclusions

1. Overseas location influences numerous aspects of the college search process.
2. Strong student ties to "home" play an important role in their college choice process.
3. Adjusting to U.S. culture is an expected challenge.
4. College orientations are extremely important to TCKs.

14

## Conclusion: Overseas location influences numerous aspects of the college search process

- In general, the students recognized that their college choice experience would have been different if they had been located in the U.S.
- Family and Friends
  - A lot of weight was placed on opinions of family or friends who attended college in the U.S. or who were in the U.S. and currently in the search phase
  - Cottrell & R.H. Useem, 1994; Gist, 2007; Kim, 2001; Lawrence, 1997; Stewart & Felicetti, 1991; Wu, 1989; Zikopoulos & Barber, 1986
- Global Choices
  - U.S. was not the only choice, also Australia, Canada, the U.K., and elsewhere in Europe.
  - Lawrence, 1997; McDonough, 1997
- College Counselor Role
  - Students felt it was very important
  - College Board, 1997

15

## Conclusion: Overseas location influences numerous aspects of the college search process

- College Recruitment Activities
  - Students relied on Internet
    - Bevis, 2001; Kim 2001
  - Campus visits were common, though difficult for some and sometimes the absence of a visit foreshadowed later transfer to other colleges.
    - College Board, 1997; Cottrell & R.H. Useem, 1994
  - Lack of access to admission interviews
  - Communication Challenges
    - Regular Mailing Addresses, sometimes in the U.S., but then re-shipped.
    - Host country mail unreliable.
    - Insufficient use of email by college admission counselors
    - Advantage: Access to college fairs and college admission officers visits, though not used to the student's advantage.
    - College Board, 1997; Gist, 2007

16

## Conclusion: Strong student ties to "home" play an important role in their college choice process

- Location of Colleges
  - All thought it was advantageous to live overseas and experience a new culture before college.
  - All students had interest in returning to a familiar location for college, instead of another new location.
    - 2 students had their entire choice sets in a U.S. location considered "home."
    - Only 3 applied to more new locations than familiar locations
    - For final choice, of 8 students who self identified a "home state" (though might have only lived there as little as two years), 5 of them returned to their home state. 2 more returned to another place they used to live.
    - For final choice, of 3 student who did not identify any "home state," 2 ended up in a place they used to live.
    - Overall, only 2 students adventured to new places. These same 2 had the most diverse application pools.
    - Non-admittance to an institution did not seem to impact the final choice, as only 2 students had non-familiar places where they were not accepted
    - Type of Colleges – Gleason, 1969

17

## Conclusion: Strong student ties to "home" play an important role in their college choice process

- Value of Family
  - Students were close to their families.
  - All parents were active in the students' lives
  - Maintaining some kind of close ties throughout college was also considered important.
  - More than half indicated they would have family members close to their final college choice
  - 5 indicated they would miss their families when they moved back to the U.S.
  - Bishop, 1997; R.H. Useem & Downie, 1976; Zilber, 2005

18

## Conclusion: Adjusting to U.S. culture is an expected challenge

- 8 predicted adjustment issues
  - In general, because they had experience with many moves
  - 2 students commented on previous U.S. reentry problems
  - 3 students did not mention adjustment issues, 2 had only lived abroad for their senior year and the third had only lived abroad for her last 2 years and while spoke Spanish felt like she didn't belong.
  - Coschingnano, 2000; Cottrell & R.H. Useem, 1993, 1994; Downie, 1976; Gleason, 1973; Harrell, 1986; Salmon, 1987; R.H. Useem, 1993a
- Even though it was predicted, not much preparing
  - Only 1 student was preparing to deal with it officially with a "Transition Seminar"
  - 3 had talked about it with family members
  - Austin, 1986; Brislin & Van Buren, 1986; College Board, 1997; Denny, 1986; Foreign Service Youth Foundation, 2007; Freedman, 1986; Kendall, 1986; Loewenthal & Snedden, 1986; Sussman, 1986; Storti, 2001; U.S. Department of State's Family Liaison Office, 2007a; U.S. Department of State's Transition Center, 2007b; Werkman, 1986

19

## Conclusion: College orientations are extremely important to TCKs

- Orientation perception was that the college should know everything students need to know and cover it at orientation.
- Students were unsure what they needed to know.
- Students expected high levels of support from colleges which reflected the similar levels in their current situations.
- Students felt their high schools were not doing anything to prepare them for college life.
- American University, n.d.; Azusa Pacific University, 2007; Brown University, n.d.; College of Wooster, n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c; Colorado State University, n.d.; George Mason University, n.d.; Lewis and Clark College, n.d.; Mu Kappa, n.d.; Syracuse University, n.d.; University of Denver, n.d.; University of the Pacific, n.d.; Wheaton College, n.d.

20

## International Secondary School Recommendations

- College Counselor role important!
  - Appropriate Background, U.S. degree
  - Access to training and professional networks
  - Awareness of the TCK population
- Compile College Resource Inventory
  - Maintain a list of institutions where the staff and administrators were educated
- Conduct a pre-departure orientation for students going to the U.S.
- Maintain contact with graduates and connect them with future TCKs when they go to college.
- Conduct a parent session regarding TCKs and college reentry and transition challenges

21

## U.S. College Recommendations

- Keep websites up to date and have full information available.
- Consider alternatives in receiving documents in admissions
- Use email when possible. It's the preferred method.
- Create virtual tours online.
- Consider alternatives to face-to-face interviews
- Consider using the Common Application
- Understand who TCKs are and their diverse perspective
- TCKs generally placed little importance on attending college fairs and visits to their schools by admission personnel.
- One college counselor thought school visits were more valuable than fairs.
- Take time to understand the school you are recruiting from.
- Communication between admissions and international offices crucial to know if TCKs are coming.
- International Offices – Invite TCKs to orientation and social events
- In general, advertise services to this group

22

## Recommendations to Other Invested Parties

- TCKs and their parents
  - Understanding of identity=better adjustment and feeling less isolated (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001)
- Sponsoring Organizations
  - Provide resources and opportunities for discussions about TCKs
  - Advertise and encourage transition seminars
- EducationUSA
  - Increase awareness among TCKs
  - Provide special transition workshops for TCKs
  - Offer help to college counselors

23

## Future Research Recommendations

- Numerous opportunities
- Conduct a similar study in different regions of the world.
  - Less common host country language
  - Rural
- Examine the family role in the college choice process.
  - Interview Parents of TCKs
  - Interview/Collect Data on Siblings of TCKs
- Examine socioeconomic status of TCKs and differences in the college choice process
- Examine the academic achievement of TCKs and college choice
- Conduct a quantitative study on college expectations of TCKs
- Compare college expectations and realities by conducting follow-up interviews with the student participants after 1 semester in college or 6 months after the first interview.
- Examine the college recruiters' (who travel internationally) perceptions of TCKs.
- Examine the role of the sponsoring organization

24

Yolanda's final thought, "Even if you go back to the States every summer, you still don't know what's going on. You don't understand people and people don't understand you or your experience."

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My final thought, "College WILL be an adjustment! How can we each best help TCKs with their adjustment?"

Questions?

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