Meeting the Distinct Needs of Refugee High School Students Applying to College

Dorothy Taylor, Associate Professor
Oliver Glover, College Connections Coordinator
Educational Opportunity Center
University at Buffalo, SUNY
Malala Yousafzai
Today’s Agenda

- Relationship of Academic/Language, Sociocultural and Postsecondary Process
- College Application Process
- Best Practices and Resources
- Sharing Q & A
Some relevant stats

- The number of refugees coming into Erie County has more than doubled since 2005
  - In 2005 Erie County, received 692 refugees; and, in 2009, Erie County received 1,414 refugees according to data provided by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH)

- Erie County receives the largest number of refugees in New York State compared to other counties outside of New York City.

- Second migration accounts for additional numbers of refugee resettlement in Western New York.
There is no ONE refugee . . .
International and Refugee Students

**International Students**
- Require student visas
- Often come from high socioeconomic backgrounds
- Have extensive academic skills in native language
- Completed high school in native country

**High School Refugee Students**
- Benefit from ongoing language support
- Face cultural adjustments
- Revere education and respect professors

- Are permanent residents
- Have limited financial resources (Face financial struggles)
- Often have little or no academic skills in native language
- Completed high school in U.S.
La La Land . . . Vs. . . .

Develop Language

Apply for Admission

Matriculate into Classes
. . . Reality

Language

Process

Academics

Sociocultural
Studying English is a lifelong process.

English language learners develop basic interpersonal skills much more rapidly than cognitive academic language proficiency.

Home language and academic language may differ.

Familiarity with process and terms affects understanding.
Many refugee students and parents are unfamiliar with the application process. There may be cultural differences in the process between their countries and U.S. Students from some cultures may be reluctant to ask questions. Many students will not understand the difference between college credit and non-credit courses and the use of financial aid.
Sociocultural

- The family is of utmost importance to many refugee families.
- Religion is often an integral part of life.
- Past cultural experiences may affect perceptions.
- Trauma is a common factor of the refugee experience.
- Most refugees are poor.
Academics

- Persistence has brought the refugee student to your door.
- English language learners need language and academic support.
- Interrupted educations may pose gaps in learning.
- Temporary withdrawal from college does not mean students won’t return to complete their education.
**College Application Process**

- Understand/meet college entrance requirements; obtain academic advisement; select a major and school(s)
- Apply for admissions
- Apply for federal and state financial aid
- Explore scholarship opportunities
- EOC provides assistance for students and their parents via its College Connections initiative.
College Entry: NYS Requirements

- High School Diploma
- General Equivalency Diploma (GED)
Proof of Refugee Status Documents

- Arrival-Departure Record (I-94) showing refugee status issued by US Dept. of Homeland Security
- Refugees holding a valid passport
Admissions Process: Selected Schools

- Niagara County Community College
- SUNY ECC
- Buffalo State
- University at Buffalo
Erie Community College
& Refugee Students - Admissions

- Apply online
- Submit proof of refugee status documents
- Submit local high school diploma and transcript of grades
- Schedule bilingual Compass placement test
- ECC accepts refugees w/GEDs also
- ECC can accept English-translated foreign high school transcripts coupled with Compass test results
Compass Test measures...

- Written essay skills
- Oral interview ability
- Reading and writing skills
- Math skills
- English as a second language skills

ECC Mission & Values

Mission:
“Meet the needs of a diverse student body”

Core Values: Openness and Respect
“…recognize, promote and appreciate a broad range of cultures”
ECC’s English as a Second Language Program

- Offers an ESL Student Support Center
- Guides students in choosing courses to improve their English, math, and other academic skills
- Advisement is coordinated with academic departments to place students appropriately
ESL Program at ECC

- ESL Student Lab and Language Lab staffed with mentors and tutors
- Degree credit introductory courses available
- Focuses on vocabulary and concept building and are credited, in most cases, to the program of the student’s choice
Part Time Students – Refugee Status

- Part time matriculation into a major is an available option
- Submit proof of refugee status
- Provide proof of local high school diploma, complete Compass testing
- Students with GED must complete Compass bilingual placement testing
- Students with foreign diplomas submit transcripts, complete Compass testing
ESL Program - Other Supports

- Offers *Summer Institute* for incoming admits and continuing students
- Encourages student confidence, keeping them connected to the English language
- Students can practice computer use
- Network with other students
- Students gain familiarity with the college environment
- Program staffed with ESL instructors
University at Buffalo & Refugee Students - Admissions

- UB requires SAT or ACT scores from all high school applicants.
- Applicants with refugees status must submit documented proof of their status.
- Refugees must have a minimum SAT reading score of 410, or a minimum ACT score of 18 in English and reading for regular admission, or… (see next slide)
University at Buffalo - Admissions

Foreign-born applicants (refugees) must submit a TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score of 79 or 550 paper-based, which would place them into ENG 101 – Composition or ESL 407.

For refugee/students that obtain a minimum SAT or ACT score that falls below 79 on TOEFL,...

Admissions recommends that students attend community college and complete 1-2 English courses to strengthen their language and writing skills.

Web: TOEFL and IELTS Placement - [http://advising.buffalo.edu/trainingguide/faq/toefl.php](http://advising.buffalo.edu/trainingguide/faq/toefl.php) for more information on standard and conditional admission requirements concerning TOEFL.
If part of a student’s three years of high school grades are from a foreign school and they can provide proof, a waiver of ESL 407/ENG 101 may be possible provided the student has high iBT scores along with high writing subscores.

High school students must produce at least three years of transcript and grades for admissions consideration.
UB-Admissions may also accept a letter from a guidance counselor requesting waiver of the admissions application fee.

Students can apply for a hardship waiver of the application fee.

SUNY waiver form available at

http://www.suny.edu/student/downloads/Pdf/fee_waiver.pdf
Middle 50% of students accepted into UB score between 1170 and 1260 on the SAT

UB usually seeks students with a 90% to 96% high school GPA average

Some students may wish to consider attending a community college and transfer later to save tuition and college costs

Transfer students must have a 2.5 minimum GPA; PLUS - no SAT required
**UB Admissions - Advice**

- Take the SAT in the 11th grade; visit online SAT prep sites and prepare for it.
- Be aware of application deadlines and submit timely college application.
- Visit online college essay preparation sites to strengthen those writing capabilities.
Buffalo State College & Refugee Students - Admissions

- Must submit proof of refugee status documentation (e.g. I-94, passport)
- Apply online (SUNY or Common App)
- Submit high school diploma with transcript of grades
Buffalo State College - Admissions

- If refugee takes SAT, scores well on it, they can be a regular general admit.
- If refugee student submits a TOEFL or ACT test result, they could gain acceptance on the basis of their combined test results plus their high school preparation work completed.
- If verbal/writing skills are not proficient, then ESL program would be offered.
If English level is too low, BSC offers a fall, spring and summer ESL program.

Students may study up to one year.

ESL offers six levels of English language study.

Once at level 5 of ESL program, students take an internal TOEFL test; with good score results, matriculation is offered.
If TOEFL still too low, another semester of ESL is offered, then student can reapply for admission
Buffalo State College – ESL Program

Offers English as a Second Language program for refugee groups, which include:

a. Students Wanting ESL only courses
b. Conditionally Admitted Students
c. Fully-Admitted Students

Web: http://admissions.buffalostate.edu/esl
Buffalo State College – ESL Program

- Offers non-credit courses
- Courses are ineligible for financial aid
- Affordability of ESL’s tuition and costs may prove challenging for refugee students and their families
- EOC’s tuition-free ESL program can be an option to improve language skills to improve a student’s ability to perform well on TOEFL or IELTS prior to reapplication
Buffalo State – Conditional Admits

- Are students that meet Buffalo State admissions requirements but do not meet the English language proficiency requirements; Get offered ESL program
- Buffalo State ESL program completers may gain conditional admit status, which may later convert to full admission status
- Some credit-bearing academic coursework may be permitted under conditional admit portion of ESL program
Buffalo State – Exploring New Approach

- Now exploring development of 3, 6 and 9 credit course work for refugee students
- Adding credit-bearing course work coupled with student involvement in ESL program can enhance student success
- Having courses taught by ESL instructors
- Approach can offer added in-class support for refugee students
Niagara County Community College
Admissions – Refugee Students

- Submit proof of status documentation
- No minimum TOEFL score required for admission
- Apply online
- Complete Accuplacer testing
- Accuplacer testing could be waived with strong scores on high school regents exams
Niagara County Community College

- NCCC does offer remedial reading, math and writing classes, but they are not geared towards an ESL population.
- Those requiring English proficiency help should locate and enroll in an ESL program to build fluency.
- UB-EOC offers tuition-free ESL classes that can help these students.
Financial Challenges – Refugee Students

- Lack of family resources/finances for college
- Lack of knowledge about grants
- Lack of knowledge about loans, the repayment process and how it effects them and their families
- EOC’s College Connections initiative provides one-on-one FAFSA & TAP help & academic advisement to high school grads
Financial Aid Terms – General Advice

- Students may not necessarily be familiar with the distinction between financial aid, loans and scholarships.
- Terms should be clarified for students with refugee status (and parents) who may have concerns about the impact on their financial situations.
- EOC’s College Connections initiative provides students and families with financial aid assistance.
Challenges for High School Guidance Counselors

- Refugees have language proficiency challenges
- Students lack understanding about the college application completion process and are unfamiliar with FAFSA, state aid and loan forms
- Students have problems with SAT testing (test may not accurately measure what students know)
- Some experience a sense of being overwhelmed and a general feeling of being lost in school
- General assimilation problems to the US culture
Challenges – Postsecondary Schools

- English language proficiency of applicants
- Limited experience with students with refugee status
- Ensuring students receive comprehensive supportive services
- Limited resources to develop new institutional programming for refugee student population (e.g. budget, personnel)
- Students want quick exit from ESL programs; they much prefer full matriculated status and equate that to ‘getting somewhere’
Thank You
Sharing Questions and Answers