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Common Struggles among Persian Immigrant Students in Community Colleges

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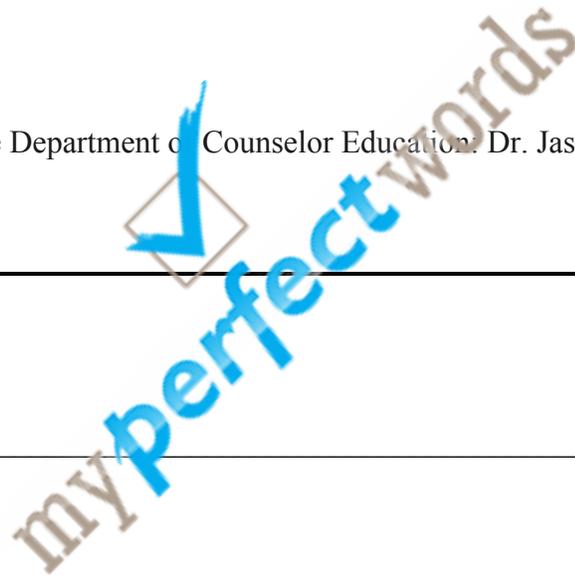
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Approved by the Department of Counselor Education: Dr. Jason Laker

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### Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge my parents, for providing me with the opportunity to continue my education. Their support and encouragement has been a source of inspiration as I continue on the path to fulfilling my educational and professional goals.

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### Abstract

Non-U.S. natives studying at U.S. community colleges face unique challenges in meeting their academic goals. Large numbers of these students struggle in achieving adequate college entrance test scores to gain appropriate grade-level placement. Many of these same students have experienced significant rates of high school failure with concomitant classification into special education programs, many of which are remedial in nature at specific grade levels. Immigrant secondary students commonly enter the U.S. at diverse levels of academic achievement and are frequently challenged to adapt quickly to new curricula and protocols while dealing with unrecognized social, cultural, and personal challenges, not the least of which is an unclear expectation of and inadequate support for the development of fluent, colloquial English literacy.

This paper endeavors to explore the ongoing significant need for collegiate student affairs policies to actively embrace the inputs and participation of the growing population of students of Persian origin, with the explicit mission of further accommodating the unique cultural, social, and educational needs of this group.

Workshops are proposed as part of this thesis project, with a specific focus upon improvements at the college and university level.

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### Chapter I: Introduction

Ever since the first Persians immigrated to the United States, the social, economic, and cultural challenges faced by all new “Persian-Americans” have been daunting. All Persians leaving their homeland do so in search of opportunities for educational advancement, material prosperity, and religious and personal freedoms.

Immediately following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, large segments of the indigenous population fled the country for a wide variety of reasons. Those who were in any way affiliated with the prior government were the first and most highly-motivated to leave, threatened by the growing potential of violent civil unrest. Those who followed this exodus shortly thereafter were young men fleeing military service in the Iran-Iraq War, followed quickly by young women and their families intent upon escaping a growing wave of draconian Islamic gender discrimination. Many families left the country simply because Islamic law required women to wear hijab coverings over their faces, restricted their access to education, and made them abjectly subservient to males and to any family into which they married. This group was promptly followed by waves of intellectuals, business leaders, and professionals fleeing the country, all of whom foresaw the installation of a new government wherein personal freedoms were secondary to the principles of Islamic rule. Having a daughter was often the critical factor in a family's decision to escape since the post-revolution era forced women to wear hijab, offered decreased educational possibilities, and enforced obedience to her husband's family.

A large percentage of those who fled to the U.S. did so in search of educational and economic opportunities, but they encountered cultural, socio-economic and language challenges, one exemplar of which is the inadequacy of educational institutional student services and their associated programs. At U.S. colleges and universities, offices providing student services—

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tasked with the integration of incoming students into campus culture and academic protocols—are designed primarily with American-born students in mind; immigrant students are generally left to their own devices in coping with summary immersion into the demands of higher education. The irony, of course, is that American universities offer some of the world’s best engineering and technical curricula, and have always been eager to attract the best and the brightest students from around the globe, regardless of country of origin. In the Seventies, for those with academic promise, student visas were available for the asking; by 1975, the Institute of International Education’s annual foreign student census figures listed Persian students as 9% of all foreign students in the United States (Bozorgmehr & Sabagh, 1988), indicating both the interest and qualifications of those recently immigrated from their homeland.

### **Background**

Persian culture is rich and complex, dating back thousands of years. Historically, this region was known for its natural resources and the sophisticated culture they supported. The Persian revolution of 1979 established a fundamentalist theocratic Islamic government and created profound religious, social, economic, and political upheaval. In the years of strife immediately following, hundreds of thousands of Persian citizens fled repression and violence, seeking increased opportunities for advanced academic attainment and financial success found predominantly in democratic capitalistic societies.

The eight-year war following the 1979 revolution stimulated accelerated emigration of much of Iran’s established middle class. By 1988, Iran had become #10 on the world’s list of nations generating political refugees. Persian immigrants were no longer simply individual students or professionals; a large percentage by this time were entire middle and upper class families seeking political asylum in the West (Curtis, & Hooglund, 2008). This second wave of

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Persian citizens fleeing Islamic rule was generated by the high number of ethnic and religious minorities in the country, while the earlier exodus had significant numbers of writers, journalists, artists and musicians who had been targeted for oppression by the new government. During this period, approximately 57 percent of Persians seeking asylum in the U.S. were men (Ferdowsi, 2013). A series of registration programs documenting this enormous influx of new arrivals caused considerable concern among Persian immigrants; arrests—many on technical visa violations—and civil rights abuses impacted thousands waiting for processing of paperwork required for application of permanent resident status. This resulted in widespread public protests in many major metropolitan areas, the first taking place in Los Angeles (Modarres, 1998).

Because of tightly-controlled admission policies and limited placement opportunities in Iran's universities, and because both the Persian economy and culture hold university degrees in high social and political regard, studying abroad is an attractive option for large numbers of Persian students. Moreover, studying overseas also provides an important connection for Iran with the outside world. Given that, serious political realities have an enormous role to play in determining when and where Persian students are able to study within the country. All these factors exacerbate the challenges of acquiring a secular education at home, motivating all who have the resources to travel to the U.S. for study to do so.

### **Problem Statement**

In recent years, the number of Persians enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities has been increasing year-over-year by nearly 20%, now totaling nearly 10,000 students. Highly motivated and enrolled in critical fields of study (75% of Persian students are engaged in science, technology, engineering, and math curricula), with the majority enrolled in post-graduate coursework. These students, one-third of whom are female, face considerable obstacles to

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matriculation at American schools. The application process itself has significant costs amounting to half the annual income of the typical urban Persian family; standard admission tests required by U.S. schools can only be taken by Persian students outside of their own country, generating significant travel costs.

Once a student overcomes those impediments to matriculation and is successfully engaged in a course of study, a large percentage of these immigrant students have difficulty adjusting to the American school system, experiencing difficulty assimilating into a competitive in academic environment and adapting to America's social, emotional, cultural and linguistic contemporary traditions. Providing services to facilitate this adjustment is essential to help these students achieve their educational goals.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this project is to create and implement a program that addresses common struggles among Persian students endeavoring to improve their opportunities for academic success. This program is designed for community colleges and engages students and parents by providing culturally and linguistically relevant information that motivates students to continue their education at four-year institutions.

### **Research Questions**

The objective here is to address the following research questions:

- What barriers do Persian students face when pursuing post-secondary school higher education?
- What student services are of most value to foreign students in terms of integration into the campus community and in the pursuit of their degree objectives?

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- What additional information is needed by faculty, administration, and the student population to better understand the needs of Persian students?

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of discussing the current state of the relevant literature in this area, our exploration of the issues and solutions will subscribe to the following common definitions:

*Higher Education:* Post-secondary education beyond high school, specifically that provided by colleges, universities, graduate schools, and professional schools. (dictionary.reference.com).

*College:* An institution of higher learning, especially one providing a general or liberal arts education rather than a technical or professional training (dictionary.reference.com).

*University:* learning of the highest level, having a college of liberal arts and a program of graduate studies, together with several professional schools, i.e., theology, law, medicine, and engineering, authorized to confer both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Continental European universities only have one graduate or professional school. (dictionary.reference.com).

*Persians:* The ethnic group or a member of the native people of Iran, descended in part from the ancient Persians. (dictionary.reference.com).

*Iran:* A country in South Asia settled since 2000 B.C. by Aryan people. This region later became the center of the Persian Empire. Tehran is the capital and the largest city in Iran.

*Farsi:* The modern Persian language of Iran and western Afghanistan.

### **Assumptions**

The assumption pursuant to this review of the current literature is that Persian immigrant students and their guardians would use the workshop information as a resource.

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- The professional staffs at higher education institutions need further training to assist and show sensitivity to all students, including both domestic and international students.
- If specific student services were provided to international students before and during enrollment, there would be higher retention and graduation rates among this student population.
- Persian students will want to participate in the foreign student workshop proposed in this thesis project.

### **Limitations**

The following limitations were beyond the control of the research design:

- Difficulty for attendance of Persian students in workshops after hours due to work, class schedules and lack of motivation.
- It may be hard to find a volunteer to assist with the workshops due to lack of interest, heavy workload, and personal and professional responsibilities after work. The workshops could not be conducted if there is no one to lead them.
- Another challenge might be to find a volunteer who's not wish to participate to make a better situation for student services being offered to the Persian students.

### **Parameters**

Though many immigrant groups experience challenges accessing higher education, the focus of this thesis project is on Persian students seeking or preparing to attend institutions providing post-secondary education at the collegiate or university level who are experiencing difficulties presented by social, cultural and language barriers.

### **Significance Statements**

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This discussion will be focused on solutions to the challenges of Persian students within the American system of higher education. The workshop will provide guidelines and methodologies for the creation and management of improved student services targeting foreign students enrolled in U.S. schools with a focus upon the social, cultural and language problems encountered by this student population. This program will point the way toward effective solutions to the asynchronous and dysfunctional state of affairs currently extant on campus throughout the U.S., without regard to individual student age, academic level, gender, or ethnicity, or economic background.



### Chapter II: Literature Review

Immigrant students have social, language and cultural barriers to overcome in order for them to achieve academic success in their host country. Among those are color-based ethnic discrimination directed toward Persians by non-Persians, the anxiety of Persian students in the use of computer programs in language learning, and previous levels of education, poor institutional communication, inadequate access to financial support via grants and scholarships, and poorly trained staff facilitators.

Success in today's competitive academic university environment requires students to quickly adapt to a specific institutional culture, which requires clear and consistent communication of campus customs, values, and protocols to each student. Failing that, any student—regardless of place of permanent residence or origin—will struggle greatly. Even more dramatically, Persian-born students who do not quickly assimilate into their particular U.S. campus life will face barriers guaranteed to produce frustration and mediocre performance at best.

Most college and university systems in the U.S. provide a modicum of counseling and student guidance historically inadequate to the particular needs of their Persian students; the primary cause of this shortfall is a straightforward lack of consistent communication, outreach, and engagement by staff with this growing student population (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005). Contributing to this asynchronous communication outreach, significant numbers of these immigrant students, supported by family, friends, and Persian community groups, attend school while housed in linguistically isolated residential settings where the only language spoken is Farsi, and where all cultural inputs and expectations are exclusively Persian. While such arrangements may at first be comfortable and easily accessible for the individual student recently

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arrived from Iran and now matriculated into a U.S. college or university, they guarantee a prolonged, sporadic, and ultimately insufficient cultural integration that may presage unanticipated feelings of isolation from age peers of disparate cultural orientation, academic frustration, and emotional problems. This extended period of cultural adjustment, wherein Persian students only befriend other Persians, speak only to other Persians, and gain their cultural knowledge of the U.S. only via other Persians can create a “ghetto” mentality which ultimately inhibits socialization and academic achievement. There are many strata of “culture shock”, none of which are mitigated by a system which fails to fully engage Persian students at the outset of their U.S. college or university experience, all of which hold the potential of erecting insurmountable obstacles to academic success.

Factors that inspire a foreign-born person to learn the English language are many and varied. The preponderance of Persian students in America are eager to become proficient in English as quickly as possible, as the benefits of social integration, cultural assimilation, ease of commercial transacting, and improved academic skills are widely appreciated and understood. The lifestyle satisfaction and economic success of foreign-born students in the U.S. depends to a significant degree upon how well those students learn English and adjust to their new milieu.

Those Persian students who have immigrated to the United States with English language and literacy limitations find themselves at considerable disadvantage and frequently experience profound challenges in adapting to their new environment and in managing academic coursework. This lack of language fluency creates demands and stresses unappreciated by faculty, staff, administration, and other students on campus, and is frequently the cause of emotional and psychological pressures that, unabated, are demotivating and pave the road to failure. Given that, it is essential for newly-arrived Persian students—or any other foreign-born

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students for that matter—to acquire the language and social skills that will reduce those stresses and pressures and allow them to broaden their cultural perspectives and to move toward academic growth.

The acquisition of new language skills does not occur overnight, but only through consistent exposure and support of those with whom one associates. To a considerable degree, much of that support in a college or university setting ideally comes from contact with faculty, staff, and administration working in concert with the foreign-born student and with the common objective of student success.

Faculty, staff, and students around the world play easily-recognized specific roles in an academic environment. Each participant in the educational endeavor understands those roles and carefully adheres to them in the interests of student growth and achievement. But when the teacher and student come from different cultures, there is a danger of confusion in the process which can lead to the disorientation of the student. This can arise pursuant to cultural differences manifested in classroom and social situations between teachers and students, significance of the curriculum in distinct cultures, profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations of the two societies, or culturally expected teacher/student and student/student interaction.

Competing or discordant cross-cultural and socio-cultural histories, habits, prejudices, and preferences carries considerable impact upon the perceptions and daily experiences of Persian students toward their new life in any host country. Most U.S. academic institutions and schools provide routine assistance to help foreign students assimilate into their student community and the broader cultural community through broadly-designed programs and support services. These services are generally tasked with helping foreign students to accelerate English

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comprehension and increase English speaking ability (Yusoff, Ramayah, Nadarajah, & Mutia, 2011).

### Overview of Barriers

#### Social Environment

The United States receives the largest annual influx of immigrants in the world, with over a million immigrants receiving legal permanent residence in the U.S. each year (Camarota, 2010). When immigrant people move to North American countries, they face a plethora of challenges, some of which are peculiar to the Persian student who needs to settle in as quickly as possible in order to get on with the business of academic studies. The level of difficulty faced by the individual Persian student can be a factor of prior education, current ability to speak English, socio-economic background, and access to relatives and friends already residing in the U.S.

Clearly, adapting to the new social environment presented upon arrival on U.S. soil is among the earliest and most significant of the several barriers facing them. The process of adjusting to this new social environment rife with unfamiliar standards of behavior, progressively liberal sexual mores, and legislated business practices can be daunting and bewildering absent any consistent external help. Persian students arriving in the U.S. for the first time often spend considerable resources researching and locating friends or relatives able to provide some scale of initial support and guidance. Beyond that immediate circle of culturally narrow contacts, it can be a difficult and lengthy process for Persian students to develop new social networks to replace those from which they are transitioning (Yeh & Okubo, 2008).

Differences in language, dress, and patterns of speech may be an unspoken yet significant reason for the initial lack of social acceptance experienced by newly-arrived Persian students.(Williams & Butler, 2003). These fairly elementary human preferences and prejudices,

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which are difficult to assess in any statistical fashion, and may fundamentally be the product of an unseen “tribal instinct” colloquially referred to as “human nature”, are only exacerbated by the reality that “each period of human development brings new competency requirements, challenges and opportunities for personal growth” (Briones, & Taberner, 2012), all of which surely presents Persian immigrant students with a multiplicity of difficult challenges.

Challenges of acculturation accompany the normal developmental process experienced by any college age person. Persian self-identity is more group-defined rather than individualistic. Cultural events, customs and leisure activities centered around familiar Persian markers help to self-define and instill a personal sense of pride, cohesion, and belonging for first and second-generation Persian immigrants. Participation in and engagement with activities promoting an appreciation of all things “Persian” is a strong factor in maintaining student connections with family members back home and with the traditional culture.

First generation Persian students in the U.S. are commonly more reluctant to assimilate completely into a particular campus community and culture because of a deep attachment to, and preoccupation with, ongoing events in the homeland. Second generation Persian students see themselves as more “American”, and lack the strong and pervasive attachment to the Persian homeland held by their parents. These second generation students are far more likely to be politically and socially engaged in all aspects of contemporary American culture (Bozorgmehr, Iran, 2009), and although they are interested in visiting Iran, they would not consider living there. (Mostofi, 2003)

Most Persians in the U.S. continue to enjoy and participate in customary Persian cultural events. Regardless of political or religious beliefs or ethnic background, a large percentage celebrate the Persian New Year (NoRooz) on March 20<sup>th</sup>, the Prophet’s Birthday on June 4<sup>th</sup>, and

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Islamic Republic Day on January 20<sup>th</sup>, as well as other holidays, several of which note the dates of certain revolutionary milestones. As they assimilate into American culture and gradually participate in U.S. holiday celebrations, fewer Persians consistently participate in mourning the deaths of religious or political leaders (Chaichian, 1997).

### **Cultural**

New immigrants have always had an active relationship to American society, often trying to interact and integrate into the communities in which they live. These immigrant people are adapting to American's diverse cultures and values, just as American society adjusts to the immigrant societies and perspectives.

Persian culture, one of the oldest in the Middle East, is rich in symbolism, much of which originates from ancient times and has influenced other cultures as distant as Russia, Italy, and East Asia. The only nation in the Middle East that uses the solar calendar, Iran is also the only country using the Persian calendar that marks the beginning of the New Year at the vernal equinox. Iran is a polyglot country, with a multiplicity of spoken languages. Persian is the language spoken nationwide, with Kurdish, Arabic, and Azeri dominating in certain regions. This is in stark contrast to the U.S., where English—although not mandated as an “official” language—is the universal spoken tongue of the land, and those who do not speak it fluently are at a severe disadvantage.

Persian immigrants often express a strong desire for preserving their cultural and religious heritage, which is remarkably diverse. For nearly 1,000 years prior to the “Arab conquest” of Persia in 651 A.D., the predominant faith had been Zoroastrianism, which continued to have significant cultural impact in a wide range of cultural aspects following the country's conversion to Islam. Even today, religious distinctions among Persians remain a

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strong social force, and although Christians, Jews, and Baha'i practice their faith openly, the predominant Muslim faith rules daily life to a large degree and can be an inhibiting factor of assimilation for Persian students residing in the U.S. Persian family life and community engagement in the homeland is strongly influenced by religious traditions. Those traditions are considerably weaker in the U.S., which can frustrate Persians entering the country who anticipate finding a religiously-oriented community of support waiting for them. The universal focus on religious life in Iran generally has no common parallel in the U.S., and is an isolating factor for many Persian students.

The standing of females in the culture of contemporary Iran has been fundamentally altered since the 1979 Revolution that brought an end to the Pahlavi monarchy. The revolution itself was strongly influenced by the widespread participation of women of traditional backgrounds, as well as by those women who had benefited from higher education provided by that same monarchy.

With the majority of Persian students matriculating both at home and in the U.S. to colleges, universities, and post-graduate programs being female, and with more than 70% of science and engineering students being female, individual students of either gender who come to the U.S. for study are forced to assimilate with non-Persians on every level. With more Persian female students than Persian male students in American colleges and universities, any female of dating age is forced to consider the possibility of interacting with non-Persian male students; on the obverse, from a purely demographic standpoint male Persian students find themselves a particularly sought-after commodity for Persian females interested in traditional Persian male-female relationships.

The stresses created by this cultural gender imbalance, while undocumented by any

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statistical analysis, may reasonably be considered significant in the daily lives of immigrant Persian students. The current and future economic impact of this gender imbalance is not lost upon Persian students, many of whom upon expiration of their student visas will return to Iran where U.S.-educated females with advanced degrees do not find employment opportunities commensurate with their abilities. This under-employment at home incites some Persian females whose studies in the U.S. come to an end to violate the terms of their student visas and to remain in the U.S. in order to take advantage of greater economic opportunity. This, in turn, further isolates these females from their native culture, as travel outside the U.S. with hope of return becomes highly problematic. The potential for these students to be permanently cut off from physical contact with friends and family still in Iran clouds their psychological horizons throughout their U.S. studies and creates additional stresses which are generally unrecognized by their fellow students, faculty and staff.

What is clearly an under-appreciated cultural touchstone for Persian students immigrating to the U.S. for educational purposes is the importance within Iran of the traditional Persian diet. The cuisine of most countries is a fundamental characteristic of national and ethnic culture; America, because its population is comprised of people who have immigrated to its shores from many countries over a long period of time, does not have a specific culinary culture. This may explain the general oversight by U.S. educators and administrators of the importance of Persian immigrant dietary habits as they relate to Persian student adjustment to American campus life. Specific Persian cultural prohibitions against certain foods ubiquitous in the American diet may, in fact, restrict popular food choices for Persian students, further distinguishing and isolating them from their non-Persian student peers.

There are several different additional factors that influence Persian students' self-identity

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and their ability to effectively adjust to life while residing in the United States. The current absence of diplomatic relations between the government of Iran and the U.S., the ongoing U.S. trade embargo of Iran, and the fact that most Americans harbor a negative opinion of Iran do not bode well for immediate social acceptance of Persian students by their non-Persian American student peers.

Conversely, while Persians generally have a favorable notion of individual Americans, those who have been educated under the current Persian regime and have been inculcated with that government's perspectives hold a strongly contrary view of the American government which they regard as heavy-handed and arrogant, seeking only world domination. This political perspective naturally leads to a clash of opinion between Persian students and their American counterparts who commonly react by further isolating Persian classmates from activities, discussions, study groups, and social opportunities.

Since the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, whereby an indigenous revolutionary faction within Iran seized dozens of American diplomats and held them captive for well over a year, there have been a number of other serious political and military events that can only be regarded as detrimental to relations between the two countries. With the U.S. currently enforcing strenuous economic sanctions against Iran and with its history of conducting covert military operations within the country pursuant to American fears of Iran's development of nuclear power as a stepping stone to increased military capacity, relations between the two nations remain less than ideal. These troublesome international relations ultimately affect how Persian students are perceived by American students, faculty, university administrators, and local law enforcement, which creates an additional source of interpersonal, social, and academic pressure for individual immigrant Persian students. Aside from Iran-U.S. geopolitical tensions, other international

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events unrelated to them negatively influence non-Persian student perceptions of the immigrant Persian student body (Mobasher, 2013).

Those immigrant Persian students who, for economic, social, or cultural reasons live and socialize only within ethnic enclaves frequently do so to avoid daily discrimination and lack of opportunities. Outside these areas, where there are opportunities to create wider community connections, find employment, and enjoy improved housing, they are forced to respond to subtle or overt racism which projects a sense of “other-ness” and creates stresses that affect all aspects of life, particularly academic achievement.

Following the rise of radical Islam throughout the Middle East and the events of September, 11, 2001, discrimination against Arab, Persian, Sikh, and Muslim Americans has increased throughout the non-Muslim world. In spite of the fact that the vast majority of Muslims are neither violent by nature nor have any connection whatsoever to terrorist groups, the discrimination currently seen in America and on the campuses of U.S. colleges and universities indicates an unresolved mindset based upon a lack of true information that has serious negative impact upon the daily lives of Persian students studying in the U.S.

This is not to say that the same issues of discrimination against those of (visibly) apparent Persian origin do not exist outside the U.S.; they certainly do. It is worth noting, however, that the expectation of Persian students immigrating into the U.S. is based upon the perception of America as “the land of the free.” Perhaps that expectation in and of itself, simply because it is based upon an *ideal* rather than a practical day-to-day working reality, is the source of frustration, disappointment, and disengagement on the part of many Persian students studying in the U.S.

As indicated, there are manifold traditions, languages, religious practices, and customs

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specific to countries of the Middle East. (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2010) Because religion has played such a significant role in the history of Persia and continues to do so in modern Iran, and because Islam is widely regarded by a large segment of the American population having little appreciation for the tenets of the Muslim religion, immigrant Persian students are frequently stereotyped and not seen as individuals. American media coverage is widespread and generally takes a pejorative view of the Muslim faith, which further isolates those students who bear strong Middle Eastern appearance from the standpoint of physiognomy, behavior, attitude, or apparel.

Because immigrant Persian students are frequently judged by other based primarily upon visual appearances and accented speech, effective integration into the wider institutional culture is generally challenging. When, for example, a female Persian student feels obliged to set aside her traditional Persian wardrobe in order to avoid the appearance of rejecting American standards or any prospect for assimilation—regardless of her true purpose in wearing such garb, she is the victim of subtle forces denigrating her intrinsic humanity. This phenomenon is commonly seen when Persian immigrant females, who have for much of their adult lives worn the traditional *hejab* and *chador*, find themselves inclined to adapt Western fashions simply to remove yet another basis for discrimination by others. While some discrimination occurs on a very subtle, non-confrontational level—the sideways glance, the lack of eye contact or glaring, forced eye contact, the muttered or whispered comment to third parties—and is far from overt, the attitudes and instinctual reactions to the mere physical appearance or to the English language skills of native Persians in the U.S. by non-Persians are nevertheless easily perceived as hurtful and discriminatory.

Analyses of the mechanisms of social assimilation and cultural integration and evolution for first generation immigrants inevitably reflect problems of adjustment and acculturation. Most

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immigrants prefer to remain invested in and living within their own culture, adhering to identities and practices which effectively reject any notions of adaptation to a host culture. Those who are compelled by social, economic, and political circumstances to leave their own country and migrate to another usually find themselves in an environment which does not support their prior social status or background, and are forced to deal with a broad spectrum of different values within their host country.

Persians migrating to the U.S. do so with a great sense of optimism and high expectations. They generally anticipate certain important differences between Persian and American cultures, but their approach is one of positive engagement in a learning process, not one of dealing with the negative aspects of “culture shock” or discrimination pursuant to the attitudes of many Americans to those of middle eastern heritage or appearance. Given that Persians embrace with optimism the positive aspects of their host country’s culture, they remain steadfast in their reluctance to dismiss their own traditions, an attitude that indicates a certain lack of interest in full assimilation into the American system (Chaichian, 2005).

The core values between Persians and Americans are the same. All humans, including Persians, have the same basic life necessities. A country serves the good of all its inhabitants when they share trust, respect for self and others, and a like-minded pursuit of common goals. Happiness among peoples is based upon commonly-shared values and social objectives. A society succeeds when people have freedom to pursue happiness in their own way, and when they have the right to practice their religion, and to vote and express their opinion about their government without fear. Persians in Iran have had difficulty enjoying such freedoms following the Islamic revelation, and this difficulty is what has driven so many from their homeland. Persian students in particular continue to migrate to America in search for those values.

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### Language

All immigrant students—including those from Iran—who come to study in North America bring with them a variety of diverse backgrounds, languages and educations.

Fluency in one's native language generally declines with each passing generation among immigrant groups who have come to the U.S. The first generation principally speaks their native tongue exclusively, the second generation is commonly fluent in both their parents' native language and in English, and the third generation usually speaks only English, while maintaining familiarity with isolated words and phrases from their family language. Persian-Americans are no exception to this cultural phenomenon, and continue to followed this pattern.

Although first-generation Persian-Americans primarily speak Persian at home, due to their comparatively high levels of education precedent to their arrival in the U.S., they have also demonstrated greater English fluency than first generation immigrants from many other groups. Among all Persian immigrants to the U.S., only 30% speak only English, speak it with proficiency, or don't speak with any proficiency. (Bozorgmehr & Der-Martirosian & Sabagh, 1996)

When Persian students arrive for study at U.S. schools, they display a wide range of English language literacy. Many are well educated in English-speaking schools in Iran and are consistently motivated by high levels family support and encouragement. While some come from middle class families with a good level of literacy, others are the product of economic deprivation, coming from homes where there is a distinct lack of books and reading materials. It is the reasonable task of schools accepting these Persian students into a course of study to make certain their ability to prosper, flourish, and learn on a par with other students in the institution.

There is little argument that students with a Latin-American origin language have the ability to

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can recognize English words with similar prefix-suffix roots; students from non-Latinate language backgrounds, like Japanese, Chinese, or Arabic, do not share that advantage (Short & Echevarria, 2005). Character and word recognition are at the basis of reading and writing; lack of familiarity with the characters of a language is a serious impediment to learning progress in that language. Programs like “Success for All” can help socio-economically and culturally challenged students toward literacy simply because of their familiarity with the Western alphabet; those without that familiarity rarely benefit from such methodologies, and the value of imposing those tactics upon Persian immigrant students with the objective of social and academic integration is questionable.

Cognitive ability can have significant impact upon the rate at which one learns the English language. Teachers at varying grade levels should be aware that this problem can negatively affect these students beyond the classroom as well as within it and, when appropriate, request an SST meeting to provide and identify needed supports. Cognitive ability and acculturation inarguably affect the ease with which immigrant students achieve English proficiency in academic and conversational areas.

### **Barriers to Academic Success**

According to the American Community Surveys (ACS; 2011), 58% of Persian-American college and university students studying in the U.S., age 25 or older, have earned a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. A majority of Persian immigrant students in the U.S. are working toward advanced graduate degrees, predominantly in science and engineering programs. In spite of a success rate far above that of many other ethnic and cultural populations studying at U.S. schools, Persian-Americans still experience many barriers to academic success. Immigrant Persian students who enter the U.S. with academic ambitions are universally unaccustomed to

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America's individualistic, competitive grading and achievement scoring, and find the predominant teaching methodologies less than inclusive (Garrett & Holcomb, 2005).

Researchers recognize that immigrant students struggle to be academically successful, frequently facing the aforementioned obstacles of insufficient English literacy and advanced math skills, stressful studying environment, and difficulty in socialization. Adjustment to an unfamiliar learning situation can be academically, socially, and psychologically difficult for young immigrants due to the complexity of the various systems that they encounter daily (Yeh, Ching, Okubo, & Luthar, 2007).

The challenges faced by Persian students studying in the U.S. appear to be expanding rather than contracting. Of recent note, the University of Massachusetts Amherst—a highly regarded center of technical and engineering education, and a nationally ranked public research university offering a full range of graduate and professional degrees—summarily unilaterally reacted to current U.S. State Department sanctions against the transfer of technical knowledge to Iranian nationals which might ultimately be used in the service of Iran weapons development by issuing a statement on February 18, 2015 to the media which read in part: "...the university...will no longer admit Iranian national students to specific programs in the College of Engineering and in the College of Natural Sciences effective February 1, 2015" (Blaguszewski). The implications for Persian immigrant students attending U.S. colleges and universities was clear: Persian students could prejudicially be considered part of Iran's weapons of mass destruction program, and would be singled out by the administration on a purely ethnic-national origin basis for discriminatory enrollment in selected curricula. While the reaction from both the State Department and the U.S. media was swift and strong, pointing out the illegality of such a policy on Constitutional grounds alone, and caused an immediate retraction of this policy

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statement by UMass Amherst shortly after its original announcement, no doubt hoping to avoid a rash of civil rights lawsuits, that fact of the initial announcement appears to be *prima facie* evidence of ongoing ethnic distinctions made by non-Persians throughout the system of higher education.

The UMass Amherst statement and its retraction are clearly exemplars of an unspoken and highly prejudicial perception of foreign-born Persians studying in the U.S. on the part of the education community at large. This episode, one might reasonably suspect, is merely the tip of a “silent majority” iceberg, and has a potentially profound effect upon the integration and assimilation of minority Persian immigrant students into the larger culture around them.

Although many Persian immigrant students seek more academic support, others feel uncomfortable in requesting it, for fear it may reveal their lack of English fluency or impact their standing in the community of scholars. Their personal and academic needs, therefore, are often undetected or ignored simply out of faculty oversight or student trepidation. Culturally, Persian students are not outspoken, opinionated, or vociferous in an educational or classroom setting, and from an American perspective, may appear to be studiously quiet and calm in lectures, labs, and discussion groups when they are actually avoiding embarrassment or loss of face. There is currently scant anecdotal or data research on this phenomenon; the academic literature addressing the educational problems and classroom experiences of immigrant students is but slowly emerging for both documented and undocumented students (Gildersleeve & Ranero, 2010; Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010).

Given the current global economy and a highly competitive labor market, students are increasingly aware of the need for academic success in STEM curricula as a precursor to potential career fulfillment and success. All students, including those foreign students of Persian

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origin, should be encouraged to maximize their individual academic potential, and should be provided the tools necessary for them to do so. Whether or not students are immediately college bound, all students need a forward-thinking secondary education that is academically challenging.

All students need to develop the technical knowledge, communication skills, and cultural awareness required for success in today's labor force. Ancillary to this objective, each student should emerge from the education system with the motivation, confidence, and posture of educated people. Unfortunately, many foreign-born Persian students in the U.S. struggle to achieve those ideals, as they are commonly relegated to "remedial" curricula due to a lack of English language fluency, and fail to earn admission into professional-level, academically challenging coursework.



### Chapter III: Method

Persian immigrant students often experience formidable barriers that prevent access to the best of U.S. higher education. Because Persians are ethnically and culturally different from other minority groups in America, they have unique needs at the college and university level. The purpose of this project is to create and conduct an informational workshop for Persian students prior to accepting admission to West Valley Community College. Such a project, once achieved and operational, will allow for a positive and ongoing effect upon this student population. The information and support provided through this project will enhance opportunities for their success throughout their careers.

The Success For All informational workshops are organized with the explicit objective of providing students direct access to the information they need to know about the range of student services offered at West Valley College, as well as to address the concerns and specific needs of individual students *as individuals*. These workshops will also allow for candid feedback from attendees to help faculty and administrators identify systems and protocols in need of improvement, with the constant goal of providing maximum personal and academic benefit to those students attending the workshops. These workshops will strive to alleviate the many anxieties and uncertainties the adult Persian immigrant student learner may have with regard to overcoming the many aforementioned barriers to assimilation into campus culture and to academic success.

The stress that accompanies poor self-esteem among these students may be so profound as to bring individual academic progress and learning to a halt, and is obviously a major factor to be avoided. Having support for these students at the beginning of their educational journey, and

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maintaining that support throughout their enrollment is critical to the success of the individual student and to the success of the educational institution as a whole.

### **Participants**

Students eligible to participate in this program are first generation Persian Immigrants 18 years of age and older at varying stages of matriculation at West Valley College in Saratoga, California. These students often struggle with adjusting to society socially, culturally and linguistically. The workshop will assess prospective, admitted, and enrolled Persian students, and will be geared toward those Persian undergraduate students who may be just beginning their post-secondary education or who may have prior West Valley College or other college/university credit in United States.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

This program is created to inspire and support immigrant students, particularly Persians, who come to the United States to study. This workshop will take a social justice approach wherein critical stakeholders in the educational process (students, faculty, counselors, administrators) work to mitigate both the visible and the subtle barriers to the academic progress and ultimate success of Persian immigrant students. The fundamental truth is that Persian students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities are commonly marginalized by the greater campus community, are left to deal with the numerous social, psychological, and cultural impediments encountered daily on their own. If the educational system is to succeed in its mission to serve *all* students and to provide access to opportunities and resources, meaningful changes need to occur and new protocols need to be initiated. Efforts must be made sincerely and vigorously to help students gain an understanding of their rights and responsibilities within the campus culture. This workshop is designed specifically in pursuit of that objective. Helping these

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students learn what they need to know about the school system and the range of services available to them is a major goal of this paper.

A wide perspective of the career development process for young adults is vital when analyzing barriers and discovering how to help students to reach their goals, which may include learning about the educational system and the techniques and methods of adjusting to it during their study in the United States. Supporting self-esteem, developing leadership instincts and techniques, and actively engaging students in their own educational process are critical stepping stones in progressing toward the empowerment of students to access and use vital information throughout their career. This program curriculum can help Persian students to gain confidence from a meeting a series of challenges and using that newfound confidence as validation of their ongoing learning experience.

### **Intervention: Success For All**

Immigrant students and their families may lack information about the U.S. school system and may have difficulty learning how to access important information. They lack awareness of available resources needed for matriculation, counseling, guidance, and successful academic performance. Providing programs or seminars that actively inform families about school culture, institutional guidelines, rules, procedures, grading, extra-curricular activities, and special support services can help students to succeed in the U.S. educational system. Moreover, the workshops can expose them to opportunities and educational paths to specific careers of which they may have been woefully unaware.

There are a number of different ways to convey this information. Information could be presented visually via PowerPoint to the families, with handouts provided to enhance information retention following such a presentation. Group discussion will follow an audio-

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visual presentation as a regular program follow-up, encouraging social interaction and improved learning through discussion and the exchange of ideas.

### **Coordinator**

To create Success For All, a committee will be formed that includes a member from each student service department at West Valley College. These participants will designate a Workshop Coordinator who will be the organizer with committee oversight. This Workshop Coordinator will be appointed on a yearly basis with a new coordinator selected at the end of the year either by Committee vote. The Workshop Coordinator and a member of student services staff will provide all necessary documentation and perform administrative tasks as they may be reasonably required. The Coordinator will be responsible for ensuring proper workshop staffing and for monitoring workshop supplies required for workshop success. The specific tasks of The Coordinator may involve the preparation of announcements and invitations for distribution, arrangement of room reservations for workshop sessions, and keeping track of all workshop surveys and analysis information for review and discussion in order to improve future workshops provided to the Persian immigrant students.

The Workshop Coordinator will arrange meetings for the committee members to attend discussions to determine who will be participating in each workshop from their department. These meetings will also include updates, identify needed materials and discussion regarding other information that can assist with making the workshops a success.

The Coordinator will obtain records of correspondence and emails from the admission office for the purposes of accessing information about prospective, admitted, or current students at West Valley College. Information will be updated through a Google document tracking system. Monitoring eligible students, planning workshop dates, and managing other duties will

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be the responsibility of the workshop coordinator. Once students have responded to an invitation to attend the workshop and have registered for the workshop, an acknowledgment email will be sent out. The Coordinator will also be responsible for relaying the number of attendees to the presenters.

The workshop coordinator will provide the workshop information to attendees and all student services personnel in order to hear feedback on information provided and to allow for constructive feedback. Encouraging staff from all student services departments to participate in the distribution of information for the workshop will help spread the information to more departments with the objective of helping more students in their West Valley College careers. Inviting the student services staff to attend the workshops, along with invited students, will also allow for feedback from both student and the staff perspectives and will provide insight for changes and improvement. Under proper workshop coordinator leadership, the adult student learner will feel valued, validated, and an integral part of the West Valley College community.

The workshop coordinator also needs to confirm the number of attendees in workshop session. The presenters also will be contacted by the coordinator who will provide the presenters with emails on workshop hours, location, and number of attendees and in turn allow for return emails should changes need to be made by the presenter. Consistent communication with presenters and attendees is crucial to ensure successful workshops.

### **Students Informational Workshop**

The following matters will be included in the workshops for those Persian students who are identified as prospective applicants for admission, have applied, or have been accepted to West Valley College:

- Summary of presenters of college and university campus

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- Short overview of orientation information and topics
- Greet and meet session (Ice Breaker Activity)
- Workshop topic overview
  - Admission Office and explanation of department and functions
  - Presentation on the following topics with a question and answer session
    - Application processing, website, and navigation
    - Impaction
    - Transcripts
    - Testing and Requirements
    - Getting transfer credit
    - International student information catalog
    - Admission contact information
  - Question & Answer Opportunities
  - Feedback Survey

Throughout the workshop process, assessments will be made of individual Persian immigrant students in the domains of acculturation, cognitive ability, and social adaptation. This process will help to individualize support strategies and tailor the program to better meet the needs of the students and their families. Prior to beginning the workshops, staff will need to interview these immigrant students in order to identify problems, issues, and concerns. The “Success For All” program is based on Persian student backgrounds, languages and educational needs, and will work to provide the direction and action to ensure goal achievement. The Persian immigrant students who have been part of the U.S. school system may come from varying

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socioeconomic levels and with different life experiences and needs; they will, however, have common needs that can be addressed through this program.

The “Success For All” program would focus on two assessment areas in the immigrant families’ journey. The first would be a systematic evaluation of each international student’s academic success or difficulty as they progress through their college or university curriculum. A second research aspect would be to statistically control whether the struggles could be credited to English language weaknesses or to other variables.

### **Encouragement to Apply to Four-Year Institutions**

“Success For All” can help the students who immigrate to North America make the transition to four year institutions colleges and universities. Providing important information to these students will guide them toward knowledge essential for their journey. A number of programs provide basic information about preparing for selecting, and applying to colleges, and help guide students throughout the process.

### **Parent Workshops**

To help Persian immigrant students’ families successfully understand the school system, all of the handouts will be translated into the home languages of the local cultural communities represented. However, because some students and their parents may not be well educated in their native language, videos may also be provided in some of the primary languages as needed. The videos could help to explain the school procedures, expectations, and available opportunities. This can help parents visualize what they can do to help their kids improve academically in the school system. English language learners (ELLs) benefit just as much from their parents’ involvement in their education as do other students. Some Persian parents may feel nervous about getting involved because of their own limited English skills, lack of understanding with

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American culture, and the U.S. college system, to name just a few inhibiting factors.

To support their children's education, the parents of ELL students need to understand how the North American education system and culture operates. The "Success For All" program can help them to get essential information about the American education system and allow them to move forward knowledgeably and with confidence. Facilitators would listen to parents' concerns, answer their questions, and provide them with written materials in their native language. People presenting at workshops would need to be knowledgeable about Persian cultures (we might be able to use Persian American volunteers who can speak both Farsi and English).

This program will be presented to people who have come from Iran, where the curriculum is very different than the North American education system. Parents could benefit from knowing their rights regarding access to interpreters and translated materials from their particular institution, the offerings of a particular school's ELL curriculum, any additional college services that may be available to their student, and anything else that parents are expected to know about education systems. It would be helpful for parents to have information about the FAFSA and any other programs that are available to support them financially.

A workshop has the advantage of flexibility and the ability to be adapted to the immigrant parents' unique needs. An informational workshop could be a source for parents to learn about the school's policies and procedures. The two-hour workshop could be most effective if it were scheduled for the evening of the school's Back to School Night. The session could start with an introduction, which would cover the registration process for school, with instructions about how to properly fill out applications and paperwork. This workshop would ideally cover all of the specific institutional information that parents need to know. In this workshop, the

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audience could also be provided with information about the local secondary school system. At the end of the session parents should have the opportunity to ask any questions. Surveys will be distributed at the end of each session to gauge the effectiveness of presentation and to identify additional topics of interest to the community to continually improve the program to further meet family needs.

“Success For All” language programs can offer Persian immigrant students programs such as ESL classes. They would work in partnership with college administration or counseling departments, and provide the program options that are available in the systems in their area.

“Success for All” could explain, define, and clarify the language programs that are available in the system, discuss why they work the way they do, and suggest why the chosen program may be most appropriate for their children. If parents are hesitant, facilitators could discuss their options and invite them to visit and observe the class.

Immigrants may be slow to engage or be overly guarded for a variety of reasons, including prior negative experiences since coming to the U.S., fear of what is new, and concerns as to the effect of local cultural differences upon their child. Most families have the primary goal of assuring their child’s success, but have difficulty trusting the safety of their children in a cultural environment very different from their own.

### **Evaluating the Intervention**

When surveys are collected, either by hard copy at the workshop or through a survey sent to the students and parents via their email when they check in, the workshop coordinator will manage the information and accumulate the information for review by the committee members. This information will allow for targeted discussion focused upon areas needing improvement, and upon suggested changes to the current workshop presentations. The goal is to

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provide the most specific, concise and useful information for the adult student learner attendees which will confirm program value in the pursuit of their success.

The expected outcome is that Persian students will be informed about all opportunities available to them.

### **Reporting about workshops:**

The assigned workshop coordinator will provide survey feedback information to participants at the workshop. The coordinator also delivers the result of the workshop to the student services personnel in order to get administrative feedback. This participation from student services staff will help to disseminate the information gleaned from workshop participants, and it will help the service department to be on a more direct level of development. When the staff from student services attends the workshop along with Persian Students, it allows them to hear the feedback and be aware of areas that need to be changed or improved.

### **Chapter IV: Success For All Informational Workshops**

The research of Persian immigrant students at West Valley Community College shows that these students are not feeling fully supported by student services departments on the campus, and they are in need of a greater range of service offerings. Reviewing this information and observing the communication counselors for West Valley Community College at work, it is apparent that more needs to be done to help this student population at various points throughout their education. Many complaints came from students via phone conversations and email correspondence indicating a need for increased levels of student outreach and guidance.

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Providing better student services and assistance to Persian student population at West Valley College can help them to achieve their goals. Helping these students at this point in their educational endeavors will most certainly put them on a career path with more positive outcomes. Offering informational workshops on topics that will help Persian students understand and make use of the student services department at West Valley College in their own language (Farsi) will empower them and create a sense of independence and integration into the WVC student culture. At these workshops, Persian students can also meet with individual staff members from each department. They can establish relationships, ask questions, talk about their concerns, or make suggestions to further improve services. These workshops also can inspire them to form a Persian social club and reach out to other students with similar needs.

The suggested Persian student informational workshops can start with three major student services at West Valley College. These three service departments are Admission, Financial Aid, and TRIO. By establishing a workshop plan under the aegis of a motivated workshop coordinator, areas of focus can be immediately identified as immediate targets of concern.

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### **Workshop Mission**

This workshop's main focus is to provide services that Persian student require for success in their educational journey. It is essential that these students get enough information to use the available services currently provided to them. Providing these services and the information about them in Farsi will allow the Persian students to freely participate and take advantages of the college's available support mechanisms.



## Success For All Workshops

### Admission Workshop

**Date:** TBA

**Location:** West Valley College Trio department

**Time of workshops:** 6:00 pm – 8:00 PM

#### Introductions:

An admissions staffer from West Valley will present elementary admission information (the workshop will be translated throughout). The workshops will begin with introductions of presenters, students, and the people who have accompanied them to the workshop.

#### Admission Information:

The admission presenter will provide students with an admission handbook ( see Appendix). This handbook can help to provide specific information to Persian students with accompanying translation for those who need it. This handbook should become part of the individual student's personal library, as it can be useful when they leave the workshop. The admission presenter will also explain the nature and locations of different departments in West Valley by providing a Campus Map (see Appendix). A WebEx url link also will given to the students to allow them to see the brochure and map online.

#### ADT:

The presenter will explain the ADT process to the Persian students. This will help these students to understand the process and the benefits of the Associate Degrees of Transfer to CSU schools.

#### Transfer credit:

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The workshop presenter will present information about the transfer process. This can help Persian students to understand the requirements for Associate Degrees, which are offered at West Valley, and how to transfer to four-year institutions. This session will cover all the steps to transfer, like TAG, ADT, and IGETC conveyed in Farsi language for purposes of complete clarity. The presentation will also discuss the transfer calendar, with information about the Farsi speaker counselors available on campus. Some of these students may be coming from other colleges and need help to get credit for prior coursework. The information about how to receive those credits and when they will be posted to a student's record will be discussed as well as the process for submitting transcripts to the admission department to get the credit properly recorded. Contact information will be provided to student to follow up with questions they may have.

### **Placement test/Orientation**

An explanation of the purpose of placement tests for incoming students will be provided, along with information about where and how to take Math and Reading placement test. Orientation schedules will be provided to students who need them. Freshman students need to do attend both placement testing and orientation, so the admission presenter will clarify the process for testing and attendance at all orientation events.

Website: <http://westvalley.edu/admissions/assessment/>

### **International student information:**

The West Valley international student brochure will be provided to the Persian students, with its contents fully explained in the workshop. The presenter will help the students with information on how to apply, submit documents, placement test, financial information and how

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Form I-20 is issued and processed. Information about application fees, where to translate their degree, and the mandatory courses will be discussed in orientation sessions.

The international website url will be provided to students at the workshop.

<http://westvalley.edu/services/academic-success/international>

- **International Transcripts:** A description about how transcripts should be received from out of the country will be given, along with a list of documents required. Details about specific requirements regarding their education in Iran and the process for its evaluation at West Valley will be provided. International Counselor contact information will be provided for further questions and help.

### **Catalogue:**

A West Valley School Catalogue will be provided to each attendee in the workshop. Presenters will explain how to access the catalogue online. The presenters will also break down academic majors, course requirements, and degree tracks.

### **Admission Contact Information:**

The presenter will provide admission and complete contact information, so students have access in case they have any further questions. The contact information will include admissions mailing address, direct phone number and mail address.

### **Q &A:**

The presenter will solicit questions and provide the answer in Farsi as much as possible.

### **Closing of Workshop:**

The admission presenter will collect any papers students wish to submit to the admission office, and then distribute the session survey, asking students to complete it before leaving the

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workshop. The presenter will emphasize how this survey can help the college to understand the issues these students are facing, with the objective of improving student services quality. The presenter will then submit the documents/transcripts to the admission office to start the process.



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### **TRIO/ EOPS Workshop**

**Date:** TBA

**Location of workshops:** West Valley College Trio department

**Time of workshops:** 6:00pm – 8:00 pm

#### **Introductions:**

The Trio/Eops workshop will begin with a Persian Counselor who has experience working in both EOPS and Trio. We will get help from staff at the workshop to support those Persian students in attendance. The workshop will start with a welcoming announcement and the presenter will explain the purpose of the workshop to introduce all the services at Trio and EOPS.

#### **Trio/ EOPS Information Handouts:**

The workshop presenter, who is also counselor at EOPS, will talk about all the services at these two programs. The presenter will provide the students the website url or both programs.

#### **EOPS:**

This program will be presented by one of the lead staffers at West Valley College. At the outset, students will learn about the eligibility and gender requirements to join the EOPS. The presenter will talk about different services in EOPS: Academic, career and Personal Counseling and the additional program offerings. The handout defining income requirements will be provided to students.

#### **TRIO:**

The presenter will discuss the Trio Program in West Valley college. Students will learn what services are available at Trio to support their educational objectives. The presenter will

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provide the website url and all contact information to the student. Trio website information will be reviewed.

### **Q & A:**

The question and answer session will be open for further questions regarding the services at EOPS and Trio.

### **Closing of Workshop:**

At the closing section, the presenter will express appreciation for the students' participation in the workshop. EOPS and Trio applications will be provided to the students who are interested in joining these programs. The workshop survey will then be presented to students, with the presenter explaining the value of the data it collects.



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### **Financial Aid Workshop**

**Date:** TBA

**Location of workshops:** West Valley College Trio department

**Time of workshops:** 6:00pm – 8:00 pm

#### **Introductions:**

The workshop coordinator will introduce the school's financial aid Farsi speaker from West Valley college, who will present this workshop for Persian students.

#### **Financial Aid Information:**

At the beginning, the presenter will provide a PowerPoint presentation about the FAFSA process. This will cover all the important points about how the academic probation and disqualification process works. This information will be important for students, should they need to refer to it later in the school year.

#### **FAFSA website and navigation:**

The financial aid presenter will inform attendees of the FAFSA website url and show them how it is most efficiently navigated in applying for financial aid. <http://www.finaid.org/>

#### **WV Financial Aid:**

During this session, the financial aid presenter will show the students the West Valley College Financial Aid website, [wfa@westvalley.edu](mailto:wfa@westvalley.edu) and how to navigate the website. Emphasis will be given to the forms, steps to the financial aid process, calendars and deadlines to help students understand and complete the steps to benefit most from the financial aid process.

#### **Grants, Scholarships, and Loans:**

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The financial aid presenter (who is speaking Farsi) will explain the difference between grants, loans, and scholarships. Information on how to apply for them and the requirements for each individual to receive the help will be given clearly.

### **Q & A:**

The financial aid presenter will give time to the students to ask any questions. Contact information for the Persian student counselor from West Valley college will be provided.

### **Closing of Workshop:**

The presenter at the workshop will allow students to submit documents that they need to turn in to the financial aid office. After this section, the students will be provided a survey and asked to complete it. The presenter will emphasize the value of the data collected by the survey, and how it helps the college to understand the issues that these students are facing, and how it helps improve the quality of student services. The presenter will wrap-up and conclude the workshop by expressing appreciation to the students for their workshop participation. The next step is collecting all surveys and providing information about the next workshop topic and the date and time of that meeting.

### **Workshop Summary:**

These workshops will be for the Persian students at West Valley Community College and will be implemented to assist these students to learn about services availability around them. The selected workshop coordinator will work with staff from each academic department so that an informative series of workshops can be provided for these Persian students. This information will allow them to obtain the information needed and to be successful in pursuit of their educational goals.

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### **Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

There are things that constantly plague immigrant students attending U.S. colleges and universities. The main issue for these students is lack of knowledge about services that are available at these schools. From the time that Persian students research various schools, through the application and admissions process, Persian students do not have the same access to information about varying levels of student services offered at individual institutions enjoyed by American students. The problem is that these specific services are described in admissions literature in English only, and that many Persian students have English literacy comprehension challenges. This language barrier is particularly difficult to overcome for some Persian students, even though at most colleges and universities foreign students are paying tuition rates at the highest institutional rates with only spotty grant or scholarship support. Many Persian students are paying “full fare” and receiving less than complete student services. This results in Persian students receiving insufficient information that ultimately affects their ability to succeed academically and complete their degree.

The main purpose of this project is to identify the needs and problems of Persian students needing better services at U.S. campuses, with a main focus on West Valley College.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, “Success For All” is a program designed to help students and families to adjust within American culture especially within the local educational system. It could help teachers and schools to be more culturally informed, as well facilitate communication with families who may be challenged to express and identify their needs. Persian families should have services, handouts, and videos available in their native language to help them to better understand and access the educational system processes.

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### **Recommendations**

“Success For All” will present strong academic support services which are culturally sensitive and designed to augment other currently available resources. These could include services such as afterschool tutoring, summer schools, and English language skill development. Through connecting and collaborating with institutions of higher education and observing the guidance protocols and services offered to students at other colleges or universities, Persian students can be inspired to learn more about the college of their choice while visualizing their own participation in a specific campus culture.

Pre-admission assessments of incoming foreign students needs to be articulated clearly and scheduled well in advance of commitment to enroll. Many foreign students find themselves at a college or university unable to enter their major field of study simply because the school fails to take into account the students’ prior subject matter exposure, knowledge, and understanding. Those students are forced to repeat coursework they have already mastered, delaying their academic progress. Others arrive on U.S. campuses only to discover that they are not adequately prepared for their chosen curriculum, and spend valuable resources playing “catch up” before they can embark upon their primary course of study. Accurate and timely pre-admission academic assessment is a fundamental tool in the success of any student, and in particular for those of foreign origin.

An American college or university education is among the most expensive in the world. When those costs are not made transparent to incoming foreign students, when the costs of food, housing, transportation, clothing, recreation, textbooks, lab courses, elective studies, and tuition add-ons are not effectively communicated to foreign student applicants and their families, those students are set up for frustration, disappointment, and frequently for failure. Available financial

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aid programs need to be presented to foreign students in their native language, and application assistance must be provided to those who are unfamiliar with the complex process of managing required documentation.

Most colleges and universities today offer substantial coursework accessed primarily online. These online courses need to be available to foreign-born students in their native language, and foreign students need adequate training in their use. These are fundamental issues of access and must be addressed vigorously.

Beyond the programs suggested here, the U.S. educational system as a whole needs to adopt a pattern of greater integration of foreign students studying on campuses nationwide. Protocols need to be developed to facilitate translation services for students who, while conversationally fluent in English, may be severely challenged in comprehending complex academic reading materials presented in their non-native language. The difficulties faced, for example, by a Persian student with advanced literacy in Farsi but with much less facile skills in reading dense academic content written in formal, complex English, can be a major impediment to subject matter expertise. The solution to this problem is simple: schools need to have accurate demographic data about their individual foreign students. The basics of national origin, native language, and English reading assessments need to be a matter of pre-admissions protocol. With that data in hand, individual colleges and universities can plan, budget, and provide for adequate translation and study support in the native language of the individual student.

Institutions need to pro-actively work to assimilate foreign students into their specific campus culture. This does not mean providing cheeseburgers and fries by way of welcoming foreign students to the school. It means that schools need to provide dietary, athletic, residential, and recreational alternatives that are sensitive to the needs of those cultures from which these

## IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

foreign students come. When a student, for example, from Iran attends a college and pays full tuition and living costs at that college, it makes no economic sense for that student to receive diminished access to programs and reduced levels of student services when compared to students of local origin who may be attending on a discounted or grant-supported tuition basis.

Because perceptions are generally the foundation for actions that become realities, U.S. education leaders need to collectively institute a national media campaign pointing to the values inherent in American education, and that when those values are provided to foreign students from around the world, outcomes far more positive than those derived from any show of military might or economic power become apparent. If America is ever to overcome those forces contrary to the interests of its citizens, its “mission statement” of democratic ideals needs to reach the hearts and minds of those outside its borders. Nothing is more effective in accomplishing that than embracing and serving those foreign students studying on U.S. campuses. When a foreign student returns to his or her native country with a diploma from an American school in hand and with positive experiences to share, that is a public relations dividend that money cannot buy.

That is a message that needs to be broadcast to the American people. It is their children and their educational system that are key to the acceptance of foreign students and to the solution of the needs of foreign students. When Americans realize the benefits of serving foreign students, everyone will succeed. This requires an organized informational media campaign on the part of the government and the nation’s schools to educate all Americans to this reality. As the most media-aware nation on the planet, that is not a complicated task.

The solutions to the problems are at hand. Now it’s time to implement them.

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Appendix B



Success For All Workshops  
TRIO Department  
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

6:00 pm	Registration: Sign In
6:10	Opening
6:30	Topic discussed
7:00	Break
7:10	Trio topics Cont'd.

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- 7:45 Q & A Session
- 7:50 Survey and Wrap Up
- 8:00 End of Workshop

Appendix C





Appendix D

IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

**Financial Aid Calendar:**

<b>Programs</b>	<b>Disbursements</b>	<b>Deadlines</b>
Pell Grant	<b>Spring:</b> 1/26, 3/27	<b>Spring:</b> May include payment for late start Spring classes if enrolled by 3/23/15 and starts by 4/2/15. Must turn in all Financial Aid documents by 4/30/15 to complete a Financial Aid file in order to receive payment on 5/22/15.
Cal Grant	<b>Spring:</b> 2/13	<b>Spring:</b> May include payment for Spring classes if enrolled by 2/9/15 and starts by 2/18/15.
FSEOG Grant	<b>Spring:</b> 1/26, 3/27	
Federal Work Study	<b>Monthly Paycheck</b>	
Loans	<b>Spring:</b> 1/26, 3/27	<b>Spring Deadline:</b> 3/17/2015 NO EXCEPTIONS
Loan Entrance Session		1/07/15   10:00 AM 2/12/15   10:00 AM 3/10/15   9:00 AM
Board Of Governor's Fee Waiver		<b>Deadline:</b> 5/21/15
Professional Judgment Packet		<b>Deadline:</b> 4/14/15
Financial Aid Appeal		<b>Spring Deadline:</b> 4/7/15

**EOPS Income Eligibility**

<b>Students must meet one of these Income Level Requirements</b>	
<b>Number in Household (including yourself)</b>	<b>Total family income last year (adjusted gross income and/or untaxed income)</b>
1	\$17,235 or less
2	\$23,265
3	\$29,295
4	\$35,325
5	\$41,355
6	\$47,385
7	\$53,415
8	\$59,445



Appendix F



## Success For All Workshop Evaluation Questionnaires

Workshop Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

West Valley Educational Status:  
(Freshman, sophomore, return student, etc.)

**Instructions**

Please circle your response to the items. Rate workshop on a 1 to 5 scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree, or the lowest, most negative impression
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree, or an adequate impression
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree, or the highest most positive impression

Please chose N/A if the item is not appropriate or not applicable to this workshop. Your feedback is sincerely appreciated. Thank you

\*\*\*\*\*

**Workshop Content (circle your response to each item)**

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. I was informed about the objectives of this workshop                                  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. This workshop lived up to my expectations   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. The content is relevant to my education at West Valley College                        | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. The information was easy to understand and I was able to Benefit from the information | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Workshop Design (Circle your response to each item)**

- The workshop objectives were clear to me
- The workshop activity(s) stimulated my learning of materials
- The difficulty level of this workshop was appropriate
- The pace of this workshop was appropriate

**Workshop Presenter (Circle your response to each item)**

- The presenter was well prepared and knowledgeable

## IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

- The presenter was able to answer my questions clearly
- N/A

### **Workshop Results (circle your response to each item)**

- I am more knowledgeable about the topic of this workshop
- N/A
- I will be able to use what I learned in this workshop
- N/A

### **How would you improve this workshop? (Check all that apply)**

- Provide better information before the workshop
- Clarify the workshop objectives
- Reduce the content covered in the workshop. What would you reduce? \_\_\_\_\_
- Increase the content covered in the workshop. What would you increase? \_\_\_\_\_
- Update the content covered in the workshop
- Improve instructional methods
- Have more workshop activities

**What other suggestions can you provide to improve the workshop?**

my perfect words