Understanding International Cultures: Pakistan

International Student & Scholar Services
November 15, 2013

Pakistani Attitudes about Education & Students’ Motivations for Coming to the U.S.

Imran Gulzar, Master’s Student, Urban Planning

Pakistani Attitudes about Education

- Pakistan had only one university at its inception
- Now has 136 universities
  - 74 Public + 62 Private
- Literacy rate - 59%
  - 74% - male, 47% - female
- By 2015, under UN MDG Pakistan expects
  - 100% enrollment
  - 86% literacy rate

Pakistani Students’ Motivations for Coming to U.S.

- Students come to U.S. for career boost
- Some students come to U.S. to learn independence
- Some girls want to leave overprotective fathers

Pakistani Attitudes about Education

- Aspiration to study is incredible now
  - Girls drive siblings on a bicycle
  - Boys cling to outside of buses
  - Girls walk 5-6 miles to school
- Parents send children to school even if it means cutting out a meal
- Every father and mother knows importance of education—even if resource-starved

Pakistani Students’ Motivations for Coming to U.S.

- Few girls come to the U.S.
  - Parents prefer to invest in their son’s education
  - They cannot travel alone because of religion and culture
  - Parents fear
    - they will be “out of their hands”
    - people will talk about them
    - they will find a boyfriend and dishonor the family
  - Some girls are betrothed before they come to U.S.
Pakistani Academic Vocabulary
- Tuition – tutoring
  Ex. teaching or giving tuition, taking a tuition
- Merit – academic performance
- Graduation – undergraduate education
  Ex. “I’ve done my graduation.”
- Secondary/Matriculation – 10th grade
  Ex. “I’m matriculated.”
- Primary school – up to 5th grade
- Middle school – 6th, 7th & 8th grades

- College/Intermediate/Higher Secondary – 11th & 12th grades (“first year” & “second year”)
- Paper – exam
- Register – class roster
- Dues – tuition and fees
- Struck out – kicked off class list
- Hostel – dormitory
- Mess – dining hall

Structure of Educational System
- Higher Education Commission accredits and ranks colleges & universities
- Types of universities
  - Federal
    - run by government and/or military
    - admit students from all over country
    - have own university entrance exam
    - Ex. National University of Sciences & Technology, Quaid-i-Azam
  - Provincial
    - give preference to students from same province
    - students from other provinces must compete for their quota of seats
    - use provincial university entrance exam
    - Ex. Punjab University
  - Private
    - admit students from all over the country
    - each school has own university entrance exam
    - offer high quality education
    - skimp on student services to increase profit

Curriculum and Textbooks
- University students must be full-time
- No flexibility regarding course selection except that electives are being added
- English language textbooks used
  - All STEM, medicine, social sciences and some humanities textbooks are American or British

Higher Educational System in Pakistan
Zulqarnain Haider, Master’s Student, Industrial Engineering
Academic Integrity
- No formal way of teaching about plagiarism
- Students not aware of it until Master's level
- Students don’t know how to cite sources or understand importance of doing so unless they are involved in undergraduate research project
- HEC software checks writing assignments to be sure there is no plagiarism at graduate level

Exam System
- Students must pass provincial or federal exam after 10th & 12th grades
  - If they don’t pass, they retake it next year or go to work.
- Students choose arts or science track according to their academic performance and interest
  - Arts track does not require as high academic performance as science track

Exam System
- University exams are typically semester, midterm and final exams. Quizzes and assignments are also given.
- University entrance exams
  - Students pay to take the exam
  - Most students take 1-3 or up to 5 university entrance exams
  - No chance to retake exam in same year
  - Each university has cutoff score

Financial Aid
- Federal and provincial universities offer subsidies based on academic performance
- Scholarship sources
  - HEC or government
  - University
  - Private organization
- Students without money can tutor
- Tuition payment not always enforced in provincial universities
- Student loans almost do not exist

Student Services
- Student services in federal and private universities are good.
- Military-operated universities are characterized by discipline. Punctuality and high quality work are expected.

Student Services
- University employees’ service to students in provincial universities is dismal.
- Administration is bureaucratic, conventional and paper-based.
- Provincial university employees are unionized and have no incentive to do a good job.
- Older institutions have employees who are political appointments and have job protection.
You have to befriend provincial university employees and humor them to get them to do the work. Ex. “Sir, please do this. Come on.”

You have to be confident and pushy. You have to go back multiple times.

Joke: “There are two k sounds in clerk and one in dog so you have to be careful when working with clerks.”

Some employees have strong sense of responsibility which stems from religion and personal beliefs.

- They believe you have to work for the money you earn.
- Sometimes they will break rules to help you while other times they won’t.

How Pakistani Students Choose Their University

Saima Hafeez, Master’s Student, Linguistics

Factors Which Determine Schools to which Students Apply

- Academic performance
- Financial circumstances and cost of tuition
  - $120-150 (subsidized) per semester for provincial university & $450 (nonsubsidized)
  - $400-500 per semester for federal university
  - $600-$1,500 per semester for private university
  - $5,000 per year for private medical school
- Note: Students with high academic performance pay a subsidized tuition rate, which is lower.

Factors for Choosing University

- Cost of tuition (cont.)
  - Pakistani-American children sent to Pakistan for higher education because costs are lower and education is same
  - Children of Pakistanis residing in Gulf States return to Pakistan for higher education since it is less expensive
- Level of high school students attended is another factor
  - Can compensate for attending weaker school by performing well on university entrance exam, but not easy

Relationships Between Faculty & Students & Among Students

Mohammad Hassan, Master’s Student, Civil & Structural Engineering
Faculty-Student Relationships

- Relationship is more formal
- Students must show respect to teachers
  - No first-name basis with professors
  - Use “Sahib” (honorific) with name of professor or “Sir” or “Ma’am”
  - Raise hand before asking question
  - Hide cigarette when they see professor
  - Eye contact is okay, but male professors are careful about eye contact with female students

- Faculty are less accessible, especially in provincial universities
  - They do not have office hours, but they are on campus all day
  - Students ask questions after class, in their office or when they see them on campus
- Pakistani faculty give directives.
  - U.S. professors say, “It would be better if you did this” or “If I were you, I would...”

Relationships among Students

- Doesn’t take much time (ie. 15 minutes) to become familiar with one another
  - No reservations about becoming close to people
- Close (ie. best.) friends are those
  - whom one can lean/count/depend on
  - who will go out of their way
  - with whom one shares problems
- Group studies
- Group fights
- Job referrals

- Tend to view formal interactions with peers as fake
- Communication among peers tends to be lively
  - Conversations aren’t interesting or fun unless you are arguing or joking
  - “Gupshup” – animated chit chat for relaxing situations
- Pakistanis tend not to share information or joke about their families though. Families are considered sacred.

- Close (ie best.) friends are those
  - whom one can lean/count/depend on
  - who will go out of their way
  - with whom one shares problems
- Pakistanis tend not to share information or joke about their families though. Families are considered sacred.
Linguistic Differences

- Three "you's"
  - "aap" – honorific, used with someone you don't know, older persons and persons in position of authority
  - "tum" – used with peers
  - "tu" – used with best friends, could never call husband or member of opposite sex "tu", women call their husbands "aap"

Student Life in Pakistan

Vaqas Arshad, Master’s Student, Mechanical Engineering

Punctuality & Attendance

- Depends on nature of institute (military/non-military)
- Also depends on the professor and the nature of the program
  - Some professors lock classroom door after five minutes, but many don’t.

Dress Code

- Varies according to region and type of university
- Generally, universities discourage students from wearing provocative clothing, but there are no explicit rules defining what not to wear
  - Shorts
  - Flip flops / Sandals
  - See-through clothes
  - Miniskirts
  - Sleeveless tops
  - Tights (except with longer shirts)

Part-time Work

- Students don’t usually have part-time jobs because their job is to study
- On-campus jobs for students don’t exist
  - Some campus jobs are outsourced
- Exception: Some students have to work because their families cannot pay for their education
  - Tutoring
  - Call center jobs
  - Fast food jobs

Residence Halls

- Residence halls are segregated by gender
- Maximum of 3 students per room
- Single room in junior/senior year
- Students pay $2 tip per month to cleaners
- Hazing (AKA ragging/fooling) is rampant in residence halls
Dating & Marriage

- Dating has a negative connotation and is not very common.
- It brings a bad name to the family.
  - It connotes frolicking about, not having a serious relationship, etc.
- If a girl and boy like each other, their parents can arrange their marriage
  - Male students prefer to marry if they like someone

Pakistan Students’ Relationships with Parents

Naila Sahar, Ph.D. Student, English

Pakistan Family Culture

- Extended family and clan structure keep Pakistani society intact
- Close family relationships are caused by economic interdependence
- Economic unit is the family with one breadwinner
- People do not die of hunger because their clan comes to their assistance
- Individuals alone are completely helpless
- If someone becomes a bureaucrat, engineer or police officer, they help the entire clan.

Family Culture

- Mothers keep their children close and don’t teach them to be independent. They don’t want to let them go.
  - “Mummy daddy” are children who never become independent.
  - There is a lot of emotional blackmailing. Ex. “We’re getting old. We need you. Don’t you know your responsibilities?” “Please marry X. I’m getting old and will die soon.”
- Children receive continuous assistance from their parents—even into their forties.
Pakistani Students’ Impressions of U.S. Educational System

Students’ Expectations
- Believed that universities understood that international students have certain needs when they arrive and would accommodate them
  - airport pick-up
  - temporary housing

Students’ Surprises
- U.S. students’ behavior
  - Not saying hello to professor
  - Not acknowledging his/her presence or hushing when s/he walks into classroom
  - Talking loudly and arguing in presence of faculty, including during class breaks
  - Talking about boyfriends and girlfriends—unheard of in Pakistan
- People don’t look at each other here. Instead they’re looking at their cell phone.

Students’ Surprises
- Offended by stereotypes
  - “Can you hear songs in Pakistan?” “Do you have refrigerators/cars in Pakistan?”
  - “What are you doing here? Are you allowed to study in Pakistan?”
  - “What is going on in your country? We have heard that women aren’t allowed to study there.”
- Malalla gives West the impression that all Pakistani women are oppressed.

Students’ Impressions
- Find it hard to make American friends—unless it is over drinks.
- Most relationships with American students are superficial—and not very warm.
- Feel that American students’ families are not close to their hearts.

Students’ Impressions
- Expected more vibrant environment, more participation, more student questions. Find U.S. classes to be quite serious, devoid of humor.
- Level of classes is not higher than classes back home. Students’ intellectual level is not higher than that of Pakistani students.
- U.S. professors follow “mechanical schedule”. Pakistani professors deviate from schedule and improvise.