



International Service-Learning: Proposal for a Multi-Dimensional Model for Student Selection

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International Service-Learning: Proposal for a Multi-Dimensional Model for Student Selection

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In an age where students display competency in diverse fields of activities, selecting qualified candidates from an assorted group for a service-learning exchange program demands a multidimensional approach. The framework for student selection for International Service-Learning (ISL) at Union Christian College (UCC) has been designed bearing this in mind. Its value increases when there is a proportionally higher number of applicants for a limited number of slots. Practiced for the last three years (2018-2021), the model has been designed using seven-fold criteria. The compositely designed rubric examines Q&A responses, perspectives on SL, and problem-solving skills at various stages in the assessment. Each assessment level is graded from A to D, with highest A and least D. The evaluation is conducted to assess student social commitment, community engagement, leadership qualities and personal initiatives. The process of enriching writing skills and designing SL activities for diverse communities during the SL committee selection process prepares students to meet challenges in the field. Students prepared under such a method are selected for ISL.

Keywords: *international service-learning, multi-dimensional model, rubric, institutional, student selection*

Aprendizaje-Servicio Internacional: Propuesta de un Modelo Multidimensional para la Selección de Estudiantes

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En una época en la que los estudiantes muestran competencia en diversos campos de actividades, identificar a los candidatos más cualificados de un grupo variado para realizar un programa de intercambio de aprendizaje-servicio exige un enfoque multidimensional. El marco para la selección de estudiantes al programa de Aprendizaje-Servicio Internacional (ASL) en la universidad Union Christian College (UCC) ha sido diseñado teniendo esto en consideración, lo cual es de gran relevancia debido a que el número de solicitantes es bastante mayor que el número limitado de plazas. Este modelo, que se ha seguido durante los últimos tres años (2018-2021), ha sido diseñado tomando en cuenta siete criterios. La rúbrica incluye preguntas y respuestas, diversas perspectivas sobre aprendizaje a través del servicio a la comunidad y resolución de problemas en varias etapas de la evaluación. Cada nivel de evaluación se califica en un rango que va de la A a la D, siendo A la máxima nota y D la mínima. La evaluación se lleva a cabo para hacer examinar de un modo efectivo el compromiso social del estudiante, los compromisos adoptados con la comunidad, la calidad del liderazgo, así como iniciativas personales. A los estudiantes se les prepara para enfrentar los desafíos de este campo durante el proceso de selección. Para ello, el comité prepara actividades con las que los estudiantes desarrollan sus habilidades de escritura y aprenden a diseñar actividades de aprendizaje-servicio. Los estudiantes preparados bajo dicho método son finalmente seleccionados para el programa de ASL.

Palabras clave: *aprendizaje-servicio internacional, modelo multidimensional, rúbrica, institucional, selección de estudiantes*

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Service-Learning (SL) is based on the pedagogy of students applying knowledge to community challenges and re-situating understandings based on needs and knowledge identified in that community. Students can find real meaning in what they obtain from abstract and theoretical knowledge in the classroom when they apply it in practical settings. The communities students serve can range from those close to the students' region or locality, to those that lie in far-flung regions of the globe. Opportunities to engage in SL among communities linguistically and culturally different from students' own can be a huge challenge, yet enable them to broaden their mental horizons (Annette, 2003; Crabtree, 2008; Hartman & Kiely, 2014). Researchers have identified that students score higher grades when they engage in service-related activities as part of their course (Markus et al., 1993; Shumer, 1994). Other studies have identified that students engaged in SL spend more time interacting with faculty members and activities such as reflection enable them to connect academics with real-life situations (Kendrick, 1996).

International Service learning (ISL) combines academic instruction with community-based service in an international context (Crabtree, 2008). ISL is different from study abroad or international education as it provides students with opportunities for experiential immersion with international communities. Apart from providing better educational understanding, it allows for intercultural exchange, appreciation of the host country, exposure to diverse cultures, development of cultural competence and opportunities for transformation of students into global citizens (Bringle et al., 2011; Cox et al., 2014; Hayward & Charrette, 2012). As Mezirow (1991) suggests, learners interpret and reinterpret their experience to find meaning from learning and this can bring about lasting transformation (Kiely, 2004; Nickols et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2018). Student-exchange programs both at the national and international levels among institutions have gone a long way toward facilitating this sort of engagement (Chupp & Joseph, 2010), making the pedagogy an increasingly global one. ISL experiences tend to be more intense as well as demanding, and have been found to have more capacity to be transformative compared to domestic SL experiences (Cluett, 2002; Grusky, 2000; Roberts, 2007). Experience gained in an international context not only transforms students but can benefit institutions that enter into such partnerships, as such work promotes global civic engagement and critical reflection (Cazzell et al., 2014; McKee, 2016). In the context of institutions where a large number of students apply for a limited number of slots for ISL, the process of student selection becomes a matter of concern. Programs garner high appeal, yet only some students are sufficiently prepared for ISL. Positioning both programs and students for success calls for using a calibrated assessment model in the student selection process.

International Service-Learning at UCC

Union Christian College (UCC), Aluva, with coordinates 10.1260° N, 76.3340° E holds the distinction of being the only college in the state of Kerala, India, to offer International Service-Learning (ISL). UCC is an affiliated college under Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. It is one of the earliest colleges in India to be established and managed by Indian Christians. UCC has been undertaking ISL since 2012 and is one of few institutions in India to offer a platform for SL. Selected students from the college get the opportunity to observe and participate in SL along with students drawn from institutions across the globe, participating over a stipulated period of time in the host institution. ISL offers avenues for interaction with diverse cultural groups and helps to establish an international network of student enthusiasts who are committed to the goals of SL (Miller & Gonzalez, 2010). To derive the best out of such international collaborations, the selected students must manifest a set of qualities that go beyond simply academic performance. Students' knowledge, attitude and behaviors pertaining to global civic issues are an important aspect to be assessed (Tonkin, 2011). In this context, it is worth noting that the student population of UCC is a highly eclectic group as the institution attracts students from all over the state belonging to different educational backgrounds, socio-economic status, culture and religion. The diversity ranges from students who are first generation learners to those having prior exposure to international systems of education. This makes the student selection process highly challenging and a key determining factor for the success of ISL. Researchers have identified that lack of rigorous selection procedures in any program may produce negative

effects, such as reducing the quality and effectiveness of the program, not meeting desired objectives, and enabling casual commitments on the part of candidates, facilitating performance (Creighton & Jones, 2001). The Service-Learning Centre (SLC) at UCC, recognizing these challenges, has evolved a rigorous set of assessment measures to gauge latent potential and suitability among student applicants to ISL. The multi-dimensional model created is aimed to address difficulties faced by institutions where student selection from diverse populations, for limited numbers of slots, becomes a challenge.

Methodology

The SLC at UCC constitutes a SL committee headed by faculty members from various departments. Apart from meeting periodically to plan and initiate SL on campus and with partner institutes, the SLC has the key responsibility to coordinate ISL for students and to select them for exchange programs. UCC has linkages and MoU's with several higher education institutions in Asia and abroad. Every year, students go through this selection process, and two to three students are selected for ISL at each international institution. ISL programs are scheduled during July and August, with students spending time in an international university abroad, engaging themselves in community-based activities organized by host institutions. Activities include working in primary schools, as well as special schools, English education, geriatric center services, and working in agricultural fields. Here, community partners identify needs, develop collaborations with educational institutions, and provide information about the local community.

The present selection process (in operation since 2017-18) was proposed by the authors of the paper. The long, drawn-out process taking over a month is meticulously planned, involving selection of suitable students from first year (freshman) undergraduate streams which comprise close to 800 students. Parameters for candidate selection have evolved based on challenges faced by present and previous SL committees over the years since the inception of the program. A set of practices for evaluation and assessment has evolved that has now been in operation for the last three years, and which has seen fairly good results especially in selecting the suitable candidates and tracking performance during and after completion of ISL. Such a methodology can contribute student assessment strategies to selection systems and can help attract participants with motivations beyond what is requisite for "ideal" candidates. The multi-pronged approach has been conceived based on the experience of faculty in carrying out ISL and is designed to ensure transparency and promote objectivity at each stage of the selection process.

Stage 1

The selection process for ISL begins in February every year. Though technically students from across disciplines are eligible to apply, students from second (sophomore) and third years are not included as this opportunity interferes with their regular academic calendar, and they stand to lose a year. So, the ideal pool is among first year students, already into their second semester when applications are invited, and after they have become fairly well adjusted to the campus and its culture. This pool also affords time for involvement in college activities and builds links with clubs and associations on campus. Moreover, after completion of the program, these students get time to impart some of their learning experiences and reflections to SL on campus, and can serve as student peer resources on campus over the following two years. At the start of every year, a meeting is convened to discuss the program recruitment and selection procedure, and to chart out a schedule for conducting the process beginning with sending out brochures to various departments. During this stage the committee recaps the previous year's strategies, based on the accumulated documents, reviews selection criteria, and assesses the merits and demerits of these again before finalizing the procedure.

A crucial question that comes up during this stage concerns the number of participants to be permitted from each department. This is a major concern for each cycle, since every year sees varied quality in the student applicant pool. The selection ratio for the last three years has been approximately one in fifteen. Once selection criteria, program number targets and deadlines are set, the invitation is circulated to all departments on campus. There are two core groups to whom the message needs to be conveyed. First, the department heads and faculty for first-year students, and second, the student community at large. Selection

committee members conduct visits to departments conveying selection criteria to department heads and classroom faculty. The college also has an official online and offline platform where the announcement is made for the benefit of the entire college teaching community. Students are informed about the program through an official announcement system by the head of the institution and through class teachers. A date is set for interested candidates from each department to submit their names to their respective class teachers. During this stage the students may consult the SLC for queries and discussions. Queries are mostly related to the selection process, selection requirements, overseas travel, and nature of SL in partner institutions. The number of applicants is usually very high since many apply for the program guided by varied interests rather than those that the year's program focuses upon. The first level screening takes place at this stage, where class teachers assess the eligibility of the candidates for stage two of the selection process, based on their interaction with students during last and current semesters. For this purpose, the class teacher relies on the first criterion in the rubric (see the Appendix), to filter the potential candidates for the next level. Overall academic performance is considered in this phase. During this stage, the onus falls upon the class teacher to identify potential candidates for stage two. Where departments exceed their target number of eligible applicants, the committee allows them to recommend additional names to the next stage of selection for consideration.

Stage 2

Once the lists of applicants from class teachers of every department reach the SLC, the processes of the second stage are set in motion. From this stage onwards assessment of applicants rests with the SL committee. As the first part of stage two, (see the Appendix) eligible applicants are invited for an Orientation class organized by the SLC. The session, conducted by the Director of Service-Learning along with the other SL faculty, presents to participants more details about the nature of the program, and about ways students may prepare themselves for the selection process. A highlight of the orientation is the presentation by previous year student program participants. This not only gives a fairly good idea about what is expected of participants, but also communicates challenges students should prepare to meet in the selection process. The meeting concludes with handing out a set of forms, which includes a Student Profile Sheet, Questionnaire and Essays (criteria 3 & 4 in the Appendix) which they are expected to submit within a stipulated time period.

The forms submitted by students are examined by the committee. Following this, they are asked to prepare presentations based on the data provided, adding further information and valid proofs to the claims they have made. The last level of stage 2 is a presentation by the students. Student insights on SL, service-oriented initiatives undertaken by students, understanding of individuals' roles in serving communities and rationales for applying for the program are evaluated in this phase. Each student makes a 15-minute presentation to the SL evaluation team. To advance transparency of the process, a faculty member outside the selection committee is invited as a guest to the panel. The presentation is evaluated on the basis of criteria 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the rubric (see the Appendix). Based on the combined assessment of the written document and presentation, students are shortlisted for the final stage of the selection process.

Stage 3

During the third and final stage, each shortlisted candidate is given a week to design a SL project to be implemented on campus. Guidelines for preparing a project proposal are provided. Students are encouraged to design projects related to their discipline to develop better understanding of opportunities to apply theoretical concepts in practical settings. With the involvement of the full SLC and an external evaluator, student evaluation is conducted based on criterion 7 in the rubric. Evaluators assess the student's vision, perspectives on the different components of SL, and effectiveness in designing the project. Once this round is complete and grading is done, the committee members come together to evaluate each of the shortlisted candidates based on their performance to date. Candidates are ranked based on the scores, then invited for a personal interview with the head of the institution and the SL evaluation team as a formal procedure.

Method and process of data analysis

Data generated over three consecutive years were used to analyze the model. The number of students proposed by the teacher-in-charge of each class, the number of related queries concerning the selection, the number of students belonging to upper and lower strata of society, and the number of student applications from the language, social science, science, and commerce streams of the University during the course of three years were entered into MS Excel spreadsheet. This illustrated whether there were any increases or decreases in rates of student participation in the selection process with respect to those variables. Descriptive methods of analysis summarizing counts and percentages were used in the present research. Percentage of students belonging Above Poverty Line (APL as per Indian Public Distribution System under National Food Security Act of India) and Below Poverty Line (BPL) categories as well as those belonging to different streams of study over three consecutive years were compared manually. Similarly, annual student grade performances were evaluated.

Findings

The SL committee at UCC has been using the above criteria for student selection for the past three years (2018, 2019 & 2020). Continuous evaluation of the student statistics and performances are recorded for study purposes and development of the SLC. The present research analyzed the data to identify distinct features of student participation. The authors were directly involved in the collection and processing of data at every stage and sought consent from the participating students for using the data for research and development.

Statistics of Student Participation in SL Selection

Of the thirteen undergraduate programs spread across four different streams, there are two programs in Language (English and Malayalam), two in Social Sciences (History and Economics), eight in Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Botany, Zoology, Psychology, Biological Techniques and Specimen Preparation and Computer Science) and two Commerce programs (B. Com Computer Application and B.Com. Finance and Taxation). Table 1 indicates the basic background and status of students who applied for the program. Twenty-eight students from thirteen programs participated with the highest representation from the science stream during the first year under study. There was a consistent rise in the participation from second year onwards. Students from both APL and BPL applied for the selection. The data showed that the student representation from APL was higher than BPL and BPL students who applied for SL mostly belonged to the Government-aided programs. The data obtained across a three-year span can be used to assess student interest, willingness and commitment to participate in ISL.

Discussion

ISL is a pedagogy that aspires to promote civic engagement and global citizenship. This can be achieved through an amalgamation of studying abroad and international education (Bringle et al., 2011). The multi-dimensional model of student selection was designed to accurately assess competencies of students, in a fair and judicious manner and to ensure that those selected would rise up to meet these ISL objectives.

An analysis of the results obtained, using the selection model, provided several valuable insights into student participation. A comparison of responses obtained during the last three years of student selection process revealed a decrease in strength of the initial number of students proposed for the selection process by class teachers, with respect to that of the consecutive level of selection (Tables 1 & 2). The dropping-out of students was mostly noted from the science stream. These students may have harbored anxiety regarding losing out on their examinations (theory and practical) during absence from the institution. At the same time, a gradual increase was observed in the overall number of student responses from year one to year three. The permeation of SL on campus through partnerships with neighboring institutions and communities over the last few years, alongside the interaction with students from foreign institutions who

arrived on campus for ISL has contributed to this enhanced interest in exchange programs. During the initial days of ISL in UCC, very few students from the BPL category applied for exchange programs. This was partly due to the general perception that ISL was an elite program and only students with prior exposure to international education systems were likely to qualify for participation. Hence the increase in number of student responses from BPL category during year 3 compared to previous years was not only a gratifying change but it also underscored strength of the assessment model as achieving inclusivity and objectivity (Fig. 1).

Table 1
Statistics of Student Background and Frequency of Queries

Year	Stream	No. of students proposed by class teacher	Queries	No. of students from APL background	No. of students from BPL background	Total no. of students
1	Language	4	3	3	1	11
	Social Science	5	6	4	1	16
	Science	17	37	15	2	71
	Commerce	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>98</i>
2	Language	6	27	3	3	39
	Social Science	7	26	5	2	40
	Science	20	102	18	2	142
	Commerce	4	14	4	0	22
	<i>Total</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>169</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>243</i>
3	Language	7	47	3	4	61
	Social Science	8	40	3	5	56
	Science	22	126	15	7	170
	Commerce	6	32	6	0	44
	<i>Total</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>245</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>331</i>

The effectiveness of the model for appropriate student selection became further evident through a comparative analysis of the grades scored by students in the three years since the implementation of the current model. On comparing the overall performance of participants across years 1, 2 and 3, the study found an evident rise in the percentage of A grade ratings obtained by participants from year 1 to year 3 (Fig.2).

Figure 1

Percentage of Students in Different Streams Belonging to APL and BPL

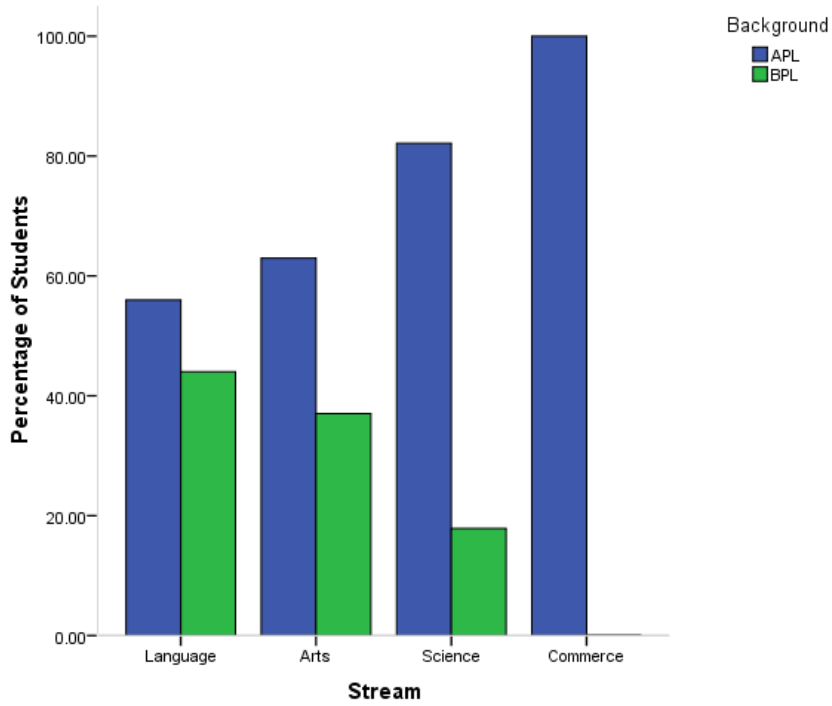
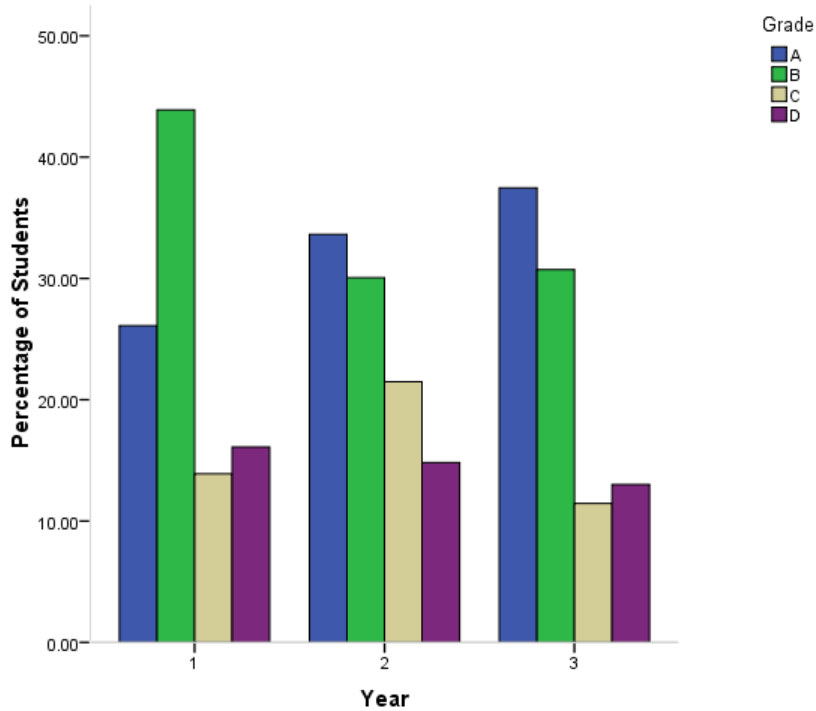


Figure 2

Percentage of Students Who Secured Grades A, B, C, and D in 3 Consecutive Years



Previous researchers have indicated the value and effectiveness of using rubrics in assessing student performance (Boston, 2002; Brookhart & Chen, 2015; Cooper & Gargan, 2009). By delineating criteria with specific descriptions related to performance levels in the rubric, the committee succinctly communicated to participants what was expected of them. This not only minimized blind spots in assessment but assured a clear-sighted involvement and understanding from students. This also possibly contributed to students scoring higher grades.

The rubric developed for the purpose of student selection for ISL emerged as a reliable measure from the perspective of evaluators as well. It was found that there was around 75% to 80% agreement and lesser disagreement among members of the selection committee regarding the grades assigned to candidates based on the criteria. This provided evidence for inter-scorer reliability (reliability and consistency among the different evaluators) of the proposed criteria (Anastasi & Urbina, 2006; Gregory, 2017).

The inclusion of the criterion meant to assess student project proposals based on environment, health and hygiene, natural disasters and service with children having disabilities, to be implemented on campus, helped evaluators understand students' sense of civic responsibility and commitment to society (Felten & Clayton, 2011). Students who took part in the assessment process also got a clear understanding of what was expected of them to become part of the SL venture.

Student outcomes after completion of ISL were also evaluated based on the extent of their involvement in campus-community service. It was observed that the participants after the completion of their ISL made more constructive contributions than their counterparts from previous years to the overall development of the college and community, undertaking more new SL initiatives on the campus. They assumed leadership roles in planning and executing programs organized by the SLC of the institution (Seider, 2010). Past research has identified a similar transformation in students engaged in ISL-based internships (Larsen & Gough, 2013; Niehaus & Crain, 2013). Students who participated in ISL developed a mindset to take up further initiatives in service of the community. Student reflections on ISL experiences after completion indicated greater satisfaction with work they were involved in, and expressed increased feelings of self-worth. Previous researchers have reported that ISL has the potential to enhance students' self-exploration, providing opportunities to incorporate cultural, moral, and service-related values into their life (Yang, et al., 2016). The greater involvement and commitment in community initiatives observed in these students was a desirable outcome that underscored the predictive value of the criteria for student selection. Student participants evolved into trendsetters on campus, motivating others to undertake SL initiatives.

The committee decided to develop a multi-dimensional model for the student selection process based on the challenges faced in the years since the inception of the ISL at UCC. Service-learning was neither credit-bearing, nor was it attached to the curriculum of any of the universities in the state of Kerala except in Union Christian College. A service-learning component was included in the curriculum of B.Sc. Psychology program of the University (to which Union Christian College is affiliated) under the initiative of the faculty members who were involved in service-learning projects funded by international organizations. Since Union Christian College has had linkages with international institutions, student exchange programs have been part of the academic landscape for several years. At the local level, students supervised by faculty members engage in community service activities as part of the National Service Scheme. Since serving the community has always been a priority area of the institution, a program like ISL was expected to invite attention of large numbers of students interested in community engagement. Therefore, accommodating a higher number of aspirants for a program with limited numbers of seats was a major challenge before the SL committee. This warranted an initial screening process. Furthermore, given the importance of applicant attributes such as attitude, communication skills, presentation skills, social commitments, approach to service and collaboration and large number of applicants, the selection process had to be designed with multiple stages using a wide range of tools (written documents, presentation and project designing), with each stage acting to effectively winnow numbers. Conducting the selection process with transparency was yet another challenge, given the high level of competency among student applicants, and high expectations from departments recommending students. While we aspired for only the best student applicants to come through final stages of selection, the committee was deeply concerned about supporting interest among students not selected for the program and retaining them as potential candidates for future

ventures related to SL. They were viewed as potential student volunteers for SL led or launched by international students. The recording and documentation of the entire selection process was done regularly and systematically at each phase of the selection process.

Conclusions

The paper proposes a multidimensional model for student selection in the context of ISL. Having put the model into practice for the last three years and analyzed the outcomes based on the acquired data, it can be instructive as an effective institutional model which caters to a diverse student applicant population and in scenarios with higher applicant numbers than program seats. Participation among students from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds may be among the strongest indication of the model's success in achieving inclusivity. Introduction of the rubric for student selection produced a positive impact as evident from the student performance measures from year one to three. The authors' efforts to clearly define criteria with distinct markers for student performance have contributed to the model's objective and transparent characteristics. Dependability, reliability, and reproducibility of the model make it potentially conducive for institutions that find it challenging to conduct a complex yet inclusive selection processes for ISL.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The proposed model may not find its application in the case of institutions where ISL slots and opportunities are wide-ranging, and where students themselves can choose the international institution in which they wish to do ISL. Viability of this model, if assessed in global settings, could offer scope for more generalizability and utility. Further studies in the field can focus on obtaining information regarding the performance outcomes of student participants using performance-based measures which could enhance the validity of the proposed model.

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Appendix – Rubric for ISL Student Selection

Sl. No.	Stages of selection process	CRITERIA	QUESTIONS/AREAS GRADED	GRADE A	GRADE B	GRADE C	GRADE D
1.	Stage 1	Academic Performance in Semester 1 & 2 of UG program	1. Internal Assessment 2. Class performance	1. Above 90% 2. Very active participation in class	1. Above 80% 2. Fairly active participation in class	1. Above 70% 2. Occasionally participates in class	Does not meet the minimum requirements.
2.		Awards & Recognitions	To assess the proficiency of the students.	Co-Curricular & Extra-curricular ---International, National, State Level	Co-curricular & Extracurricular --- National, State Level	Co-curricular & Extracurricular -- State Level	Does not meet the minimum requirements.
3.	Stage 2 (Student presentation)	Insights on ISL	Why do you want to participate in ISL?	Good clarity on the concept of SL and the objectives of the ISL and potential role as part of it.	Fair clarity on the concept of SL and the objectives of the ISL and potential role as part of it.	Marginal clarity on the concept of SL and the objectives of the ISL and potential role as part of it.	Does not meet the minimum requirements.
4.		Service-Oriented Initiatives	Narrate the best SL experience you have had? Service oriented initiatives you have undertaken.	Has participated and provided leadership for service-oriented activities in school/college, community and on an individual basis.	Has engaged in service-oriented activities in school/college and community.	Has some experience of service-oriented activities	Does not meet the minimum requirements.
5.		Contribution to the Parent Institution	What will be your contribution to UCC after the completion of the program?	Good clarity on the needs of the college community and identifies the potential area of contribution with specific goals and plan of action.	Fair clarity on the needs of the college community and identifies the potential area of contribution with specific goals and plan of action.	Marginal clarity on the needs of the college community with some understanding of what could be done.	Does not meet the minimum requirements.
6.		SL and Personal Growth	What qualities do you feel you need to develop to be a better person? What are the qualities of good leadership that you have?	Good clarity on how SL activities can contribute to personal growth and leadership skills. Good understanding of the role of individuals in the community.	Fair clarity on how SL activities can contribute to personal growth and leadership skills. Fair understanding of the role of individuals in the community.	Marginal clarity on how SL activities can contribute to personal growth and leadership skills. Vague understanding of the role of individual in the community	Does not meet the minimum requirements.
7.	Stage 3	Designing a SL program for UCC	The students design projects related to Environment, Health and Hygiene, Natural Disasters, and Children with Disabilities	Has a good vision and perspective with all the essential components of SL. The project is highly sustainable and feasible.	Has fair understanding of SL and a few essential components. Moderately sustainable and feasible.	Marginal understanding of SL with bare minimum components. Marginally sustainable and feasible.	Does not meet the minimum requirements.

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