Introduction

The inflow of international students to the United States has had a significant impact during the last half century on aspects of the domestic educational, social, economical, and political situations (Dalton, 1999; Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1999; Ping, 1999; So, 1994). The Institute of International Education (2004: 1) claims that "International students in U.S. classrooms widen the perspectives of their U.S. classmates, contribute to vital research activities, strengthen the local economies in which they live, and build lasting ties between their home countries and the United States". These developments have important implications for higher education student affairs professionals, expanding their role in integrating international students into educational programs and academic life, and in "using the international students on campus to educate American students to the new global reality" (Ping, 1999: 14).

On the other hand, however, there were examples of violent crimes in recent years, especially after the terrorist attack in 2001, where we could observe existing interracial and ethnic tensions in U.S. colleges and universities. With the increase of international student mobility, the negative attitude of local people toward international students and problems of discrimination, as well as prejudice and racism on and off campus affected international students in their adjustment and sometimes caused security concerns in other country contexts such as in Australia and New Zealand (Sawir, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2009). Sawir et al. suggests that institutional support for student activities can enhance students'

cultural understanding and cross-cultural skills, which lead to a closer integration of students outside the classroom. To this end, student affairs professionals seek to provide a comfortable and safe-learning environment in college life by providing opportunities for learning cross-cultural awareness outside the classroom. Social and cultural programs have often been used as a tool to promote this vision, as they may serve as an avenue for learning cross-cultural skills and developing social networks among students. This study was designed to address these visions, to explore the various aspects of students' participations as described further in the following pages, and to understand the existing needs among the international students in order to enhance the institutional efforts to promote participation among diverse populations.

The availability of social networks leads to strengthening social capital, which is an important component of academic success for students. Social capital refers to "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000a: 19). In the academic setting, social capital "makes individuals less prone to depression and more inclined to help others," "increases student test scores and graduation rates," and "makes navigating life a whole lot easier" (Putnam, 2000b: 4). Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood (2002) point out that students who frequently participate in arts and culture activities also have a tendency to actively participate in civic, political and religious activities. This participation is what Walker et al. (2002: 14) refer to as "a model of civic voluntarism". These civic-minded people participate in arts and cultural activities because they want to support the related community organizations and also because they want to learn about high-quality art. These individuals can "represent a