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## **Work Satisfaction: Critical Factors for Foreign-Born Faculty**

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### **Abstract**

Many higher education institutions seek to attract and retain diverse faculty in an effort to intentionally diversify college campuses and make them more inclusive. The development of a diverse faculty body that matches the diversity of the student body is crucial, but the representation of foreign-born people with doctoral degrees who are working as faculty members has been relatively low, compared to the numbers of foreign-born students, and actual numbers are difficult to estimate. Foreign-born faculty can have very different experiences than do American-born faculty and report lower levels of work satisfaction. The key factors that contribute to workplace satisfaction for foreign-born faculty are not known. Some factors that may influence work satisfaction for foreign-born faculty members include their varying degrees of independence, their salary and accompanying levels of responsibility, and their job security. Differences related to academic discipline may be an influence, as are salary differences associated with the individual disciplines. Without additional insights as to why foreign-born faculty are less satisfied in the workplace than their American counterparts, colleges and universities are in danger of continuing to invest in the recruitment and hiring of foreign-born faculty who have a higher likelihood of leaving the institution.

Keywords: higher education institutions; work satisfaction; foreign-born faculty; promotion; tenure; underrepresented faculty

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) often partner with industry in the production of knowledge and the further development of society (Munene, 2014). In turn, these partnerships assist HEIs in their efforts to help people gain new skills, expand research networks, and provide a global perspective to the learning and teaching experience (Finkelstein, Walker, & Chen, 2013; Bennion & Locke, 2010; Kim, 2012; NAFSA, 2011). Many HEIs work to attract and retain diverse faculty in an effort to intentionally diversify campuses and make college campuses more inclusive (Calderon & Mathies, 2013). The development of a diverse faculty body that matches the diverse student body is critical (Wade-Golden & Matlock, 2010) but until recently the numbers of foreign-born people with doctoral degrees working as faculty were fairly low (Finn, 2014; Munene, 2014). The racial and ethnic composition of the workforce in the United States continues to become more diverse (Mosisa, 2013). In 2012-2013, the Open Doors Report (Institute of International Education) indicated that 122,059 faculty members employed in United States HEIs had been born outside the United States. Therefore, it has become critical to examine the experiences of foreign-born faculty in their own right (Chen, 2014).

## Background

Foreign-born faculty experience difficulties that their American counterparts do not, and researchers do not know the key factors that contribute to workplace satisfaction for foreign-born faculty. Researchers do not know which factors predict work satisfaction for foreign-born faculty. Sabharwal (2011b) and Sallee and Hart (2015) concluded that future research should identify factors that influence workplace satisfaction and retention for foreign-born faculty. Some factors that may influence work satisfaction for foreign-born faculty members include their varying degrees of independence, their salary and accompanying levels of responsibility, and their job security (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Lawrence, et al., 2014; Sabharwal & Varma, 2012). Differences by academic discipline may also come into play, as salary differences can be based on the demands of the individual discipline (Chalikia & Hinsz, 2013; Xu, 2012). Several seminal studies (Mamiseishvili, 2011a; Mamiseishvili, 2011b) have implored future research to examine work satisfaction for foreign-born faculty related to country of origin, ethnicity and gender, and fluency in English. Without additional insights as to why foreign-born faculty are less satisfied in the workplace than their American counterparts, HEIs will continue to invest in recruiting and hiring foreign-born faculty who have a higher likelihood of leaving the institution (Constantinou, Bajracharya, & Baldwin, 2011; Sabharwal, 2011b; Sallee & Hart, 2015).

HEIs are competing for foreign faculty in a time of global expansion, and institutions must stay up-to-date in their approach in order to attract and retain them (Bennion & Locke, 2010; Hughes, 2015). While there has been a significant focus on understanding immigration regulations and obtaining visas for foreign scholars to teach in American HEIs, there has not been a corresponding focus on how foreign-born faculty fit in once they have been hired. Seminal research has found that diverse faculties often face more issues related to workload and satisfaction than faculty of the white majority (Mamiseishvili, 2011a; Mamiseishvili, 2011b), and found foreign-born faculty may be both less satisfied and more productive than their counterparts (Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2011; Sabharwal, 2011b). The demands of specific academic disciplines may be a concern (Xu, 2012). Research also suggests that the greatest challenges for foreign professionals coming to the United States relates to language proficiency (Ewy, Geringer, & Taylor, 2015), a clear understanding of the dominant culture (Jackson, Ray, & Bybell, 2013), especially as related to understanding the level of responsibility required in faculty positions; a loss of professional identity in their academic discipline; a lack of clear transferability of professional credentials, a concern related to tenure status/rank (Khrabrova & Sanzo, 2013); and the campus environment (Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2011; Sabharwal, 2011a; Sabharwal, 2011b; Trower, 2012).

Without data on the factors which influence foreign-born faculty in their work satisfaction, there will be significant implications for the continued recruitment of skilled international workers (Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011; Mamiseishvili, 2011a; Mamiseishvili, 2011b; Shah, 2011). For example, HEIs with goals for recruiting diverse faculty

may not be able to meet those goals (Sabharwal, 2011b) or retain foreign faculty after hire (Chen, Ployhart, Thomas, Anderson, & Bliese, 2011).

The construct of work satisfaction includes several factors such as academic discipline, professional relationships with colleagues (collegiality), autonomy or independence, workplace environment, and quality of life factors within HEIs. These factors are believed to strongly influence how foreign-born faculty members experience their workplace (Bozeman, & Gaughan, 2011; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2011; Sabharwal, 2011b). If foreign-born faculty are found to be marginalized, their work satisfaction may be affected (Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2011; Sabharwal, 2011a; Sabharwal, 2011b; Trower, 2012).

The numbers of foreign-born doctoral recipients in science and engineering continues to increase rapidly (Gupta, 2016). The recruitment and hiring of foreign faculty can give HEIs a competitive edge (Munene, 2014), allowing the flow of personnel and knowledge to be distributed across international borders. An additional cohort of foreign-born faculty who received their education overseas now complements the skills of native-born workers, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields (Kim, Wolf-Wendel, & Twombly, 2011; Sallee & Hart, 2015). Seventy four percent of international scholars in the U.S. are working in science, technology, engineering and math fields (Institute of International Education, 2015). In 2016 alone, all 6 Nobel laureates associated with U.S. HEIs were foreign-born faculty (Redden, 2016).

Typically, change in higher education only occurs when there is a major crisis (financial or otherwise); when pressures mount from the community; or when the institution has a leader who is particularly visionary (Robbins & Judge, 2010). Merely having a proportionate representation of faculty to mirror the student body does not ensure that HEIs will realize all the benefits of a diverse faculty and student body (Park & Denson, 2009). In 2014/2015, a total of 124,861 international faculty were teaching and/or conducting research in U.S. HEIs (Institute of International Education, 2015). Yet, the participation of underrepresented minorities in the academic science disciplines remains one of the least successful of the diversity initiatives (National Academy of Sciences, 2011). While internationalization efforts have also allowed for a diversification of faculty across countries (Kim & Locke, 2010), until recently the numbers of foreign-born individuals with doctoral degrees working as faculty were fairly low (Finn, 2014, Munene, 2014). China, India, and South Korea rank highest as countries of origin for international scholars in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2015).

While many HEIs do attempt to attract and retain diverse faculty, foreign-born faculty face complex challenges, making retention and professional advancement difficult (Munene, 2014). Presently, colleges and universities hire more foreign-born new faculty than domestic racial/ethnic minority groups (Kim, Twombly, & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). Therefore, fully understanding the potential cultural barriers and career implications for foreign-born faculty (De Beuckelaer, et al., 2012) is critical to HEIs.

### **Academic Mobility**

Faculty with international experience can bring diversity and global expertise to the classroom and to their work, and help students achieve intercultural awareness, the ability to understand multiple perspectives, and provide real-world problem solving skills (Finkelstein, Walker, & Chen, 2013; Gahungu, 2011). The recognition of the importance of internationalization efforts has additional significance, and the framework of internationalization has shifted considerably.

With mobility comes acculturation issues. When immigrants first come to the US, whether as children, as students, or as workers, they all experience some level of discomfort related to their experiences in a new setting. For foreign-born faculty, this is often a barrier to the development of their professional identity (Gheorghiu & Stephens, 2016). While not specific to foreign-born faculty, research on international students has shown assimilation to academic settings can cause problems related to differences in what is considered conventional behaviors and norms in the dominant culture (Jackson, Ray, & Bybell, 2013); struggles related to race and ethnicity (Kim, 2012); and disturbances in family relationships due to academic demands and distance from home (Zhang, Smith, Swisher, Fu, & Forgarty, 2011). These same struggles, which can result in feelings of seclusion and loneliness can lead foreign-born faculty to suffer from isolation and bullying in the workplace (Denny, 2014). Over time, immigrants must choose to either assimilate and integrate into their new country and institution, or separate from the institution, or remain marginalized (Campbell, 2015; Gheorghiu & Stephens, 2016). Academically, there may be challenges related to language barriers and differences in teaching styles between U.S. HEIs and foreign HEIs (Kim, 2011; Telbis, Helgeson, & Kingsbury, 2013). There is a small body of literature on the adjustment of expatriates to their new environment (Campbell, 2015; Schütter & Boerner, 2013). Foreign-born faculty in particular, face enormous pressure to conform to their new country and workplace, in a phenomenon known as cultural hybridization (Pieterse, 2015).

The mobility of academics - either post-graduation for international doctoral students or through the direct recruitment of international faculty, focuses specifically on the advancement of an individual faculty member for reasons of career progression (Cantwell & Taylor, 2013; Pherali, 2012). American faculty tend to migrate outside their own country less often than do scholars from other countries, most likely because the United States has so many HEIs, providing faculty members with many more opportunities to move from institution to institution without ever leaving the country (Halevi & Moed, 2013; Pherali, 2012). Several studies of faculty mobility comparing non-citizen and citizen faculty (Kim, et al., 2011, Kim, et al., 2012) reveal that foreign-born, non-naturalized citizens who have tenure are more likely to remain at their current institution, while those who have high research agendas and have not been in academia long, tend to leave for industry positions (Kim, et al., 2011; Kim, et al., 2012).

Each of these studies (Kim, et al., 2011, Kim, et al., 2012) determined that the strongest predictor of decisions to leave (academia and the U.S.) is work satisfaction. However, these studies, like many others that have attempted to determine factors of work satisfaction of

foreign-born faculty, did not examine the country of origin of the faculty member in their analysis, and grouped all foreign-born faculty into non-citizen versus citizen (Lawrence, et al., 2014), likely because more granular data is difficult to access. The academic mobility of foreign-born faculty may influence not only their own careers but also the social and economic situation of entire countries (Halevi & Moed, 2013; Pherali, 2012).

### **Foreign-Born Faculty**

HEIs must seek to recruit and retain foreign or international faculty for internationalization efforts to be successful (Fink, 2013). However, the experiences of foreign faculty who come to the United States to pursue their doctoral degree are very different than that of foreign faculty who are educated overseas and then must adapt to the American higher education system after receiving their degree (Kim, et al., 2012). Little research has focused on distinctions between foreign-born and U.S. born faculty. As of 2014, there were 42.2 million foreign-born living in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2016; Zong & Batalova, 2016), and it is projected over the next ten years, between 12 and 15 million additional foreign-born immigrants will settle in the United States (Camarota, 2012). Many foreign-born workers contribute to the American economy, particularly in the STEM fields (NSF, 2015). In fact, 22 percent of the STEM workforce in the U.S. is foreign-born, and they have a higher percentage of advanced degrees than U.S. born STEM workers (Anderson, 2016).

### **Work Satisfaction Theory**

Many attempts to study work satisfaction have applied an organizational behavior, personnel and human resource management, or organizational management theory to higher education, yet most of them have produced little empirical data (Mamiseishvili, 2011a; Mamiseishvili, 2011b; Sabharwal, 2011a). Research specifically focused on faculty work satisfaction have also utilized various theories of work satisfaction. Some based their foundation on expectancy theory (Lawler & Suttle, 1972; Vroom, 1964), or values theory (Kalleberg, 1977). Locke (1976) expressed work satisfaction as a connection between people's emotions, values and needs. Others focused on needs theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). It is the latter which has the greatest applicability to the research study. While work satisfaction is of critical importance, it is not a set occurrence and does change over time (Chen, Ployhart, Thomas, Anderson, & Bliese, 2011; Hausknecht, Sturman, & Roberson, 2011). The two factor motivation/hygiene theory of satisfaction (Herzberg, et al, 1959) differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic factors related to work satisfaction. These differences are based on the human need to achieve and experience psychological growth. Extrinsic (or hygiene) factors such as salary, benefits and institutional policies are based upon the human need to avoid dissatisfaction, but these extrinsic factors do not impinge upon daily work of faculty. Conversely, intrinsic (or internal) factors such as work satisfaction are based upon the human need most have to grow and succeed (motivation). Herzberg's theory supports the belief satisfaction and dissatisfaction are affected by different factors, and therefore cannot be measured the same way, and are not a



continuum of the same scale. Herzberg's own work (1959) was grounded in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of need as a way of understanding behavior, believing individuals have the ability to reach their highest potential when they have met all five tiers (physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization) of human needs. There are significantly higher satisfaction levels related to pay and benefits for native workers than for immigrants (Chiswick & Miller, 2009), and the status as an immigrant has a direct impact on lower wages and benefit satisfaction as compared to that of native workers (Chowhan, Zeytinoglu, & Cooke, 2012) but previous research has not been able to explain the specific factors which contributed to these findings.

### **Work Satisfaction of Foreign-Born Faculty**

When diverse faculty are hired, they often face issues related to workload and satisfaction (Lawrence, et al., 2014; Mamiseishvili, 2011a; Mamiseishvili, 2011b; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2010; Sabharwal, 2011a), and some data indicates work satisfaction is often influenced by cultural and sociological values (Lawrence, et al., 2014). Therefore work satisfaction may influence how foreign-born faculty deal with conflict, change, communication and motivation (Matic, 2008), as well as their perception of the workplace. Extensive research has examined the experiences of minority faculty (Eagan & Garvey, 2015) in HEIs. Other studies have focused on the role of gender and race, as related to their experiences (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wong, 2011) but most research on faculty satisfaction examines faculty without regard to ethnicity or race. The term 'faculty of color' typically includes all underrepresented faculty, including Hispanic, Asians, American Indians and "other" (Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009), without disaggregating the groups by race or ethnicity examining their experiences.

Several studies found international faculty to be less satisfied in the workplace than their American counterparts yet still more productive (Corley & Sabharwal, 2007; Kim, et al., 2011; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2010). However, these studies looked at variables separately and in isolation, and did not examine the relationship between satisfaction and productivity (Kim, et al., 2011). Many foreign-born faculty feel enormous pressure to produce at high levels because productivity is typically linked to gaining a tenure track position (Gheorghiu & Stephens, 2016). For example, a study by Corley & Sabharwal (2007) utilized data from the National Science Foundation's 2001 Survey of Doctorate Recipients (SDR) to examine the benefits of foreign-born academic scientists and engineers in the workforce. Foreign-born faculty who are not satisfied are less likely to remain at their institution, even after they are granted tenure (Kim, et al., 2011).

### **Factors Influencing Work Satisfaction for Foreign-born Faculty**

Work satisfaction is a complex concept and satisfaction in one area of the workplace does not necessarily carry over to satisfaction in another area (Herzberg, et al., 1959; Lawrence, et al., 2014). In order to fully understand the experiences of foreign-born faculty teaching in

United States higher education institutions, it is necessary to examine the factors presented in current research on work satisfaction, including (a) demographic characteristics, including race and gender (b) promotion and tenure; (c) research productivity and (d) institutional support (Mamiseishvili, 2011a; Mamiseishvili, 2011b). Rosser (2005) suggests that even the perception faculty members have of their academic work life has a direct and powerful impact on their satisfaction. Further, any study on the experiences of foreign-born faculty should include an acknowledgement that institutional discrimination and racism still exists for many people.

### **Promotion and Tenure**

Achieving tenure is one of the most significant events for faculty in higher education (Vogelsmeier, Phillips, Popejoy, & Bloom, 2015), but it is difficult to compare HEIs in terms of promotion and tenure requirements, as the requirements may differ even within the same college or institution (Reinsch, Titus, & Hietapelto, 2011). In all HEIs, faculty must meet specific criteria for promotion and tenure decisions. Tenure positions are considered the ultimate security (unless egregious acts of behavior occur) for a faculty member. It is granted after a review of the faculty member's teaching, scholarship and service, which are generally the agreed upon standards for the evaluation of faculty for tenure and promotion (AAUP, 2013).

In the past, tenure policies have been developed by those who had achieved tenure, usually those in the dominant groups who traditionally have been white, older males (AAUP, 2013). While it is unlikely that information is purposefully being withheld, there are assumptions made and practices that are considered common knowledge by some groups that may not be so for other groups. Decisions are made to hire diverse groups because of the value they (and their work) has to the institution, but that often does not carry over to valuing their work in the tenure process.

In order to develop a campus climate that respects the views and attitudes of every member of the college community, and to ensure parity and equity for all faculty members, transformative change is required. Consistency in tenure decisions can offer protection but by their very nature, tenure decisions are made on an individual rather than a comparative basis, with serious implications for the hiring and retention of faculty, and resulting financial consequences for the institution. In fact, half of all STEM faculty do choose to leave their institution within the first eleven years (Kaminiski & Geisler, 2012), leaving institutions with economic losses and interruptions to research and teaching agendas.

Faculty satisfaction or dissatisfaction with institutional tenure and promotion standards is linked to the availability of research support systems (McGill & Settle, 2012). Only 8% of bachelor's degree granting institutions have specific guidelines or criteria to consider international work experience in faculty promotion and tenure bids (ACE, 2012). This narrow view of work satisfaction represents a gap in the literature in regard to how foreign-born faculty fit into their institution upon hire, and as a part of tenure and promotion decisions (Mamiseishvili, 2011b). Bias and discrimination during the tenure process is linked to the diversity climate of the HEI (Castañeda, Zambrana, Marsh, Vega, Becerra, & Pérez, 2015).

Acknowledging global competencies as an asset, and making them a part of promotion and tenure decisions would support and facilitate further diversification and integration of foreign-born faculty into HEI (Gahungu, 2011). Some faculty (typically underrepresented faculty), believe that the tenure process is not clearly defined, evenly applied or consistently achieved (Street, Maisto, Merves, & Rhoades, 2012; Mamiseishvili, 2011a; Mamiseishvili, 2011b; Street, Maisto, Merves, & Rhoades, 2012). Underrepresented faculty who have not achieved tenure, and believe the system to be unfair, often leave before tenure decisions are made (Lawrence, Celis, & Ott, 2014). Many foreign-faculty are left with the belief there are major obstacles to their continued success, such as discrimination, disappointment and invisibility (Lawrence, et al., 2014), and the experiences of a faculty member can dramatically change based on their gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality and discipline (Bailey & Helvie-Mason, 2011).

These differences may contribute to higher attrition rates for foreign-born faculty than that of American faculty. Some research (Kim, et al., 2012) has found foreign-born, untenured faculty are more likely to depart their institution before attaining tenure than other faculty. Concerns for the tenure process itself is one of the most significant reasons faculty leave their campuses before tenure (Lawrence, Celis, & Ott, 2014). Sensitivity to parity and transparency in the tenure process are important components of job satisfaction for faculty (Castañeda, et al., 2015; Lawrence, et al., 2014).

### **Retention of Foreign-Born Faculty**

Research has shown that work satisfaction is the most studied factor of turnover (O'Meara, Louder, & Campbell, 2014), and while the factors that contribute to retention and work satisfaction are not well understood, there is a relationship between the work satisfaction and retention, and dissatisfaction with any area of faculty work is correlated to an intention to leave (Lawrence, et al., 2014). Underrepresented faculty who believe their institutions are not supportive leave in greater numbers (Castañeda, et al., 2015; Mamiseishvili, 2011a; Mamiseishvili, 2011b; Sabharwal, 2011a; Sabharwal, 2011b). Faculty searches and the turnover resulting from faculty departures are very costly, and can delay the work of an institution (O'Meara, et al., 2014). Some recent research (Lawrence, et al., 2014) does indicate that foreign faculty base their decision to leave on organizational factors, but each of the factors addressed may have an impact on the retention of all diverse faculty, as the strongest predictor of intent to leave an institution is overall work satisfaction and institutional control (Castañeda, et al., 2015). Many early career international faculty are unsure about whether they will remain at their current institution (Kim, et al., 2011), and the cost of replacing faculty who choose to leave are significant (Kaminski & Geisler, 2012).

Research on the stay rates of immigrants who earn their doctoral degrees in the United States is of some importance. As of 2009, 66% of foreign students who came to the United States to earn their doctoral degrees were still in the United States 10 years later (Finn, 2014), although this percentage varies greatly depending on the country of origin (Finn, 2014). China, India, and Iran have some of the highest stay rates, while Saudi Arabia, Thailand, and Jordan

are among those with the lowest stay rates (Finn, 2014). Overall, the stay rate for all foreign doctoral recipients remaining in the United States was 64 percent five years after graduation; and 66 percent for those who graduated 10 years earlier (Finn, 2014).

HEIs must acknowledge the critical role of diversity and campus climate in the achievement of institutional excellence. Faculty diversity issues can no longer be tackled simply by hiring a critical mass of underrepresented faculty (O'Meara, et al., 2014). Studies that highlight the differences in productivity in teaching and service between U.S. faculty and foreign-born faculty suggest institutions need to do more to support foreign-born faculty so that they can be a resource for the institution (Kim, et al., 2011; Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2010). Once goals and critical issues have been identified, administration must provide professional development and skills training to support the needs of individual faculty members (Childress, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Earlier research studies had concluded that further research was needed to determine the reasons why foreign-born faculty are less satisfied in the workplace than their American counterparts (Constantinou, et al., 2011; Sabharwal, 2011b). The theoretical implications of these findings supports the need for a new framework specific to foreign-born faculty members (Mamiseishvili, 2011a; Mamiseishvili, 2011b). An alternative means of predicting job satisfaction and retention must be developed for foreign-born faculty members in addition to an alternative framework for better understanding contributors to work satisfaction. Future studies of foreign-born faculty must use different methods of assessing work satisfaction and consideration given to potential confounding variables. Until then, there will be significant implications for the continued recruitment of skilled international workers (Christensen, et al., 2011; Shah, 2011), and retention of them (Corley and Sabharwal, 2007). Given the current political climate and the unknown visa implications for foreign-born in the United States, the continued recruitment and retention of foreign-born faculty will continue to be a concern. Colleges and universities continue to expand their global reach, to diversify and to become more inclusive. Therefore, understanding the needs of foreign-born faculty will continue to be a necessity.

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## **Challenges to the Internationalization of United Kingdom Universities**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative study explores the anticipated repercussions of the Brexit Referendum to the internationalization of UK universities. The referendum approved the UK leaving the European Union. This process of leaving has become known as “Brexit.” The UK has been part of the European Union for over 40 years and this membership fostered the international exchange of students and academics. University campuses across the UK have experienced significant internationalization. The study explored emergent concerns on the challenges that higher education institutions would confront as the process of Brexit continues to develop. The research draws on testimony given to the Education Committee of the House of Commons, government documents, media reports, fieldwork and interviews of UK academics. Findings are presented thematically as a narrative and include concerns about potential reduction of international students and faculty, decrease in international research collaboration and research funding, and the possible negative impact on campus and community climate.

Keywords: universities, internationalization, multiculturalism, Europe, United Kingdom, Brexit

The United Kingdom has a large and vibrant higher education system, with deep historical roots and traditions. The quality of UK universities is recognized worldwide and has attracted leading researchers from the European Union and every corner of the world. Higher education institutions in the UK have increased their global connections throughout the years, especially since the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 by the ministers of education of 29 European countries. The United Kingdom was one of the original signers of the Bologna Declaration and has been an active member in the European Higher Education Area from the beginning of the Bologna Process. The ministers of education of the countries involved in the Bologna Process and other stakeholders acknowledged that cultural richness was a valuable asset to the European Higher Education Area. The benefits of transnational experiences were widely discussed and considered important factors to achieve quality in higher education (Berlin Communiqué, 2003; Bologna Declaration, 1999; Bologna Working Group, 2005; ENQA, 2005; ESG, 2015; Ríos, 2011).

Among the key agenda objectives of the Bologna Declaration was to attain international mobility of students and academics, which resulted in a significant internationalization of UK university campuses (Bologna Declaration, 1999; Ríos, 2011). The importance of the European Union for UK universities cannot be overstated. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) that

accredits UK universities has held membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) for many years and is included on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). Universities in the UK maintain partnerships and collaborative research endeavors with numerous institutions in the European Union (ENQA, 2005; Gaskell, 2015; QAA, 2016; UUK, 2013).

Public universities in the UK are autonomous entities and as such, they can decide their own missions and strategic priorities (Gaskell, 2015; UUK, 2013, p.3). In the year 2017 there were about 160 higher education institutions receiving public funding and 2.32 million students studying at UK higher education institutions. According to figures provided by the *Universities UK* organization, in the academic year 2016-2017 there were 134,835 students from European Union countries and 307,540 students from other countries not in the European Union enrolled in UK higher education institutions at the time (UUK, 2017, para. 1- 2). The flow of students and academics from continental Europe to higher education institutions in the United Kingdom has brought a wealth of international talent and multiculturalism to its universities.

### **Background on Brexit**

The United Kingdom became part of the European Economic Community in 1973, and over the years it has signed a number of treaties intended to produce or encourage economic support and integration among the participating member countries (Suthersanen, 2017). Economic and social circumstances, such as the financial worldwide crisis and the surge of immigrants and refugees across Europe, combined to prompt the so-called “Brexit Referendum.” The term “Brexit” was coined from the words “Britain” and “exit,” to mean Britain leaving the European Union. In 2016, then UK Prime Minister Cameron called for a non-binding referendum on the EU membership. According to Welfens (2016), the electorate did not receive essential information on the expected economic effects of leaving the EU. The Brexit referendum took place on June 23, 2016, and the result of the referendum favored leaving the European Union. The outcome was close, 51.9 to 48.1 percent, and the results were unexpected. The decision to leave the EU “represents a rather surprising decision by the UK electorate and it is a historical result with implications for the UK, Europe and the world economy” (Welfens, 2016, Para 1). As Suthersanen (2017) has commented “the effects of this monumental event still remain ambiguous and murky. This is all the more so as there is no precedent of a Member State withdrawing from the Union” (p. 98, para 5). The vote to leave came after a political pro-Brexit campaign that fostered fear of immigration and disparaged immigrants. Subsequent to the referendum a wave of hate crime was unleashed across the United Kingdom (NPCC, 2016). The immediate repercussions of this negative climate for international students and academics are addressed in this article. This research explores the potential impact of Brexit on the internationalization of United Kingdom higher education institutions. At the time of the writing of this paper, the United Kingdom continues to struggle with decisions about the Brexit referendum and the relationship of the UK with continental Europe.

### **Method and Procedure**

The research presented in this paper is part of a larger study by the author on quality assurance in UK higher education. While in the UK conducting interviews on quality assurance issues in UK universities, I discovered there were widespread concerns about the effect that the split from continental Europe, could have on international research collaboration and mobility of students and scholars. This research is of qualitative nature and draws on testimony given to the Education Committee of the House of Commons, government documents, and media reports, as well as fieldwork and interviews of UK academics. The research explores the possible repercussions of Brexit to the internationalization of United Kingdom higher education institutions, as seen through the eyes of academics. The field research was carried out after the initial Brexit referendum had taken place, and included research visits to universities and accrediting agencies in the United Kingdom.

This study uses a qualitative approach exploring the participants' understanding of the foreseen effects of Brexit as a central phenomenon. Faculty members and university administrators in universities across the UK were interviewed at their own institutions. Creswell (2008) explains that a researcher using qualitative methods “purposefully or intentionally selects individuals and sites” that might provide answers to understand the phenomenon being studied. Qualitative research also “provides voice to individuals who may not be heard otherwise” (Creswell, 2008 p. 213, para. 2). This research follows Creswell's definitions of qualitative inquiry, and the qualitative interviewing approaches recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Seidman (2013). Qualitative theories stress the subjectivity of the participants' experience and assert that individuals construct their own meaning from the experiences lived. Qualitative methodologies were particularly suitable for this research where the participants' experiences and perspectives were sought. The research was conducted by the author of this paper as sole investigator.

### **Sources of Data**

Accrediting agencies and higher education institutions across the UK were contacted and interviews were arranged with individuals in the organizations who had expertise in the area of my research inquiry. Participants include administrators and faculty members in eleven universities in the UK and experts representing the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) which is the accreditor of UK higher education institutions. With the purpose of getting the perspectives of academics from different segments of the UK's higher education system, interviews were held in regional institutions of different sizes, as well as in renowned universities such as Oxford and Cambridge (Ríos, 2017).

For the research reported here, 12 academics were interviewed. All of the interviewees had been involved in processes of quality assurance at their institutions. Demographics and cultural background of the participants was not considered. The names and affiliations of the academics interviewed are not included in the narrative in order to protect their anonymity; they are referred as “participants” throughout this article.

According to Creswell, qualitative research can be seen as an “emerging process” in which “participants set the direction” of the narrative (Creswell, 2008 pp. 140-141). As the unique investigator, I facilitated the interviews and ensured that the qualitative inquiry methodology was followed. During individual interviews, most participants brought up the issue of Brexit; in some cases, a general open-ended question was given to the participants: “What is happening with Brexit?” This open-ended question became the research question for the qualitative study presented here. Participants were allowed to set the direction of the narrative and elaborate on the description of their own experiences and views. The open-ended question invited participants to share their views. Recurrent themes in the narratives were then identified and categorized.

Consistent with qualitative research procedures, the emerging themes from the participants’ narratives were triangulated with other data sources and analyzed for consistency. The sources used for triangulation are included in the discussion below. Creswell (2008) has stated that “Qualitative inquirers triangulate among different data sources to enhance the accuracy of a study” (p. 266 para. 4). Springer (2010) concurs, indicating that triangulation is “a way of corroborating information by comparing the information obtained from multiple sources” (p. 394 para. 2). The use of triangulation was valuable for this research because it allowed the incorporation of multiple perspectives and sources. The process of triangulation permitted correlation of the participants’ experiences with apprehensions across the country.

For purposes of triangulation, documentary information was gathered from minutes of the House of Commons and other government documents. On January 11, 2017, several university professors appeared as expert witnesses at a hearing of the Education Committee of the House of Commons, which took place in Oxford. The professors answered questions from the Members of Parliament and provided oral evidence regarding the impact that exiting the European Union could have on UK higher education. Some of the answers given to the House of Commons by the following academics are quoted in this paper: Professor Catherine Barnard, Professor of EU Law, University of Cambridge; Professor Alastair Buchan, Dean of Medicine at the University of Oxford; Professor Alistair Fitt, Vice-Chancellor, Oxford Brookes University; Professor Stephanie Haywood, Head of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at the University of Hull, representing the Engineering Professors’ Council; Professor Lyndal Roper, Regius Professor of History, University of Oxford; and Professor Margret Wintermantel, Professor of Psychology and President of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The names of these professors are included in this article, as their answers are a public record.

Media reports and documents posted in the websites of some universities were used as a source of information to triangulate data bearing on the Brexit effects. Given that newspapers and other media outlets in the UK gave extensive coverage to the concerns that the universities had after the Brexit referendum, and reported the resulting surge of hate crime, some of the quoted material comes from these sources.

## Findings

Following the qualitative methodology, the participants' views are presented through a "narrative" merging the identified themes from the interviews with answers from expert witnesses to the House of Commons and reports from media outlets. In qualitative research the interviewer elicits the participants' personal experiences in their environments and the resulting account is articulated in a "narrative" focused on the subjective experiences of the participants, as opposed to a quantitative report of findings (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013; Springer, 2010).

The broad umbrella theme that emerged in the interviews was "Challenges to Internationalization" and has been used in the title of this article. Participants described their concerns about the possible negative effects of Brexit on the internationalization of their institutions. The analysis of the umbrella theme produced several sub-themes which are incorporated across this paper. Sub-thematic categories include apprehensions about the Brexit impact on their internationally collaborative research and partnerships with EU institutions, potential loss of European research funding, decline in the number of European Union students and other international students attending UK universities, reduction of foreign faculty members and researchers, and deterioration of campus and community climate.

While a narrative discussion is "the primary form for representing findings in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2008, p. 262 para. 2); representing the qualitative findings visually is also recommended (Creswell, 2008, p. 261). Miles & Huberman (1994) indicate that in qualitative research a visual display such as a figure, chart, table or diagram can be useful. In order to have a visual representation of the findings, a diagram illustrating the umbrella theme and sub-themes is included (see Figure 1 below).

The narrative that follows incorporates the participants' views about the different challenges to internationalization that Brexit might bring to their institutions. The findings discussed reveal merely a snapshot of the concerns of the participants and in the country as reflected in the media, government documents, and testimonies presented to the Education Committee of the House of Commons at a particular time.

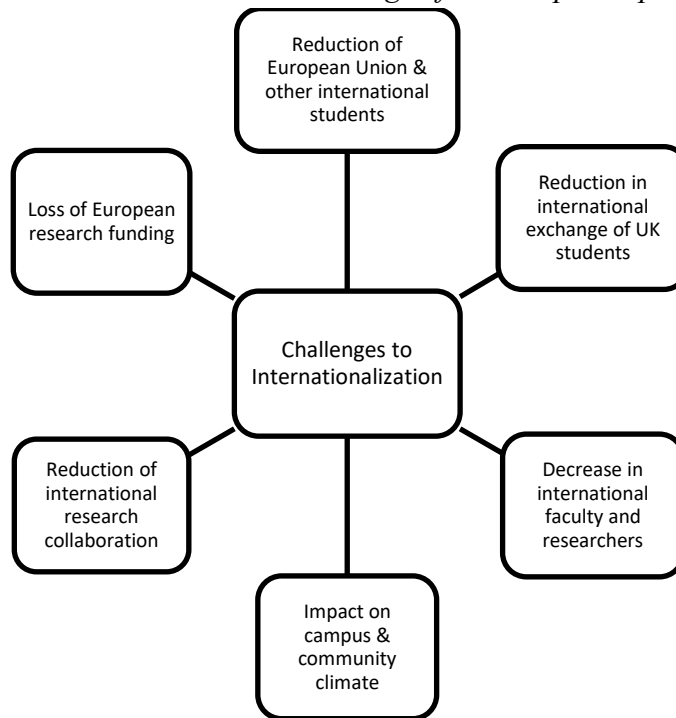
### **Significance of International Students and Academics for UK Higher Education**

Participants described the importance of international students for their particular institutions and for the UK university system. Several of the study's participants referred to the academic benefits of the presence of international students in their classrooms and university campuses. According to the participants, the number of students from European countries enrolling at their institutions had substantially increased in the last two decades. In their narratives, participants pointed out the many ways in which international students enhance the academic life of their institutions bringing multiple viewpoints to university classrooms. As I have discussed elsewhere, it is widely recognized that international students help to increase the cultural diversity of higher education institutions. They bring countless ethnicities, languages,

traditions, values, cultures, religions and different ways to understand the world (Ríos, 2017). Two participants mentioned the international recruiting efforts of their institutions or programs. Review of the literature indicates that in the last two decades, universities in the United Kingdom have intensified their efforts for recruiting international students from around the world and from continental Europe (Royal Society, 2016; UUK, 2017).

Figure 1

*Diagram of umbrella theme and sub-themes that emerged from the participants' narratives*



In the view of participants, international faculty members and students have enriched the academic life of higher education institutions in the UK. In the interviews, participants expressed concerns about a potential decrease in international faculty and researchers. Participants from regional and smaller universities were particularly concerned, as it is more difficult for lesser known institutions to recruit renowned international academics. The views of the participants coincide with data gathered by the *Royal Society* and *Universities UK* (Royal Society, 2016; UUK, 2017). Research universities in the United Kingdom attract prominent scholars and researchers from every corner of the world (Ríos, 2017). A report by the Royal Society (2016), estimated that at least 28% of the academic staff in UK universities were non-UK nationals and that half of the students enrolled in PhD programs were international students (Royal Society, 2016, p. 4).

In some elite research institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, a substantial number of academics and researchers have come from outside the United Kingdom. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, Professor Leszek Borysiewicz has explained: “The University [of



Cambridge] depends on the talent of students and staff from across the world. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of the university's academic staff (including 27 per cent of our postdoctoral researchers) are non-UK EU nationals" (Borysiewicz, 2016, para. 6). Professor Buchan, Dean of Medicine at the University of Oxford, specified the importance of postgraduate EU students for research: "The quality of the postgraduate research students is absolutely paramount for driving the research activity in the country and that is where the largest proportion is coming from Europe..." (Buchan, 2017, p. 17, para. 4).

When asked by members of the Parliament if the diversity of the academics was important for the quality of teaching in higher education. Professor Stephanie Haywood, President of the Engineering Professors' Council answered: "It is very important. In engineering we tend to have a lot of overseas lecturers anyway and not just from the rest of the EU but from China and Russia. That diversity is absolutely great. I would not like to lose the people from the EU because they bring a different perspective..." (Haywood, 2017, p. 39, para. 9).

Margret Wintermantel, professor of psychology and President of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) expressed her concern about the possible reduction of research collaboration and exchanges of students and academics, stating: "I do not know at which point I should begin, but the networks of researchers that were developed in the last 30 years are very important... we have a lot of publications in co-operation between German and British researchers and other researchers. We fear that the quality of research conducted with institutions such as the Max Planck Institute and DAAD will— *schaden nehmen* [will be damaged] ... we fear the number of German students who would love to go the United Kingdom will have problems" (Wintermantel, 2017, p. 24, para. 7 & p. 25, para. 1 & 6).

In their narratives, most participants stressed the significance of international partnerships for their institutions and highlighted their international exchanges. An analysis of the websites of the participants' institutions corroborates the importance that their universities give to international collaboration. Partnerships across the globe are evident in the websites and recruitment materials of most UK universities, which show multiple international endeavors. The website of the University of Cambridge includes the following statement: "The University of Cambridge is a highly international community. One-third of all full-time students at the University and nearly two-thirds of all post-graduate students are from countries outside the UK, as are most of Cambridge's 4,000 post-doctoral researchers" (Global Cambridge, 2016, para. 1).

### **Potential Decline in the Number of European Union Students**

Participants recognize that students from different backgrounds provide important contributions to the learning experience and to the campus environment. One of the common concerns shared by the participants was the anticipated decline in the number of students coming from continental Europe as a result of Brexit. During the House of Commons meeting, Barnard (2017) pointed out that there was already a decline in applications from European Union students at the University of Cambridge, stating: "This year at Cambridge we have seen a 14% reduction in the number of applications from the European Union at undergraduate level" (Barnard, 2017,

p. 14, para. 6). It is important to acknowledge that studying at Cambridge is the dream of many students and that turning down the opportunity is a significant event. According to Professor Barnard, the university surveyed potential students who had declined to come to Cambridge at postgraduate level, and there were, among other factors, concerns about an “anti-immigrant sentiment” in the UK and “uncertainty over future research collaboration” (Barnard, 2017, p. 15, para. 1).

As previously discussed, the number of European Union student applications to universities in the United Kingdom declined after the Brexit referendum (Ríos, 2017). This was extensively reported in the media and was one of the sub-themes that emerged in the interviews. According to one media article, a Welsh university experienced the withdrawal of the applications of “more than 100 prospective European students” (One Hundred Cancel, 2016, para. 1).

Expressing his apprehension about the effect of the Brexit referendum on prospective international students, Fitt (2017) indicated in his testimony to the House of Commons that a polling after the Brexit referendum showed that: “43% of prospective international students from all over the world felt that Brexit had affected their decision to study in the UK and, of those students, 83% said it made them less likely to study in the UK” (Fitt, 2017, p. 15, para. 2).

On February 1, 2017 the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service in the UK (UCAS) released a study of undergraduate applications that were filed by the 15 January deadline, which is considered a reliable indicator of the number of students coming to UK higher education for the year 2017. In its study, UCAS indicates that there was a decline in European Union applicants to United Kingdom higher education institutions, specifying that the number of applications from European Union candidates had “decreased by 7% to 42,070” (UCAS, 2017, para. 4).

The potential decline in the number of international students, applying from countries outside the European Union, became another sub-theme in the participants’ narratives. International students from around the world, in particular ethnic minorities, have communicated their apprehensions about the climate towards foreigners across the United Kingdom. According to media reports, this climate has deteriorated since the Brexit referendum. In their narratives, some of the participants voiced their concerns about the environment for international students, particularly on the safety of these students when they go outside campus. Participants indicated that international students and their families needed assurance of being accepted and welcomed. If international students are worried about their own safety, they could decide to select a different country for their studies.

### **A Climate of Tension for International Scholars & Students**

The outcome of the referendum became a pretext for racist and extremist individuals to attack immigrants and foreigners, given that the rhetoric of some politicians provoked resentment against people in these groups. International students, international academics, and their families were affected by the upsurge of hate crime. They were perceived as foreigners, particularly if

they were from an ethnic minority group or if they had an accent different from the local population (Ríos, 2017).

Participants conveyed distress about how these nationwide incidents could impact their communities and campus climate. University officials made statements supporting international students and minorities and condemning racist incidents. Lord Bilimoria, Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, stated: “The referendum itself has unleashed a wave of hate crime and vitriol directed towards foreign migrants, EU and non-EU alike” (Bilimoria, 2017, para. 7).

Police reports revealed that racist and xenophobic incidents escalated immediately after the referendum. The BBC published an article about the flood of hate crime, which included a chart summarizing the statistics of hate crimes reported to the police. There was a 57% increase of hate crimes in the 4 days after the Brexit referendum (Kelly, August 10, 2016). The media across the UK reported the escalation in hate crime incidents. There were multiple reports about how some minority groups had become the target of hate crime across the UK (Burnett, 2016; Kelly, 2016; “Mosque in Cumbernauld,” 2016; “Olympic Athlete,” 2016; Sherwood, 2016; Townsend, 2016; Weaver, 2016). The National Police Chiefs’ Council recounted 6,193 hate related crimes across the United Kingdom from June 16, the week before the Brexit referendum, through July 14, three weeks after the referendum (NPCC, 2016, para.1). There were media reports indicating that the week after the Brexit referendum “more than 300 hate crime incidents were reported to a national online portal” (York, 2016, para. 2).

The media reports about the wave of hate crime in the UK became international news and crossed the Atlantic. An article in *The Washington Post* described the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments in the UK, indicating that “the xenophobic passions unleashed by the Brexit vote have created a new normal of fear and intimidation for the country’s approximately 8.5 million foreign-born residents” (Witte, 2016, para. 3). According to the *Office for National Statistics*, in the year 2016, the overall UK population was estimated to be about 65 million (ONS, 2016).

Even renowned individuals such as Olympic athlete Jazmin Sawyers, BBC presenter Trish Adudu, and Lord Bilimoria, Chancellor of the University of Birmingham and Member of Parliament, experienced incidents of hate (Bilimoria, 2016; Hate Crime, 2016; Olympic Athlete, 2016). Addressing the Parliament, Lord Bilimoria stated: “I have lived in this country since I came here from India as a 19-year-old student in the early 80s. In 35 years I have never experienced any hate crime except for this year—and this year I have received it in abundance” (Bilimoria, 2016, para 9).

In some university towns and campuses, foreign-born residents and ethnic minorities experienced antagonism and aggressions. UK universities have had, for some time, “Equality and Diversity Units;” these offices have made clear the rules against hate crime. In some universities, anti-hate events were organized in the aftermath of the referendum. For example, the University of Oxford held an anti-bullying week organized by the Chemistry department and the “Equality & Diversity Unit” emphasizing the value of diversity: “Our staff and students come from over 140 countries and we are proud that modern Oxford is increasingly diverse ... we

work with colleagues (both staff and students) across the University to make sure that our community is inclusive and welcoming for everyone” (Oxford, 2016, para. 1).

In another example of a campus responding to diversity and inclusion concerns, the Cambridge Polish Studies department organized a panel discussion on the challenges faced by the Polish community as a result of Brexit. The explanation of the purpose of the panel discussion included the following statement: “Millions of EU nationals - including almost a million Poles - living and working in the UK face a period of great uncertainty, with ‘Brexit’ negotiations perhaps set to commence in 2017. At the same time, anti-migrant sentiment has been on the rise in Britain, with a significant spike in hate crimes after the referendum, especially against Poles” (Cambridge Polish Studies, 2016, para. 1).

The Oxford City Council expressed its concern about the rise of hate incidents after a Muslim woman reported an incident of hate in the city of Oxford. Council members were distressed that minority individuals had become a target of racial intolerance as a result of the rhetoric against immigrants used during the Brexit campaign. In its Minutes for the July 2016 meeting, the Oxford City Council made a cross party motion condemning the rise in hate crimes. The cross party motion states that Brexit: “has stimulated a wave of hostility towards migrants and ethnic minorities ... We are particularly concerned by the reported rise in racism, xenophobia and hate crimes since the referendum, and wish to place on record our condemnation of such crimes ...” (Oxford City Council, 2016, pp. 6-7).

The reported reduction of European Union student applications to British universities after the referendum prompted university leaders to issue declarations regarding the worth of international students to the academic life of British institutions, stating that “European students continue to be welcome at UK universities and that their contribution to academic life is invaluable. More than 125,000 EU students are currently studying at universities across the UK and they make an important cultural and academic contribution to campus life” (Goodfellow, 2017, para. 6).

### **Apprehensions about the Loss of Talented Students and Researchers**

British universities have raised their prestige and ranking by pursuing excellent students and faculty from every corner of the world, and this has brought multicultural perspectives to the institutions; the highest ranked universities in the UK have an extraordinary concentration of international talent in many of their programs. British universities have been increasing their international recruitment efforts in recent years with “aggressive international student recruitment” strategies (Nicol, 2012, p. 412). The recruiting efforts have brought international students to British universities even in remote areas of the country. There are some programs in which international students and researchers are the majority (McIvor, 2016). Participants in the study voiced apprehension about the potential decline in the quality of programs that rely on international researchers and that attract extremely talented international students. A number of the authors and the literature reviewed have pointed out similar issues (Adams, 2016; Barnard, 2017; Burns, 2016; Ríos, 2017; Royal Society, 2016).

Professor Catherine Barnard, an expert in EU Law, from the University of Cambridge referred to the enormous talent that European Union students bring to the UK, especially to certain science and exact science fields: “They bring excellent quality. Trinity is the largest of the Cambridge colleges and it is also number one in the league tables of the colleges for performance. The reason for that is largely attributable to Trinity’s brilliance in maths [sic] and that brilliance is much to do with the input of our Hungarian, Polish and Romanian students” (Barnard, 2017, p. 3, para. 3).

International students contribute to the learning experience of British students, who also benefit from opportunities to study in other countries on exchange visits. An example mentioned by three of the participant is the Erasmus program, which over the years, has helped British students to study abroad and to learn other languages. One of the participants anticipated that with Brexit, UK students will have reduced opportunities to interact with international students or to study in continental Europe. There is a wide consensus among academics regarding the importance of British students being exposed to other languages and cultures. Kohl (2016) articulated her distress about how Brexit will impact the opportunities of British students to learn foreign languages and value other cultures: “[O]ur young people have been sold short on language skills and the breadth of cultural understanding that comes from learning about other cultures. In the years ahead, it will be more important than ever to nurture an appreciation of diversity and cultural agility” (Kohl, 2016, para. 5).

Outstanding international students and scholars have worldwide options; research institutions in continental Europe or Asia would be delighted to hire the best researchers currently working in the UK. Professor Paul O’Prey, Vice-Chancellor, University of Roehampton has written: “Our success as a sector has been built on our ability to attract the most talented students and academics from around Europe. The risk of losing our access to this talent pool is, I believe, the biggest threat that Brexit presents to our universities” (O’Prey, 2016, para. 5). Some of the concerns shared by the participants mirrored Vice-Chancellor O’Prey’s insights as they had apprehensions that their universities could lose some of the brightest students and faculty.

British academics have established collaborative research linkages with colleagues in their fields, and a substantial number of international academics work in UK universities. British universities are “dependent on their ties to Europe: 1 in 3 academics in UK universities are foreign, and EU residents make up a significant proportion of that” (Bilimoria, 2017, para. 4). British academics value their international research associates and their contributions. As stated by Vice-Chancellor O’Prey: “We need to ensure that academics and their families can continue to come here to work – and that British academics continue to have access to and influence within European research networks and collaborations” (O’Prey, 2016, para. 5). International research collaboration and student exchanges were definitely important for every participant in the study.

Dr. Julia Goodfellow, President of *Universities UK* and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kent stated: “We want to play a role in working with international counterparts to

address the great global challenges of our age, to seek out and work with the best minds wherever they are” (Goodfellow, 2016, p. 7, para. 3). Vice-Chancellor O’Prey continued: “But we need to go further and remove unhelpful barriers to students coming to the UK from outside the EU too. These students enrich the learning experience of all students, and provide an influential network for British students” (O’Prey, 2016, para. 7). Not only in the literature, but from the participants’ narratives there was an overall consensus that the participation of international students is helpful in many ways for British students.

While the aftermath of the Brexit referendum has presented challenges to universities in the UK, institutions are committed to build on their internationally recognized prestige and to continue collaborating globally. Multiple initiatives focused on international issues have emerged at institutional and system-wide levels. The leading organization of higher education institutions, *Universities UK*, has included in its strategic priorities doubling UK students’ international mobility, increasing global education partnerships, and achieving a global research impact grounded on international research collaboration (UUK, 2018). A branch of *Universities UK*, *Universities UK International (UUKi)*, was created to support the internationalization and international activities of 136 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As the *Universities UK* president explains: “We are best when we are outward looking, globally networked and welcoming to the world” (Goodfellow, 2016, p. 7, para. 3).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study has explored the anticipated impact of Brexit on the internationalization of United Kingdom universities. The qualitative findings presented are just a snapshot of the insights of academics into how Brexit could impact higher education institutions. Numerous concerns about a possible decline in international students and scholars were found. Most serious concerns expressed were about the deterioration of civility and growth of hostility for foreigners across the country, which affects international students and academics. It was found that UK universities value the presence of international students and scholars in their institutions, a presence which is the result of years of recruitment effort. Participants acknowledged that UK students and faculty receive enormous benefits from their interaction with their international peers. There is a recognition among the participants that the quality of British universities is linked to the talent that institutions have been able to gather from throughout the world. International faculty and students bring a treasure of cultural paradigms that enrich teaching and learning in United Kingdom universities. The myriad of languages spoken by international students and scholars promote interest in learning foreign languages. The presence of international scholars in British universities also enhances campus life, bringing a global perspective to research endeavors and an international dimension to classroom discussions.

The concerns expressed throughout this paper seem aggravated by participants’ sense of not knowing what will happen and the uncertainty of the impact of what may come on higher education. One of the limitations of this study is that the full effect that Brexit will have on the UK university system simply cannot yet be known. The British government is still in the process

of deciding how to proceed, and is not possible to predict the outcomes. The findings presented here should be tested in time, both qualitatively and quantitatively, after the United Kingdom separation from the European Union has actually occurred. Suggestions for further research include the study of the financial impact of Brexit in UK higher education and the economic impact on universities of losing European funding for research; further quantitative and qualitative research is also needed about the participation of international students and scholars in UK higher education. These areas were beyond the boundaries of this study.

The responses of participants in this study demonstrate that academics recognize that there are important challenges ahead in order to sustain research collaboration and other academic exchanges with EU institutions. Triangulated information collected from a variety of sources corroborate the participants concerns. The challenges forecasted by participants can be summarized by what professor Bhopal has written: “In the current post-Brexit climate, marred by insecurity, fragility and risk, universities need to communicate their wider values and commitment to engaging with heterogeneous communities of students” (Bhopal, 2017, para. 8). In light of these challenges, British universities have imperative responsibilities. As a Cambridge professor has stated: “More than ever, it will be the job of universities to champion the values of openness, tolerance and mutual cooperation, and ensure that young people can feel part of the changing world rather than being isolated from it” (Kohl, 2016, para. 4).

The United Kingdom has a remarkable higher education system facing numerous challenges in the next few years as the process of Brexit is resolved. As I conclude the writing of this paper, the United Kingdom continues to struggle with decisions about Brexit and the relationship of the UK with continental Europe.

University leaders and the professoriate will play a central role in protecting the internationalization and values of multiculturalism in their institutions. Future research will be needed after political decisions are made, to reexamine their impact in universities across the United Kingdom.

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## **Internal Coordination as an Internationalization Strategy of International Student Offices: A Case Study of Ontario Universities**

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### **Abstract**

Managing cultural differences between international students and host university members is a significant challenge for international student office (ISO) staff at Ontario universities. The current influx of incoming international students to the province of Ontario continues to stretch ISOs' limited resources and support functions. This study focused on understanding these Ontario universities' international student offices and their strategic initiatives to remedy the existing challenge of assisting international students more effectively. This qualitative study applied the case study approach for its collection and analysis of data from several data sources: staff member interviews, public documents, and notes taken during field visits. The study found that the international student offices functioned as coordinating units to work with other appropriate offices to provide services to their international students while they shared their expertise with other units. The study also found the international student offices extended their coordination functions to external entities.

Keywords: internationalization of higher education, Canadian universities, organizational analysis

In the context of global student mobility, economic and academic drivers force many countries to accept an increasing number of international students to their universities and other post-secondary institutions. Canada is no exception to the global competition of international student recruitment. The Canadian federal government uses highly skilled labor recruitment through higher education as an immigration strategy and notes its positive economic impacts as shown by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DAFIT, 2012, 2014) and (Guo & Jamal, 2007). In Canada, at the federal level, admitting international students is perceived as an integral part of university internationalization effort, and is mainly "...driven by a combination of skilled migration and revenue-generating approaches, and international branding" (Gürüz, 2011, p. 279). One of the most recent reports by Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) explained that Canada saw the international student population increase between 2008 and 2015 by 92% (CBIE, 2016). Canadian universities enroll five percent of the total international students in the world, and are classified, along with Japan, Russia, and Spain, as one of the emerging "new players in the international student market in the past few years" (OECD, 2013, p. 2). Should the current trends continue, Canada will see a progressive increase in international students in the future (Choudaha & Chang, 2012).

Not only has university internationalization become important federal policy rhetoric, but international student recruitment has also been a strategic goal among Canadian universities in the past decade as shown in Association of Canadian Colleges and Universities (AUCC, 2007, 2014; CBIE, 2016; Stephenson, 2018). At the institutional level, however, one of today's most difficult challenges among Canadian universities is managing the student diversity represented on their campuses due to the international student population increase. The international student body represents great diversity by nationalities. As many as 187 national origins are represented in the international student population of Canadian universities (CBIE, 2016). Although the same report clarified that these international students come mainly from five countries (China, India, France, South Korea, and the United States), 187 different national origins in the international student body among Canadian universities may be seen as a potential source of considerable impact among the Canadian campuses when these campuses need to manage their diverse organizational diversity.

While the governmental policy discourse of inbound student mobility into Canadian universities emphasizes a continuous effort to increase the number of international students, the same policy discourse fails to emphasize providing quality services to these international students in these universities without increasing appropriate resources. Only recently, the governmental and institutional stakeholders recognized the importance of maintaining a high quality academic experience as an essential part of the long-term stability of Canada's inbound international students (Stephenson, 2018). A significant gap in the current academic and policy discourse is understanding international student offices' specific approaches to maintaining the quality of these international students' academic and social experience at Canadian higher education institutions when these offices have limited resources and functions, as pertaining to the economic and labor rationales noted above. Using an organizational perspective to describe their experience of assisting international students provides new understanding of internationalization of Canadian universities while maintaining the quality of students' academic and social experience. Due to the provincial mandate of the post-secondary sector in Canada, this study focused on five universities out of 20 publicly funded universities in province of Ontario. Ontario hosts the largest international student population in Canada (DAFIT, 2012, 2014; Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, 2009).

The research question for this study asks, "what specific organizational strategies do Ontario universities engage in for maintaining the quality of international students' academic and social experience despite an increasing number of international students at the host universities?" Designed as a qualitative study, this work uses a Case Study approach (Yin, 2014) as its main methodological framework. Scott's organizational theory (1992, 2003) was applied to conceptualize common strategies implemented by international student services offices at these Ontario universities. Specifically, the study investigated the function of international student offices and their strategic actions to collaborate with other departments in order to provide necessary services that maintained the quality of international students' academic and social experience during their degree programs. Although some findings might appear familiar to the

field practitioners and researchers of International Higher Education, integrating an organizational theory into studies of internationalization of higher education will contribute to articulating structural recommendations to the existing issues of international student services.

### **Theoretical framework: Internationalization of Ontario higher education from an organizational perspective**

#### **A need for an organizational focus in studies of internationalization of higher education.**

Contemporary universities are increasingly diverse organizations because of their members' backgrounds and heritages, so research into their operations requires finding effective ways of analyzing their complexity. Changing university demographics caused by cross-border faculty and student mobility is one of the significant organizational issues in higher education studies today. However, it was found that the current literature on the issue is somewhat limited to certain topical areas: i.e., conceptual frameworks (i.e., Knight, 2004, 2006; de Wit, 2002; Zha, 2003) and strategic planning and management (Childress, 2009; Rudzki, 1995). These studies in the internationalization of higher education institutions recognized the above organizational issues, but were unable to explicitly apply organizational frameworks in order address structural challenges and changes of higher education institutions in specific national contexts. For example, although Manning (2012) and Scott (2015) raised member diversity issues in higher education in their organizational analysis, their work focuses on the U.S. context. Their organizational analysis appears to lack a deliberate attention to the context of the international dimension of higher education institutions. Bolman and Deal (2013) also identified organizational diversity issues in their organizational leadership framework, but their work included no universities. Scott (2015) suggested greater advancement could be made to address the current complexity in the U.S. higher education institutions from the organizational studies perspectives. More importantly, greater numbers of organizational studies are needed in higher education which must be extended to include issues of managing organizational diversity within the context of internationalization studies.

The conceptual design of this study aligns a theoretical framework of organizational studies to fit the study of internationalization in higher education. It is beneficial to articulate some of the differences between organizations and institutions of higher education. When they addressed the internationalization of higher education, scholars often define universities as both organizations and institutions, without much differentiation between the two concepts, (i.e., Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Forest, 2006; de Wit, Argarwal, Said, Sehoole, & Sirozi, 2008; Sato, 2003). However, differentiating an organization from an institution highlights the study of specific internal challenges and changes at individual universities. Scott (1992, 2003) defines an organization as a combination of four cross-classified systems models (Closed, Open, Rational, Natural) depending on their characteristics. These cross-classified systems models include Type I, Type II, Type III, and Type IV, and are also illustrated in the Chart 1. For example, Type II Systems Model is a Closed-Rational Systems Model organization which describes a perspective

of an organization as a cooperative system by focusing its analysis on internal processes including such a concept as “the mobilization of resources” (Scott, 1992, p.169). On the other hand, the Type IV Systems Model is an Open-Natural Systems Model organization which includes such characteristics as resource dependency and organizational learning. Scott also recognizes that his cross-classifications is not always clear cut in their analytical applications. In contrast, also according to Scott (2004), an institution is a governing process and mechanism that provides stability and meaning while guiding social actions through regulatory “structure, schemas, rules and routines” (p. 408). Furthermore, an institution includes “groups and organizations conforming to these rules [being] accorded legitimacy, a condition contributing to their survival” (p. 408). These distinctions were applied to a set of case studies of private liberal arts colleges in the United States (Hiratsuka, 2004) and in Japan (Hiratsuka, 2017). Borrowing from Scott’s synthesis, this study defines a group of university organizations sharing a jurisdictional boundary as an institution, a clarification that focuses on individual university organizations. Therefore, this study addresses individual universities as university organizations, or simply, organizations.

Chart 1

*Organizational Matrix based on Scott (1992, 2003)*

	Rational	Natural
Closed	Type I Systems Model	Type II Systems Model
Open	Type III Systems Model	Type IV Systems Model

***Canadian university systems.*** In addition to clarifying differences between organizations and institutions in this study, applying the above theoretical framework by Scott (1992, 2003) to the study also allows the analysis to focus on a set of university organizations within the Canadian jurisdiction: Ontario universities. One major consideration for studying universities in Canada is the decentralization of the nation’s higher education mandate; Higher education in Canada falls under the jurisdiction of its provinces (i.e., Stephenson, 2018; Guruz, 2011; Kolasch, 2009). There is no federal ministry or agency responsible across Canada, although there are several voluntary organizations such as Universities Canada that hold no regulatory authority (Lang, 2001; Jones, 2009; Clark et al., 2009). While some general characteristics can be used to describe Canada’s universities, such as that they are “almost universally public, secular, highly accessible, comprehensive, and binary” (Lang, 2001, p.2), no universal legal or policy classification exists in Canada. Canadian higher education is instead a diverse collection of institutional models, historical pathways of development that differ in different regions, and current conditions that vary geographically including the nation’s bilingual and, in some ways, bicultural heritage (Lang, 2001). More recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) recognized Canada’s indigenous heritage and the past violence to the First Nations committed by the Canadian government, including in the sector of Education (TRC Report, 2015). Although a set of common patterns is evident in the Canadian universities, a

diversity of models and heritages in Canada requires focusing at the provincial jurisdiction level to avoid over-generalizations

### **The existing challenge of Ontario universities: Managing increasing organizational diversity.**

In the case of Ontario, increasing student diversity among university organizations has become a significant organizational challenge. Ontario is one of the most accessible Canadian higher education sectors and Ontario universities play an essential role in providing access to the higher education sector (Clark et al., 2009). As a result of the high level of access to Ontario universities, these universities also have received diverse groups of non-traditional students in the domestic context. For example, these Ontario universities have already experienced an increasing number of students from newcomer families and from First Nations communities. These non-traditional students have increased demographic diversity in the domestic context (Clark et al., 2009). This new increase of domestic student diversity puts pressure on Ontario universities to provide additional services to meet the needs of these new students. In addition to the existing domestic pressure, internationalization and inbound student mobility to Canada increases the number of degree-seeking international students at Ontario universities. Individual Ontario universities also have to consider providing services to these new groups of international students to support their academic and social success throughout their academic programs. These universities, already under pressure to serve an increasing number of non-traditional domestic students, face the additional challenge of managing a diverse and growing international student population.

### **The central function of international student offices at Ontario universities.**

International student offices at Ontario universities have played the central function in serving international students. These offices are the first contact for many international students and they provide culturally appropriate services and activities for maintaining the quality of these students' academic and social experience. There is an existing body of knowledge about international students' challenges, their cultural transition obstacles, and recent increases in Canadian universities' efforts to assist them (i.e., Arthur, 2012; Berry, 2004, Bond et al., 2007). Sometimes, the international student offices are these students' "only contact with the post-secondary institutions outside of their academic departments" (Bond et al., 2007, p. 25).

At the same time, these ISOs are inappropriately resourced to provide adequate services to their international students. Although more recent reports are available to describe Canadian universities' internationalization progresses (AUCC, 2007, 2014; CBIE, 2016), one study argued that consensus has not been reached on the level of adequate academic and social support for international students provided by Canadian universities (Anderson, 2015). Bond et al. (2007) has been one of the few studies that focused on the critical role of ISOs within the Canadian universities. Bond and others claim that ISOs and staff members are "...currently working 'well



over capacity', relying on the professional commitment of the staff..." (2007, p. 26) in order to perform their functions and meet the needs of international students. Inappropriate resource allocation to these ISO among Ontario universities "...appears due not to lack of will and expertise but rather shortage of staff and resources..." (Bond, et al., 2007, p. 26). Myles & Corrie (2004) advocates for improving the professional skills of international student services staff and their leadership on campus to improve organizational capacities for managing diversity. Author (2012) also suggested providing training and development for faculty and general administrative staff to improve their ability to interact with these international students. In any case, "a full-scale review of service requirements and current resourcing in this area is certainly due" (Bond et al., 2007, p. 26). Describing Ontario universities' ISOs and their engagements within their university structures will provide a better picture of ways that these offices currently engage in serving international students.

## Methods

### Design and setting

This study was designed as a qualitative research approach to generate and analyze the data. The Case Study strategy (Yin, 2014) was applied as the main methodological framework. The universities in the province of Ontario served as the basis for a set of cases and the analytical unit. The study also followed sampling, procedures, and analysis implemented by other case studies in higher education such as Clark, 1998, 2004; Yin, 2003. Data triangulation was implemented by collecting three data sources: key informant interviews, public documents, and field observation notes. This qualitative research design came with some methodological limitations and the study implemented the above data triangulation to maintain qualitative validity (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2008; Yin, 2014).

Moreover, the study's method required constant self-reflection and bias-checks in order to maintain qualitative methodological consistency and transparency. The primary approach was to position myself as a researcher-practitioner of higher education administration. At the time of this study, I was a faculty member and a program coordinator in a graduate program at a private university in Japan. In this role, I explored ways to improve the program's operational effectiveness under our limited resources by looking at different cases at various universities in Japan and abroad. I was funded by the Embassy of Canada in Tokyo to conduct a research project in Ontario. As I have been a researcher-practitioner of university administration in Germany, Japan and the U.S., my professional practice and training background in the field helped me contrast the characteristics of different university organizations in this study. At the same time, I had to be mindful of my prior experience shaping my affective and behavioral orientations in the study. My experience in university systems other than the one being studied became a source of reflection which helped check my assumptions and biases throughout this study and especially during the data collection and analysis phases.

## Sample

Through a purposeful sampling (Patton, 2001, 2008), this study identified five universities in Ontario representing three classification types according to Maclean's Canadian University Ranking: Primarily Undergraduate (n=1), Comprehensive (n=3), Medical-Doctoral (n=1) (Orton, 2009). Although these three classifications are unique to Canadian universities and some scholars and policy analysts consider them inappropriate because of their popular publication origin, the classification was justified because no other alternatives were available in the Canadian post-secondary context.

## Data collection

The data was through key informant interviews, public documents, and field observation notes. Among these three data collection methods, the key informant interviews were the primary method for collecting qualitative data. Initially, through professional contacts, seven individuals were identified who were involved in assisting international students in their professional capacities at six universities, one of those individuals was unavailable for this study. The key informants occupied administrative positions in their respective universities and were responsible for the overall operations that included international student services during this study in July and August 2012.

The data collection approach included either face-to-face or Skype interviews depending on these key informants' availability. The purpose of the interview was explained along with a copy of a grant acceptance letter from the Embassy of Canada in Tokyo as evidence for the study's credibility and transparency. Once the key informants agreed to an interview, a consent form was shared with them, explaining the purpose and procedures of my study. In my consent form, their roles in the study were explained, including their anonymity, their withdrawal options, and my contact information. Once explained, the form was then signed by both the researcher and the informant at the interview site. For Skype conferences, the consent form was distributed in advance and collected before the interview.

The key informant interviews were semi-structured. To guide the interview, a set of ten open-ended questions was developed. In order to elicit the participants' thoughts and opinions, these questions reflected the central research question of the study. The interview questions were shared with these key informants electronically in advance so they could prepare their thoughts and opinions. The interviews with these key informants lasted between one to two hours, depending on their availability and willingness to share information. The interview conversations were recorded by a digital recorder; once the data was collected, I transcribed the data for the analysis using McScribe software.

Collecting additional information to supplement the information gathered in my key informant interviews was essential. During the interviews, the key informants were requested to share their public documents relevant to these Ontario universities' international student services. These documents included pamphlets, handouts, newsletters, and other forms of physical and digital information about academic and social assistance available through key informants'

international offices and across these sample universities. Furthermore, about a half-day was spent observing these international student services units and their surrounding physical and social environments within the university campus boundaries before or after my interviews. In order to describe holistic pictures of these sample Ontario universities, I documented my thoughts and impressions of these sites with regard to their physical structures, office locations within their campus communities, and distances to the main municipal centers. Photographs were taken to use as memory aids during the analytical phase.

### Data analysis

As a descriptive case study, the goal was to characterize the sample of Ontario universities as a set of cases by generating common themes and relationships among these themes (Yin, 2014). First themes were coded from the interview data to generate a list of common organizational approaches by these international student services units. In the interview data, participants were labeled as P1, P2, P3... to organize the data more clearly. The labels were used to refer directly to the findings. At the same time, public documents and field notes, collected during my site visits were reviewed. This was done in order to fill information gaps where the key informants were silent or unclear. Once the first coding generated a set of themes, these codes were used as a codebook to re-organize these common themes. The analytical procedure continued to shape and reshape these themes until three main themes were reached and a relationship among these themes led to the findings. Based on these common themes and relationships, the analysis aimed at identifying a set of organizational strategies that these international student services units apply to internationalize their campuses.

### Findings

The analysis found two major strategies used by the international student office units (ISOs) within their organizational structures across the cases: Expert functions and interdepartmental networks. These ISO units provided their expert functions as the primary support units for their international students while working with other university units to provide services when needed. The analysis uncovered an additional common theme: a coordination function beyond organizational boundaries. The first two themes were interdependent of each other. The third theme was an extension of an interdepartmental network beyond these universities' boundaries. These findings are illustrated in the Chart 2.

Chart 2

*Organizational matrix applied to the Ontario case universities*

	Rational	Natural	
Closed	Type I Systems Model	Type II Systems Model	Ontario Case Universities (Type II with IV)
Open	Type III Systems Model	Type IV Systems Model	

## Expert functions

Needs-based services, asset-based programs, and intercultural interventions were ISOs' three main expert functions. The needs-based services are necessary to support services designed specifically for international students to sustain their academic and social lives. In order to assist these international students' academic and legal status in Canada, a range of services were provided by ISOs: The ISOs coordinated with the other units to provide necessary services that related to family issues such as healthcare, the schooling of their children, and dependents' immigration status (P1/P2/P3, 2012). Other issues included supporting international students on various academic disciplinary committees (P1/P2, 2012) and mediating conflict situations and cases (P1/P2/P3, 2012). Among these ISOs' need-based services, one most commonly identified was the initial international student orientation. Some universities organized international student orientations at the post-arrival stage to support these students' cross-cultural transitions (P1/P2/P3/P5, 2012). These orientations are developed as "Organizing an initial orientation (Undergrads & Grads) (P1, 2012), "Setting up pre-arrival preparation on cultural awareness about Canada (online and in-person) (P3, 2012) and "Assisting international students to transition into Canadian culture (P4, 2012). The above services aim to ease international students' transitional stresses when "their stresses become high depending on the academic schedule throughout the annual cycle" (P5, 2012). This characteristic is illustrated in the Chart 3.

### Chart 3

#### *Expert function: Needs-based services*

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Needs-based services	- The initial international student orientation
	- Family issues such as healthcare, the schooling of their children, and dependents' immigration status
	- Academic disciplinary committees
	- Mediating conflict situations and cases

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The asset-based programs are educational activities to encourage international students and their involvement in the campus community. These activities are "celebration of nations" (P2, 2012), "language interchange programs" (P2, 2012) or "talk swaps" (P3, 2012), and "managing a mentorship program" (P3, 2012). Intending to help the international students interact effectively with host university members, these ISO programs were on-going and provided throughout the academic year (P1/P3/P4/P5, 2012). These programs were framed as "Profiling the international students as agents of internationalization at the university" (P3, 2012) or "Building an inclusive community for international students to be part of" (P4, 2012). This theme was illustrated in the Chart 4.

## Chart 4

*Expert function: Asset-based programs*


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Asset-based programs	- Celebration of nations
	- Language interchange programs or talk swaps
	- Managing a mentorship program

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All cases conceived of intercultural interventions in different ways, depending on their organizational contexts. Sometimes, international students received these training activities: “Cross-Cultural Sensitivity Workshops for Canadian TAs at CPI / Canada 101” (P1, 2012), “Administering Intercultural Development Inventory”(P4, 2012) and “Assisting graduate international students with study skills, communicating with their supervisors, managing time, dealing with dept. politics” (P4, 2012). Other times, these interventions were organized for faculty and staff members at the host university to develop their skills, particularly as regards facilitating social relations with international students (P5, 2012). However, such offerings were infrequent. One university indicated this as an area for future improvement (P3, 2012). This theme is illustrated in the Chart 5.

## Chart 5

*Expert function: Intercultural intervention*


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Intercultural Interventions	- Cross-Cultural Sensitivity Workshops/Canada 101
	- Administering Intercultural Development Inventory
	- Assisting graduate international students with study skills
	- Communicating with their supervisors, managing time, dealing with dept. politics.

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**Interdepartmental networks**

An interdepartmental network strategy allows different academic and student affairs units at my case universities to work together to assist the international students because these ISOs offered their expertise that benefited other departments. Expert functions were unique to ISOs because their staff members held specific knowledge, skills, and experience in intercultural relations to assist their international students that general student affairs units did not have. These services were characterized as “Coordinating with other units to provide optimal services” (P2, 2012) by “redirecting the person to the Student Services or other specialized units or persons” (P, 2012). For example, when the international students were about to graduate from their degree programs, these ISOs worked with their university’s career departments to provide support services for their transition into the Canadian employment market. In this case, ISOs explained the meaning of these career services in ways that the international students could understand, better enabling them to seek employment in the Canadian labor market from both the legal and career education perspectives (P1/P2/P3/P4/P5, 2012). ISOs’ career support collaboration with their respective career development services was characterized as “interview workshops” (P1,

2012), “Organizing workshop on off-campus work: Resume, interviews, and simulations” (P2, 2012), and “To organize workshops on resume writing, networking, and interviews in the Canadian job market” (P3, 2012). Because ensuring international students’ successful retention and graduation was one of the primary objectives of ISOs, assisting international students’ post-graduation transition was one of ISOs’ primary functions that required them to coordinate with their universities’ career offices.

### **Extended network across organizational boundaries**

ISOs’ extended their interdepartmental network beyond their university boundaries, and the unit sometimes reached out to coordinate with local, provincial, federal, or diplomatic entities to help their international students. As some international students live in a greater community outside of these university campuses, ISOs’ coordination mechanism naturally extended to members outside of their university boundaries, although the mechanism mainly functioned within their universities. This included “Inviting officers from U.S. Consulates (in Canada), Provincial Ministry of Immigration, and Revenue Canada (from Ottawa)” (P1, 2012), “Policing and investigating criminal cases on campus (i.e. assault)” (P3, 2012), or “Working with the community and its members on newly arriving members of non-traditional cultures” (P3, 2012). One university ISO unit coordinated with a university unit called “Cap and Town” (P5, 2012) to mediate and facilitate relationships between international students and members of the community. These characteristics were summarized in the Chart 6.

Chart 6

#### *Organizational model of Ontario case universities*

Type II Systems Model Characteristics	Expertise functions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need-based services</li> <li>- Asset-based programs</li> <li>- Intercultural interventions</li> </ul>
Type IV Systems Model Characteristics	Interdepartmental network An extended network across organizational boundaries

### **Discussion**

Understanding current international student office functions was the case study goal because bringing a new organizational perspective of internationalization of Canadian universities appeared to be a limitation of the current academic and policy discourse. My attempt to fill this existing conceptual gap involved understanding the current functions of international student offices at Ontario universities from an organizational perspective proposed by Scott (2003). I found that in addition to offering services within their areas of expertise, which was their main function, international student offices served as a coordinating mechanism within their

university structure. An unexpected finding was the extension of an interdepartmental network beyond these universities' organizational boundaries to collaborate with external entities.

One of the most significant findings, is that international student offices at the Ontario case study function as an internal coordination mechanism. The findings exemplified Ontario university cases as a Type II Systems Model (Open-Rational) organization proposed by Scott (1992, 2003). A Type II Systems Model organization includes internal coordination mechanism as an organizational function (Scott, 1992, 2003). The interdepartmental network function became successful in my case universities because these ISOs had their expert function as a source to share with other units within and across the universities. Collaborating by sharing expertise contributed to solving issues related to serving their international students. In this sense, these two functions were complementary to each other. Establishing an active interdepartmental network based on expert function is an internal coordination mechanism of ISOs.

Among the Ontario case universities, the findings also identified some elements of Type IV Systems Model (Open-Natural) (Scott, 1992, 2003). Evidence appeared in the extended interdepartmental network with external entities. Community, municipal, provincial, federal, and diplomatic entities were collaborative partners of my Ontario cases when these universities found a need for working with these external units. Scott (1992, 2003) described this function as resource dependency in the Type IV Systems Model. He explains that resource dependency is a function of this systems model. Many organizations exchange resources with their surrounding environment for their survival. In the case of Ontario universities, they coordinated with external units for their student services. For these reasons, therefore, the findings suggest that Ontario universities in the case study do not fit one specific model, Type II. Instead, these universities are a combination of Type II and Type IV Systems Models in Scott's theoretical matrix as he explains in his publications (1992, 2003). Intercultural interventions and interdepartmental networks within and across organizational boundaries were an organizational strategy of international student offices at Ontario universities. These ISOs were proactively and consciously reaching out to other university units and external entities in order to serve their international students.

As possible evidence for the Type IV Systems Model, one unique finding deserves to be mentioned: Intercultural interventions. Although this study has not been able to determine whether this intervention belong to Type II or IV, intercultural interventions facilitated by the experts at the ISOs are the next step toward creating an inclusive organization, should ISOs continue to work with other units in the future. In fact, training and development of university members for intercultural effectiveness is a systematic way to contribute to solving structural problems among university organizations. This approach can be described in organizational learning within the Type IV Systems Model (Scott, 1992, 2003). In the International Higher Education literature, training and development of intercultural effectiveness are identified as a critical option for preparing university members' knowledge and skills to support international students effectively by further improving cooperative interactions among the university members

across cultures (Author, 2012; Deardorff, 2009; Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Knight, 2004; Myles & Corrie, 2004). However, the Ontario case universities placed different levels of emphasis on this particular function. One university had a well-developed a faculty/staff development training to improve their intercultural effectiveness (P5, 2012), while another university stressed the importance it is placing on developing intercultural effectiveness training in the future (P3, 2012). In the middle ground, some universities implemented intercultural interventions for their students to empower their effectiveness in their studies (P1/P4, 2012).

This study came with conceptual and methodological limitations that could be improved in future studies. Even though qualitative data included possible common themes on conflict management issues, this study was unable to include them due to a need for a new theoretical framework to analyze the related data. In future studies, one could revisit the data from this study to examine it from an organizational conflict management perspective. A vital consideration of bridging cultural differences is managing conflicts across cultures. The qualitative case study also posed a methodological limitation for conceptual generalizability. Sampling was purposeful and data was qualitative; text-based evidence was unique to these case universities. Further research in order to generalize these findings could employ jurisdictional, sample, data and analytical diversities or design a study with a mixed method, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.

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## **International Graduate Student Challenges and Support**

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### **Abstract**

With a growing number of international graduate students pursuing degrees in the United States, universities must understand what unique challenges this population faces when transitioning to the United States and how to properly support students through this transition. This study looks at the experiences of seven international graduate students and how they have found support during a challenging transition to a large, public, research university in the United States. Results revealed that students had difficulties with language barriers, academic differences, and finding resources, but were able to find support within their academic departments and smaller communities. Recommendations are presented for practitioners and future researchers to continue to develop support for international graduate students.

Keywords: international students, student services, international orientation

As domestic enrollments in higher education in the United States have leveled off in the past years, colleges and universities have looked to international students to both increase enrollments and bring diversity to campus. In the 2016-2017 school year, the number of international students studying in the United States was at its highest level to date, with one million eighty thousand students (Institute of International Education, 2017). However, there was a 3% drop in the number of newly entering international students. This was the first time enrollment had dropped in the 12 years since the Open Doors report began releasing data regarding international student entry (Institute of International Education, 2017). For reasons as: the number of incoming international students is decreasing, the is world becomes increasingly globalized, the American political and social dynamic grows more tense; understanding the experiences of international students is crucial to any higher education institution striving to best support these students' personal and professional development.

The setting for this research is a large, public, research university, which boasts the largest enrollment of international students in the state of North Carolina. There were 3,715 international students enrolled in the Spring 2018 semester, according to a report by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP, 2018). Of those students, almost 75% are graduate students, comprising about one-third of the graduate student population (OIRP, 2018). The top five countries from which students matriculated to the institution that Spring were India (1,242), China (752), Iran (99), South Korea (91), and Bangladesh (65) (OIRP, 2018). International student enrollment varied greatly between academic colleges. For example, in the College of

Engineering there were 1,095 domestic graduate students and 1,790 international graduate students in the Spring of 2018, whereas in the College of Education there were 1,096 domestic graduate students but only 24 international graduate students (OIRP, 2018). The academic department and its makeup of international and domestic students can greatly impact a student's experience, as can the number of students enrolled in the same department from one's home country.

This paper will examine the experiences of seven international graduate students at this large, public, research university and add to some of the current research regarding the experiences and transitions to academic life in the United States of international graduate students in similar situations. Based on these interviews, recommendations are proposed for researchers and practitioners to better understand and support international graduate students.

### **Literature Review**

Three main themes appear in literature on international graduate students: challenges they face on campus, support they receive, and the sense of belonging they experience. The following literature review includes literature on undergraduate students but is primarily concerned with the experiences of international graduate students. While the undergraduate student population is different in some ways and may experience higher education differently, the findings in the literature on this group share many commonalities with these known themes and can still be applied to all international students, including graduate students.

International graduate students in the United States face many challenges, not only those limited to cultural adjustments and transition challenges, but also academic and social isolation during graduate school. Cardona, Milian, Birnbaum, and Blount (2013) interviewed 12 international graduate students to understand their experiences inside and outside the classroom. This research revealed that although these students receive many benefits from studying in the United States, such as developing multicultural experiences, critical thinking skills, and writing skills, they face many challenges including adjusting to a new culture and country. Often language alone is a significant challenge and can cause stress and anxiety for many students. Language barriers can be particularly difficult inside and outside the classroom. Even though most admissions offices check English language competency for international students, many students are not used to taking courses in English and can have difficulty adjusting to the language. Participants in this study mentioned the stress they felt when professors constantly asked if they wanted to discuss material after class or the frustration of having to speak in class. Students were also not used to the dynamics and high interaction levels of a typical American classroom. This study found that in and out of the classroom experiences are very much intertwined for graduate students. Additionally, it revealed the importance for faculty and staff to understand that international graduate students need time to adjust and may require different kinds of support than other domestic graduate students. It is imperative for staff and faculty to understand that each student will have different support needs. Some students may not want any extra support, and some students may not feel comfortable asking for or receiving the support

they may want or need, depending on many factors, including their culture's gender roles and expectations (Cardona, Milian, Birnbaum, & Blount, 2013).

Findings about the lack of understanding of academic expectations and classroom engagement students may experience are echoed in Erichsen and Bollinger's (2011) study, where they interviewed international graduate students in order to understand their experiences with academic and social isolation in the classroom and in an online setting. Several themes emerged from this research including the students' lack of understanding of the academic culture and expectations in the United States. Participants felt it was necessary for there to be more opportunities learn about the academic culture, such as how to properly write papers without plagiarizing, proper interaction and relationships with professors. They wanted to learn about this academic culture through professional development events or general guidance and orientations of these topics. Participants also felt that they received little support from the institution as international graduate students and that others did not care about learning about their experiences as international students (Erichsen and Bollinger, 2011). Additionally, because of the long hours of academic work, many of them mentioned the lack of a social life and social interactions as well as the other commitments they had, such as family responsibilities. Finally, the researchers reported that undergraduate students have more opportunities to be involved than graduate students and that the financial and visa/immigration pressures many of them faced contributed to a strict work schedule in order to complete their degrees. The researchers concluded that many international graduate students feel isolated academically and socially and it would be of significant value for international student services offices recognize this and plan appropriate events, programs, and support to minimize isolation (Erichsen and Bollinger, 2011).

In addition to academic and social isolation, international students face many acculturative stressors during their time in the United States. Smith and Khawaja (2011) compiled a review of the literature on current acculturation methods applied to international students. Smith and Khawaja (2011) used Berry's definition of acculturation as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (p. 701). It is important to note that acculturation is a two-way process between international students and their host community and society. None of the seven acculturation methods reviewed by Smith and Khawaja (2011) specifically described the experiences of international students, but certain group and individual factors can be analyzed to better understand the acculturation processes of these students, as the acculturative stressors faced by international students can cause several challenges in the students' experiences.

The first major stressor is language barriers, in both academic and sociocultural contexts. In the academic context, low level of English proficiency can impact assignment quality, ability to understand classroom lectures, and difficulty with oral and written exams. Socially, language barriers can prevent students from making friends and interacting with the local community. Other academic stressors for international students include a mismatch in their expectations and the reality of university life and the teaching style of their host country. Sociocultural stressors can be difficult for students to overcome and may often leave students feeling lonely and

isolated. An interesting finding was that Asian international students seem to have greater difficulty making friends with locals compared to their European peers. Research by Lee and Rice (2007) found that another acculturative stressor for international students may be discrimination. Discrimination may manifest in the form of feelings of inferiority, direct verbal insults, discrimination when seeking employment and physical attacks such as having objects thrown at them. Experiences of discrimination can have a detrimental impact on international students and have been linked with poor psychological well-being and depression. The previous literature has not pinpointed the exact manifestation of acculturative stress in international students, but acknowledges that it can manifest in a variety of ways. Some examples are sleep and appetite disturbances, fatigue, headaches, increases in blood pressure, and gastrointestinal problems (Mori, 2000). Smith and Khawaja (2011) also discussed the buffering effect of social support on acculturative stress and depression. A study by Yeh and Inose (2003) of 359 international students found that those who felt socially connected and were content with their social support networks had lower levels of acculturative stress.

This review of the literatures highlights the need for continued research in the lived experience of international students. To address many of the challenges international graduate students are facing, campuses have started to increase their support for this student population through staff support, university services, and increased engagement with these students.

In terms of support for international graduate students, many studies found that students attribute their success to university services, engagement across campus, good language skills, and surrogate families. Perrucci and Hu (1995) conducted quantitative research that focused on the several dimensions of satisfaction for international graduate students. They used a theoretical model of the determinants of satisfaction with a student's academic program, academic appointment, and social relations. The four factors found in the research that contribute to satisfaction include: the student's social status, individual resources, social resources, and the student's perception of their social context. Results showed that gender of international graduate students did not consistently affect their satisfaction (Perrucci and Hu, 1995).

Another noteworthy finding is that students' financial situation, grades, and aspirations may be correlated with satisfaction, but they do not have an influence independent of their relation to other factors. Grades may be important to satisfaction, for example, but only through their relationship with language skills. Also, satisfaction in social and community relations was more common among married students and those who had more exposure to the local culture. The data shows that the satisfaction of international graduate students is shaped by their language skills, self-esteem, and feeling of positive involvement in their social context. Perrucci and Hu (1995) state that universities should give students the opportunity to strengthen their language skills and host social gatherings to improve students' satisfaction. Additionally, universities should "foster a better climate of international awareness and understanding, both on and off campus, for the different countries represented by its students" (Perrucci & Hu, 1995, p. 507).

Research has also found that international students' interactions with American students prove to be positive for international students (Trice, 2004). In light of research which showed that international students who spend time socially with American students are more satisfied

academically and better adjusted culturally, while being less likely to experience anxiety and alienation, Trice (2004) surveyed 497 graduate international students about their social experiences. This study employed the social capital theory as an explanation for the social benefits of international students interacting with American students (Trice, 2004). The study also used a three-part conceptual framework to analyze international students' social interaction with American students through their social status, cultural competency, and interactions with other students, both domestic and international (Trice, 2004). The data showed that the frequency of interaction with American students by international students varied greatly by world region. Middle Eastern and African students interacted the least with Americans, but were not concerned about this. Students from East and Southeast Asia were concerned about functioning in the American culture and establishing American friendships. Two factors that were positively related to the amount of social contact students had with American students were coming from Western European countries and communicating well in English, which can make establishing relationships easier and more likely. The findings also showed that having friendships with other co-nationals did not impact international students' commitment to developing relationships with Americans. In addition, the longer students had lived in the United States, the more frequently they interacted with American students (Trice, 2004).

Other studies have found how international students create surrogate families to help them during their time in the United States (McLachlan and Justice, 2009). American students as well as other students can be a part of this surrogate family. In their study, McLachlan and Justice (2009) revealed the many challenges international students face when studying in the United States and how those students adapted to survive during their transition and time in the United States. Among the many difficulties these students faced during the transition to a different culture included the weather differences, food differences, academic and social differences, homesickness, loneliness, pressure, language barriers, and the reluctance to seek help (McLachlan and Justice, 2009). The researchers also revealed how the students survived and worked through these challenges using approaches such as creating surrogate families with their mentors and peers as well as using university services (McLachlan and Justice, 2009). All of these factors can contribute to whether students feel a sense of belonging, not only in the United States but also in the university.

There was little research on international graduate student sense of belonging and connections to campus; however, some research focused on social sense of belonging vs. academic sense of belonging. In their study, Curtin, Stewart, and Ostrove (2013) examined the difference between international graduate students and domestic students in terms of their sense of belonging, academic self-concept, and advisor support. Their study revealed that international students rated research and professional experiences as more important than domestic students did; however, that was not the case for social experiences. This shows the importance that international students place on skills developed through research and academic experiences as well as professional development opportunities. Additionally, their study also showed that although international students did not report any additional advisor support, they did show higher levels of belonging within their departments than their domestic classmates and revealed



stronger academic self-concepts (Curtin, Stewart, and Ostrove, 2013). In terms of the study's implications for practice, it is imperative to note the importance of an advisor when considering a student's sense of belonging and academic self-concept. Students felt a stronger sense of belonging if they had a positive relationship with their advisor as well as a stronger academic self-concept. It is also interesting to note that the advisor support international students received was related to their sense of doing well in academics (Curtin, Stewart, and Ostrove, 2013).

Although international graduate students in Curtin, Stewart, and Ostrove's (2013) study placed more importance on an academic rather than social sense of belonging, the social interactions they have on a day to day basis still affect their sense of belonging. In their study, Gladd and Westmont (2014) found that the discriminatory experiences that students faced had a negative effect on belongingness. Belongingness in turn had a positive effect on academic success and cross-cultural interaction. They also found that students participation in co-curricular activities had a positive effect on belongingness as well. Although their study focused on undergraduate students, these findings are significant because many international graduate students also face discriminatory experiences. For practitioners it is important to note that events, programs, or general engagement outside of the classroom could significantly impact sense of belonging for these students (Glass & Westmont, 2014).

### **Methodology**

The sample population for this study was composed of international graduate students at a large, public, research university. All participants were at least 18 years of age. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable and neutral space on campus in a classroom or conference meeting space. All participants completed a consent form before their interview, which explained the purpose of the study and the research goal.

To better understand some of these unique experiences, we interviewed seven participants from different countries and various educational backgrounds. Based on student availability, four were interviewed individually and three were interviewed together in a focus group format. To provide anonymity for the participants, each has been given a pseudonym. The first four students were interviewed individually. The first interviewee was Flora, a first-year master's student in Architecture who is originally from Iran and earned her bachelor's degree in New York City. The second was Daniela, a first-semester doctoral student in Animal Science from Brazil who earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees from the same small institution in Brazil. Third was Wanda, a first-year master's student in Food Science from Venezuela who had attended both high school and college at the undergraduate level in the United States. Finally, Sandy was a third-year doctoral student from India studying Civil Engineering who had earned previous degrees in India.

The students who participated in the focus group were Jennifer, a second-year master's student in Accounting from China; Sarah a second-year PhD student in Parks Recreation and tourism Management from Brazil; and Baalam, a first-year master's student in Cultural Anthropology from Colombia. A snowball sampling technique was used to identify the participants for the study. The participants were asked questions about their transition to the institution and the challenges they faced being both an international student and a graduate

student on campus. They were also asked questions about how they perceived the campus culture at the institution and how they had gotten involved on campus. The interviews were transcribed and coded to find themes among the students' responses.

### Results

From the transcribed and coded interviews, the following themes emerged: challenges at the institution, lack of support, sense of belonging/involvement, and institutional perspective.

#### Challenges International Graduate Students Face

Just as the literature and research predicted, the interviews quickly presented the theme of how challenging the transition to graduate education in the United States can be for an international student. One of the main difficulties international graduate students faced was the decentralization of information concerning immigration and academics prior to and during their transition to the United States. Flora was the only student to have visited campus before matriculating, but began in the summer session and thus was given conflicting information from various offices about orientation and was not fully acclimated until the fall orientation program in August. Wanda expressed how it was difficult to know whether to ask her department, the Graduate School, or the Office of International Services (OIS) questions about how her financial aid was being applied and thus had to register late. In general, participants described initial confusion in navigating the academic culture and not just in the difficulty of their courses.

Daniela described a difficulty with being able to understand fast-talking Americans delivering important information, while Wanda described a difficulty finding apt words to express herself in an culturally-effective manner:

*It was difficult to communicate with them. Not only to understand what they're saying but also communicating in general because it's a different culture. Getting my point across was difficult sometimes. I remember one time I was talking to a friend and was telling her that I didn't know how to translate what I was trying to say in a way that they would understand. I'm not saying English words but like culturally wise.*

Students in the focus group echoed this sentiment and said that one of the most challenging elements of their transition to the institution was the language. Despite difficulties in communication and finding information, almost all of the participants expressed how smaller communities helped them during the transition. These smaller communities are similar to the surrogate families described in the research (McLachlan and Justice, 2009). For Daniela, the Brazilian Student Association reached out before she arrived to answer questions about the campus and Raleigh more broadly. Sandy took advantage of the airport pick-up service offered by MAITRI, the Indian Graduate Student Association, when she first arrived on campus. Flora described how the first few weeks were difficult, but her program cohort was a lifeline in the first few weeks of class for information and community:

*For me the hardest parts were those first few weeks because I didn't know anyone and it's a fairly quiet city so that made me feel a little sad. Once I*

*started school and I met people, it got better. The first place I got involved was in my academic department.*

A second prevalent theme about difficulties transitioning to the institution was the pedagogical differences in American classrooms. Even for the two participants who had already earned degrees in the United States, this still presented a challenge. There are many facets to the struggles our participants faced in the classroom, especially when it came to constructivist pedagogy and more learner-centered approaches to the classroom. Constructivist pedagogy, which is the dominant pedagogy of American college classrooms, places an emphasis on knowledge being constructed among the students and instructor. Many students came with experience and expectations of a pedagogy wherein the knowledge is transferred from professor to student. Daniela was not used to being graded on participation and struggled to speak up in class, especially when she was apprehensive about using the correct English words:

*Probably the most difficult part was that in Brazil, with rare exceptions, the teacher teaches the class...here you have to participate and I don't like to participate so it's difficult because they grade participation. I know it's important to participate. In Brazil when someone talks every time in the class then we don't like that students because they interrupt but here the one who asks questions and participates is the one that is most liked by the professor so it's different to transition to that.*

For Daniela, knowing the technical terms was not difficult, as she had read journal articles in English for a long time. She confided that grammatical structures such as prepositions and adjectives especially confused her up in papers when trying to make her writing and speech sound natural. Sarah talked about the high expectations her graduate program had:

*The way courses or classes happen or the expectations--especially in the graduate program. Where I'm from you don't have to turn in things every week...that was a bit of a cultural shock. The expectations seemed very high.*

Sandy and Wanda both serve as teaching assistants and expressed frustration with being the teacher at the front of a room and trying to get students to engage and cover large amounts of material. They experienced the pedagogical differences from both the student and instructional side. These findings are supported by existing literature that shows that international graduate students struggle with the differences in academic culture (Bollinger, 2011).

As mentioned in the literature, adjusting to the culture, norms, and traditions of the United States was a challenge for many international students (McLachlan and Justice, 2009), and this challenge was prevalent throughout our interviews. In general, participants faced other challenges outside of academics in their transition to life in Raleigh generally. All students expressed frustration that the Wolfline bus system did not run regular routes on the weekend and about half expressed that they would get more involved on campus if it were easier to access events on the weekends. For the students who were new to the United States, American cultural norms such as taxes and tipping were confusing and challenging to get used to at first. All participants also expressed confusion and frustration about finding affordable housing, signing a

lease, and navigating the healthcare system. While none of the students interviewed for this project expressed that any of these elements contributed to a significant interruption of their life, it was clear that little things like these added to the acculturative stress they faced overall.

### **Support for International Students & Sense of Belonging**

This large, public, research university provides a variety of different programs and staff to help support international students. Despite this, many students talked about the difficulty of finding these resources: Wanda said: “It’s not like the support doesn’t exist. It’s just that I don’t know how to tap into it. I don’t feel enough trust to tap into them.” Participants talked about how academic departments gave them support and how connections within the department fostered their sense of belonging. It was evident that the students’ academic departments were often their first social connection at the university. Sarah talked about the influence of her academic department:

*The department determines your experience because that’s where you spend most of your time. I’ve had a very good experience because we’ve had very diverse cohort and faculty and that helps a lot. I know that the professors that are international look for students who are international. There is a culture of diversity that is international...The mandatory courses usually unite the cohort and it gives you the opportunity to connect and make friends.*

The importance of the students’ connection to their department through relationships with fellow students and faculty was a prominent theme in the interviews. Although many felt supported by the relationships they had in their academic department, Balaam pointed out how some of those relationships have put pressure on him:

*For me I came straight from undergrad to graduate program and one of the things I noticed is that there is a much closer relationship with you and your advisor or thesis director. That is not as evident in undergrad and there is a lot more pressure when you have that one to one relationship.*

Even though Balaam felt this pressure, he still felt a connection to his academic department. For Sandy, having a research assistantship allowed her to build a close relationship with her faculty mentor, and thus she was able to ask questions and learn more. Considering that each student noted that the reason they attended the institution was for their specific academic program, it is significant that each had positive interactions with their department and that their department was a source of community.

All seven students had a second site of connection to their department outside of the classroom, whether it was in the lab, studio, or offices. These proved to be a critical component of fostering relationships within the department. For Wanda, having office mates who were fellow classmates allowed her to discuss class material in a more intimate setting. Flora worked on projects in her studio with classmates and thus was able to build strong connections with them. Daniela spent long hours in the lab and at a farm building relationships with fellow lab

mates that extended beyond the lab to outside social opportunities. Jennifer and Balaam both mentioned their office as one of the places that meant most to them on campus because of the amount of time they spend there. Sarah echoed this sentiment:

*The office [is important] because that's where we spend most of the time and I have a huge window that you can see a lot of green and the rain and sunset so it's really nice--also the space between the two buildings. Lake Johnson is my favorite place that I go to every single day.*

Another theme of support for international graduate students at the institution was the presence of fellow students from their home country. Again, these connections mirror the surrogate families seen in the literature (McLachlan and Justice, 2009). At this institution, these groups vary greatly in size and involvement, and each student's interactions and involvement differed depending on how strong the community was. Daniela expressed that the Brazilian Student Association was very active and hosted frequent events to help students explore Raleigh the local area and to foster community among its members. Flora was not as involved in the Iranian Student Association, since it was not very active in terms of the numbers of events and members it had. Nevertheless, Flora still enjoyed knowing fellow Iranians around campus. Wanda described how there were not many other students from Venezuela, and while she wanted to be a part of the Latin American Student Association, it was difficult as there were not many opportunities to get involved. For Wanda, the greatest connection she had fostered was with a fellow Venezuelan student and his wife who would constantly check in on her to make sure she was okay. It was common for many to see their friends around Raleigh as their family away from home. For Sandy, the Indian graduate student community was large and diverse. She spoke about how all her friends spoke English with each other because that was the only common language even among all Indian students in her friend group. She described how the size of the Indian graduate student population was both good and bad in that their association, MAITRI, was able to put on large and well-attended cultural events, but it was harder to create community among so many students.

For Jennifer, finding other students from China was not a challenge. She said there were about 500 students in a group chat who talked about events, finding roommates, selling furniture, and more. On the other hand, Sarah did not know many Brazilians, especially her first year:

*I spent most of my first year without knowing any other Brazilians here until I saw someone in the bus who had the shirt with the flag and then we connected and there was a group chat with all Brazilians who attend the university. There are about 20 of us in the group chat. There are a lot more Brazilian undergrads but they don't mix with graduate students. We maintain this group chat and sometimes meet. Share events, etc. Some of us are closer because we've known each other the longest.*

Sarah's connection to the Brazilian community started on the bus, while Balaam's connection to the Latin American students was much more formal, through a student organization; however, he did not feel it was very inclusive:

*I've been to some meetings for the Latin American association for graduate students, and there is a wide range of nationalities. I wish it were more inclusive, not only in terms of the language but also in terms in terms of college inclusion. I barely see any social science graduate students from Latin American countries. Even though we speak the same language it can be difficult to connect.*

Balaam talked about the exclusivity felt within a group where everyone was expected to speak Spanish. If someone was not fluent in Spanish, then they would feel excluded. However, he still felt like he connected with Latin American students on campus outside of the organization and within Raleigh as well. Contrary to Trice's (2004) research, the interviews in this study show that peer support through other international students was important to finding connection on campus and being academically successful. Wanda and Flora especially emphasized how it was easier to become friends with other international students and how they found a great sense of community that way. This is especially salient for those students in programs with large numbers of international students. Daniela described how it was surprising how her fellow classmates from China and South Korea relied on her so much to understand aspects of American culture because she was from a more westernized country than them. Opportunities to connect with other international students also allow for students to connect to campus and grow their community. Flora, Daniela, and Wanda all attended a spring break service trip led by OIS and all cited how they all felt like their campus became smaller after the trip because of their new friends and community, in addition to the learning experience of serving in schools and charities in the mountains.

### **Institutional Connection & Involvement**

In the vein of academic belonging, all interviewees expressed that they felt the strongest connection to the university through their academic department, which aligns with Curtin, Stewart, and Ostrove's (2013) findings about the centrality of the academic and professional experience for international students. Balaam described his involvement on campus mainly in his department:

*I'm a TA for an undergrad anthropology class. I haven't really done volunteering. Maybe my involvement is more academic including my thesis or projects that we do for school. Ideally, I would really like to volunteer in an international office, mentor, or offer my testimony as an international student.*

Jennifer also volunteered within her academic department during CPA service days, but she still wanted to be more involved on campus. Sarah talked about how graduate students need to look for these opportunities rather than wait for them to come:

*I feel like it's something you have to go after even though you get emails with information if you don't read them through or search for things. Most people would just read and not do anything about it. You really have to put yourself out there in order to get involved. Every activity is so*

*receptive to international students, but when getting involved, it's up to us to go after the activities.*

Flora talked about how graduate students interact with the campus culture:

*Graduate students don't really get involved in the larger campus culture and are more focused on their academics. When I got here I wasn't looking to get involved and then I decided to reach out.*

Furthermore, when asked about important traditions that occurred on campus, the interviewees generally had not participated in many of the major events on campus, citing them as conflicting with their academic duties or geared towards undergraduate students. Some cited sports as being important traditions but said that they had not attended: "I honestly have never been to a sports game. Anything that says international I'm attracted to. Makes me feel more connected." (Baalam)

This is not to say these students did not have pride in the institution. Four out of seven of the participants felt very proud to be a part of the Wolfpack. Flora described a key moment to her sense of belonging on campus:

*One thing that really resonated with me was the Wolfpack. When I went to get my ID in Talley I saw the statue of the Wolfpack outside and I had this moment when I really felt like I was part of the Wolfpack. Because wolves are fierce, it instills this feeling of being fierce and excited about your academic life.*

However, in general the graduate students were content to be involved in the ways they had found, but were open to participating more on campus if they had free time and knew about events and activities with ample time to make plans to attend.

### **Discussion**

The participants in this study talked extensively about the challenges they faced when transitioning to graduate school as an international student, such as language barriers, moving to a new city, and adjusting to the academic expectations. This study highlighted some of the ways in which international students find their place and support on campuses. Their academic departments were a strong influence on their sense of belonging not only in terms of academic achievement, but also in feeling connected to classmates and faculty. Students revealed that they were not as involved in the overall campus culture, traditions, and norms. It is important for institutions to understand which tools and services students are utilizing as forms of support on campus so that time and effort is put in the proper places to support international graduate students.

Students often struggled with the norms and expectations of schoolwork, social life, and understanding different aspects of the institution and the United States. Based on our findings, we recommend that orientation programming both at the university-level and the department-level should address these norms and expectations so that students know early on what to expect. Orientation programs should explain the academic rigor and expectations of the graduate program, relationships between professors/TA's and students, and general cultural differences

they will experience living in the United States. Orientation programs should also properly prepare students to find the help and resources necessary if they are struggling. Additionally, assessment after orientation programming should be critical and a priority in order to understand what international graduate students need during this transitional period.

Programs for international graduate students should not stop at orientation. All students expressed wanting to be more involved on campus but not knowing where the resources were or how to tap into them. Continued outreach to these students after orientation is critical to continue making social connections and building their sense of belonging on campus. We see from participants that academic departments do a great job at keeping students involved, mostly because they take courses together and are in their respective spaces every week, but it is important for students to build connections outside of their academic department. Building connections outside of their academic department may lead to a stronger sense of inclusion within the university and not just their academic department.

The results of this study should be considered alongside its limitations. Participants came from a large pool of international graduate students attending a large, public, research university in the Southeastern U.S. The challenges and support discussed in this study by the participants may not be applicable or present in other universities since other universities might have smaller international graduate student populations, might not have as many culturally specific student organizations or other reasons. Additionally, the snowball sampling method might affect responses, as participants might hold similar viewpoints. Despite these limitations, the results showed themes of challenges and support among all participants that are relevant for other universities.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The large, public, research university where this study took place is an institution that attracts many international graduate students from all over the world. Due to the number of participants in this study, it is limited in its generalizability to other institutions. Yet, the study shows it is important to learn about their experiences and unique needs. These results could help similar institutions develop support for international graduate students. Our interviews with international graduate students supports the literature on the topic, and also reaffirms the importance of connection to the students' academic departments. Some common themes that emerged were acculturative stress, the importance of community and connection, and how a campus community may influence a student's sense of belonging. The students interviewed felt strong connections with their academic departments, not isolation as the literature suggests. Schools should evaluate how their academic departments are helping international students build connections in order to make them feel welcomed.

The results and recommendations presented in this study will be able to help student affairs professionals understand international graduate students' challenges and needs. In addition, this study will aid in informing future research. Future research is needed to help student affairs and academic affairs professionals better understand international graduate student experiences and explore models to identify how to meet these students' unique needs related to multiple levels within the university community. Research should continue to focus on



international graduate students' unique experiences as well as what current professionals are doing to properly support these students and how these support systems and resources in place are helping them develop. Although domestic graduate students might face similar challenges to international graduate students such as isolation, moving to a new city, transportation, etc., international graduate students have the added pressure of being of adjusting to a new culture, language, and way of life. Their feelings of isolation and confusion are amplified by the fact that they might not even have family in the United States, meaning they are far from any family, or they might not have taken their academic courses in English. Students might not be used to taking graduate level courses such as accounting, physics, or others in English because they are used to hearing the terminology used in these courses in their own language.

These factors could contribute to their overall mental health and wellbeing. These factors also provide a rationale to why future research should focus on international graduate students' mental health and wellbeing. Equally important for international educators is how institutions are supporting graduate students through their transition to academic and social life in the United States.

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Phi (philomatheia) -love of knowledge

Beta (biotremmonia) -valuing of human life

Delta (diapheren) -achieving excellence

