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# The Perception of International Students Toward Programs and Support Services Offered by Higher Education Institutions in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States

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The Perception of International Students Toward Programs and Support Services Offered by  
Higher Education Institutions in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Public Policy and Administration

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

By

Charity Alinda

December 2021

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my two amazing children, Elijah and Etta. You will learn as you grow older that not playing your part in this adventure we call life is not an option. Always put your best foot forward. Never underestimate your ability to contribute to society as an individual or as part of a group, locally and globally. Remember, Daddy will always believe in you.

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## Abstract

Historically, the United States has been one of the most popular destinations for international students. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the mobility of international students. As the effects of the pandemic recede, an increasing number of international students will seek to travel from their home countries to acquire an international education. The United States remains one of the premier destinations for international students. With travel restrictions easing, more American universities have increased efforts to recruit and enroll international students. One of the fundamental responsibilities for colleges and universities toward admitted international students is to keep the promises of providing international students with effective support programs and services during their educational pursuits. This study utilized a mixed-method approach to investigate the perception of international students toward programs and support services provided by higher education institutions to facilitate their educational journey. The findings of the study were: 1) International students value programs and support services their universities provide, such as new student orientation, on-campus social programs, off-campus excursions, and continuous academic and immigration advising. 2) International students are eager to contribute to the design and implementation of support programs and services. 3) International students believe that provided programs and support services have a positive contribution toward their overall success as students in the United States. The findings suggest that colleges and universities need robust support services to remain competitive in attracting and retaining international students. Moreover, it is essential to provide international students with well-designed and effectively implemented support programs and services.

*Keywords:* international education, immigration, higher education, international students, student services, support programs

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## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than five million higher education students were studying outside of their home country. The growth of international students had been rapidly increasing from 2.1 million in 2001 (Institute of International Education, 2018). Before the pandemic, the number of international students around the world was expected to increase by another 2.3 million by 2030 (Choudaha & van Rest, 2018).

Presently, the higher education system of the United States remains popular among those seeking to attain an international education (Allen, 2020). According to the 2020 “Business of Branding” study, conducted by Carrington Crisp, 68% of the 1,442 respondents from 50 countries indicated that they would consider the United States for study. This number was one percent higher than the United Kingdom with 67% (Allen, 2020). Other close competitors were Canada, Australia, Germany, and Singapore. Since 2015, the United States has been home to over one million international students (Open Doors Report, 2020). As of March 2018, there were 1.2 million nonimmigrants on F-1 (academic student) and M-1 (vocational student) visas studying in the United States (Student and Exchange Visitor Program, 2018).

To ensure the needs of international students are met, educational institutions have traditionally designed programs and services for international students to support their educational journey in the United States (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2019). However, in order to determine whether the programs and support services that institutions offer to international students are effective, it is important to investigate how international students perceive these programs and services, and whether students believe the available programs and services meet their intended purpose. An understanding of what matters to students can also ensure that adequate support services and resources are allocated to this community on campus.

This dissertation investigates international students' perception of the programs and support services offered by two higher education institutions in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Further, this research study reviews various literature that discusses the topic being investigated. It elucidates the conceptual framework the study is grounded in and describes the methods utilized to collect and analyze data, discusses the implications of the findings, and offers recommendations relevant to international educators, administrators, and International Student and Scholar Service (ISSS) professionals. Finally, this dissertation discusses the potential limitations of the study and then offers a conclusion and suggests additional future research areas in relation to the study.

### **Research Question and Significance**

The main question of the study was: "How do international students perceive the programs and support services provided by their respective educational institutions?" This research aims to make a contribution to the literature base as it addresses how international students are supported as they pursue their educational, social, and cultural goals in the United States. It is vital to investigate the perception of the recipients of these programs in order to allow universities to grasp whether the available programs and services support international students. Knowing how those programs and support services are perceived and what impact they have, if any, can help universities plan better fund such programs to ensure that international students are well supported. A well-supported student body is beneficial to the university since there is a connection between well-supported students and higher student retention (Ammigan, Dennis, & Jones, 2021; Shelton, 2003). When international students have a positive perception of their experiences, they are more likely to be good ambassadors for their institutions which, in turn, could facilitate future recruitment initiatives (Lee, 2021). If international students feel like they

have the necessary support needed to pursue their academic programs, they are unlikely to consider transferring to another institution (Campbell, 2018). Beyond retention, international students, like any other scholars, deserve effective support services because studying and staying in a different environment from one to which they are accustomed can be a daunting task. A well-thought-out support system could be one of the determining factors for one's survival and eventual success as an international student (Shah & Richardson, 2016). The quality of student services influences the satisfaction level of international students studying abroad (Jiang et al, 2020). Due to this relationship between the quality and satisfaction level of students, institutions need to continually enhance the types of services provided to international students so as to appropriately support their academic, cultural, and social life while in the United States.

### **Problem Statement**

International students have been studying in the United States since the 1800s (Bevis & Lucas, 2007) and each year, many universities across the country continue to welcome international students in large numbers. The presence of international students on university campuses is valuable both for students as well as for host institutions (Alberts & Hazen, 2013). Since the benefits are mostly mutual, institutions ought to be well prepared to support international students' decision to choose a university for their education journey. In their 2021 report, the American Council on Education (ACE) called upon United States colleges and universities to rethink their approach to international students (Marklein, 2021). The call stemmed from the sentiment of international students being viewed with a mostly transactional mindset. This mindset was from a “longitudinal data collected by ACE showing that university leaders, on the one hand, ranked international student recruitment as a top priority for their internationalization strategy, but, on the other hand, lagged on offering commensurate support

for international students once they arrive on campus” (Marklein, 2021, Para. 5). The report called for a more intentional approach to meeting the needs of international students while nurturing more meaningful global interaction on campuses.

International students are not just scholars at a university; their student status is also layered by their international status. The challenges that domestic students face might differ from those faced by international students (Misra et al., 2004; Chue & Nie, 2016; Haverila et al., 2020). For example, some international students face challenges such as cultural differences, getting accustomed to another learning environment, comprehending native English speakers, etc. To ensure that international students are well supported, it is the responsibility of host institutions to develop and maintain an array of programs and support services that cater to the needs of this specific student population. Institutions would do well to emphasize the integration of international students deliberately and intentionally in the greater campus community. It is one thing to have programs and services for students; it is another to know how students perceive those programs and services concerning their personal, social, and academic life. Understanding how international students feel about programs and support services provided by their institutions not only ensures that student needs are being met but also enables the university leadership to prioritize how resources are allocated.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how programs and support services designed for international students were perceived by those to whom they are intended to serve.

Examining the perception of international students toward university programs and support services helps institutions ensure that services being offered to international students achieve the intended purpose of meeting the needs of international students. Since international student

enrollment numbers at American universities have been gradually dropping since 2016 (Redden, 2019), and have declined even further due to the devastating effects of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, this study offers insight into what universities might do to ensure that current international students are provided the services they need to succeed. Campbell (2018), an international educator and higher administrator, contends that universities must provide a positive campus for international students to avoid the risk of not addressing challenges international students face during their higher education in America. If international students feel that American universities are catering to their needs, they are more likely to be loyal to their respective universities (Campbell, 2018).

Additionally, the findings of this study can be used to develop effective programs and support services that impact how universities address the needs of their international students. Finally, understanding international students' perspectives can help universities as they make decisions about limited resources and priorities articulated by the students themselves. Programs and services designed with the input from the intended recipients are more likely to be successful because they would have a direct connection with the challenges being addressed. That is why understanding how the programs are perceived by their recipients is key to ensuring they are serving the intended purpose of facilitating international student success.

### **Definition of Terms**

For this study, the following terms shall be used as defined below. If the terms are used in a different context, an explanation will be provided as appropriate.

*Acculturation:* Acculturation is 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 (Berry, 2005)

*Cultural Shock:* Various emotions of a person living in a new environment that experiences maladjustment that encompassed psychology, emotions, interpersonal relationships (Raco, Ngenget, Raton & Rachmadi, 2018).

*F-1 Student Visa:* A type of non-immigrant visa that allows international students to enter the United States to pursue a full-time education at an accredited college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, or other academic institution/in a language training program study in a college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, private elementary school, another academic school, or language training program (Students and employment, 2020)

*Immigration Advising:* Type of advising that focuses on immigration regulations and compliance especially for individuals on visas.

*International Students:* International students are those who received their prior education in another country and are not residents of their current country of study (OECD, 2021).

*J-1 Exchange Visitors:* J-1 exchange visitors are foreign nationals selected by a Department of State program to enter the United States as exchange visitors. (US Department of State, n.d.)

*Orientation:* A set of programs given to international students upon their entry to the United States for purposes of facilitating their acclimatization process into a new educational environment.

*Student's Perception:* How students view and understand something that is presented to them at a particular time.

*Student Support Services:* These are various services provided to the students in order to facilitate their educational journey at institutions of learning.



*Student Retention:* A metric of student success typically measured in terms of the rates of students who return for their studies year to year (Soika, 2020).

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the concept of international student programs and support services. The chapter emphasized the value of supporting international students and how students' perception of those programs and support services can impact their overall quality of life during their academic journey in the United States. In addition, the chapter discussed the responsibility educational institutions have in terms of designing programs that cater to the needs of international students on their campuses. Chapter 2 reviews literature from other scholars in connection to supporting the international student community in various areas such as academics, immigration, social life, and transition to a new cultural environment.

## CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Studying in a foreign country and sometimes in a foreign language is not an easy undertaking (Tas, 2013). However, millions of students choose to leave their home countries and travel long distances to pursue an international education. The choice to travel across the world involves dedication, grit, and ambition (Punteney, 2019). Having invited international students to university campuses, it is the ethical responsibility of higher education institutions to provide resources to support their students in achieving their academic and professional goals (Akanwa, 2015). It is incumbent upon each college campus to ensure there are adequate programs and support services for international students. This is because such services are critical to the eventual success of international students. When considering support services for international students, universities need to have a comprehensive approach to how the international student population should be supported (Briggs & Ammigan, 2017). Support services should ensure they cover all areas of international student life on campus including their classroom environment (Ward, 2016). The stress and anxiety faced by international students go beyond academic and sociocultural settings. The toll of adapting to a new physical environment should not be underestimated since international students must get acclimatized to new weather patterns, sights, sounds, and smells, which might affect their physical comfort (Ammigan and Jones, 2018). If they are not comfortable at the outset, that might in turn affect their overall time as they start their education journey in the United States.

The United States is still home to the largest population of international students (Studee, 2021). According to Tara John (2016), a writer with *Time Magazine*, the number of international students in the United States grew by 7.1% during the 2015-2016 academic year. The growth of international student enrollment posed a continued challenge for universities and colleges to

become better equipped to attend to the needs of international students. Students joining American universities and colleges are faced with numerous challenges, including cultural, social, financial, and academic difficulties.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed one of the greatest challenges to the field of international education in recent history. According to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the country saw a 72% decrease in new international students enrolled in 2020 in comparison to 2019 (ICE Report, 2021). This decline can be attributed to various impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only were the international students restricted to travel due to country border closures; they also could not secure study visas due to the shutdown of American Embassies and Consulates overseas (Ng, 2020). While the growth of international students in the United States has slowed down in the last decade, the 2019/2020 academic year witnessed the first decline in the overall number of international students in the United States (Israel & Batalova, 2021). Even with the decline in the overall numbers of international students, there are still over one million international students choosing American colleges and universities. As the COVID-19 delta variant continues to sow seeds of uncertainty, colleges and universities are obligated to ensure international students are supported while they pursue their studies in the United States.

Various studies show the value of international students not only to U.S. universities and colleges in the form of advancing internationalization, inclusivity, and diversity (Lee & Rice, 2007; Smith, 2020) but also to the overall growth of the economy. Given their contributions to the growth and development of the country, international students must be supported as they pursue studies in the United States. According to a 2019-2020 economic analysis by NAFSA, an International Association of International Educators, over one million international students

contributed over \$38 billion to the country's economy and supported over 400,000 jobs (Open Doors Report, 2020). Since there is evidence that international students productively contribute to our society, universities are obligated to ensure that the challenges faced by international students are alleviated so they can succeed. When international students succeed, the benefit is not just for them, but for universities and the American economy at large (Krislov, 2021).

### **Acculturation by International Students**

When international students move to the United States, they enter a new cultural setting with a variety of expectations, and sometimes, it can be hard to balance certain aspects of their own culture to effectively function in a new environment. Acculturation is a process of questioning and letting go of some aspects of one's culture and gradually adopting some elements of another culture (Punteney, 2019). The process of acculturation can vary from person to person. Some students might find the process easier than others. During the acculturation process, universities must ensure that students are supported regardless of their cultural backgrounds. It is only when students have effectively transitioned into a new environment that they will be able to function in a new cultural environment. Kim (2001) describes individuals who have traveled to a new culture as "strangers." She asserts that encounters with a culture bring many surprises in all different shapes and sizes. In the case of international students, if such surprises are not addressed, they could alter how students transition to a new culture and depending on how easy or difficult the process is, it could set a tone for the rest of the student's life in the United States. When students are not supported during the acculturation process, they might end up faced with mental health and anxiety challenges (Dao, 2007). This is one more reason why international student programs and support services are crucial for the life of international students throughout their academic journey in the United States.

## **International Student Orientation**

New student orientation is one of the most common parts of support services provided to students upon arrival to the United States (Punteney, 2019). Student visa regulations by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security require all international students to report to their schools before they can be activated in the federal student system to be legally recognized as students in the United States (Sevis reporting requirements, n.d). Given the diverse cultural backgrounds within the international student population at a given institution, orientation programs must be designed in a way that will benefit all students. This assumes significance because international students often lack information specific to US culture, customs, and daily activities which are commonplace for the typical U.S. American student (Wu et al., 2015). As per Young and Althen (2013), since many of the international students come from cultures that are more formal than in the United States, best practice includes having a senior official welcome them to campus so to respond to this cultural norm. This can be done by having a high-ranking member of the university leadership team offer opening remarks at new student orientation (Young & Althen, 2013). The basic gesture of having a higher-ranking member of the leadership team at new student orientation could set the tone for the rest of their academic life at the university. That simple gesture but yet an important part of orientation indicates how students are valued by the university and also boosts their confidence and leads to a smoother transition process to a new life in the United States.

While planning new international student orientation, universities should be aware of the fact that most students arrive in the United States close to the start of the semester. Young and Althen (2013) argue that newly arrived students often experience severe jet lag at the time of arrival, and some have a difficult time understanding new accents of American presenters and

could also be still worried about finding housing, among other challenges. It could be counterproductive if international students receive a lot of information from multiple presenters when they are tired or when their minds are preoccupied with worries about their newfound life. To ensure effective results, universities need to design and implement orientation programs that meet the needs of new international students to facilitate a smooth transition to a new environment. Furthermore, institutions must ensure that orientation activities should not be a “once and for all” approach (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016). Once students have been oriented at the start of the semester, there should be additional programs and services that link orientation to semester-long programming to ensure there is continuous student support for the entire academic year rather than just the commencement of a student's academic journey.

One of the solutions to this challenge is for universities to compress orientation information to be more concise, and then reinforce the information with written handouts (Young and Althen, 2013). Having written material to take can be helpful for students who prefer to read on their own as opposed to receiving information from multiple presenters in one day. Additionally, having written material can be better if there are issues with new accents. The second possible solution is to diversify the orientation program so that it has various pre-arrival components that involve other university departments and units. This could be done via video presentations and online portals with new student resources. Perhaps these could even be recurring so that students can access such orientation material even after arrival (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016). Having pre-arrival orientation information for new students is beneficial not only to students but also to the university. In a pre-arrival setting, students can get a head start while they are still in their home country and get familiar with university life even before their arrival on campus. Additionally, students can learn about various aspects of what to expect at

their own pace without feeling rushed because the information is readily available for them to access and can be revisited multiple times depending on the students' preference, pace, and needs.

**Comprehensive Orientation.** International students and scholars at US colleges and universities frequently cite a lack of resources and support services from their departments and host institutions to assist them in navigating academic, cultural, and legal challenges (Ammigan & Caro, 2021). To remedy cultural adjustment hardships that international students face, universities can create comprehensive orientation programs for incoming international students. These programs should be appropriate and tailored to specific categories of international students. Orientation programs can include topics like, “Introduction to American Culture,” “What to expect in the first few days on a US college campus”, and “Major Holidays Celebrated in the United States and What They Mean.” By carefully designing appropriate orientation programs, international students will know more about what to expect during their time in the United States. Targeted orientation will mentally and emotionally prepare new international students before they arrive on U.S. college campuses. Furthermore, while discussing ways to support international students during the orientation period, Comevo (2016), a market-leading provider of cloud-based orientation, suggests, providing international students with a personalized orientation specific to their needs will not only help to improve retention rates but can also create a more diverse culture at institutions. Targeted orientation programs can help to ensure that no new student is unintentionally left out while providing programming for new students. In addition to targeted orientation, institutions must place a greater emphasis on integrating their international students and exchange visitors to campus rather than focusing on a

deficit-oriented assessment of the challenges faced by this demographic (Ammigan & Caro, 2021).

### **Academic and Career Advising**

Academic advising is critical for students since it focuses on ensuring that students stay on track to fulfill their requirements toward degree completion. Academic advising ranges from student course selection to related skills that are needed for academic success (Punteney, 2019). Since studying in another language is a challenge in itself, international students benefit from effective academic advising and might need extra academic guidance. Similarly, career advising is equally important because universities should aim at graduating employable graduates. Academic and career advising services are connected since the end goal for students is to successfully complete their academic programs and to join the workforce.

### **Supporting International Students**

International students face a variety of challenges even before they arrive in the United States to start their studies. These challenges range from immigration paperwork acquisition while still in their home countries, to navigating a new environment after they arrive in the United States. As discussed above, the continued growth in the number of international students enrolling in American colleges and universities justifies the need for higher education to augment the social, cultural, and academic programs offered to international students. The following scenario by Barbara L. Loach at Cedarville University perfectly captures the experience some international students face when they begin academic studies in the United States:

Imagine you have been selected to study your discipline in a university in another country. You've already studied that country's primary language and researched



information about the university and the city in which it is found. You feel confident that, after a short time of adjustment, you'll be able to settle into university life without too many problems. But when the first day of classes arrives, you find yourself overwhelmed by all the red tape and protocols that no one bothered to explain to you ahead of time. In your classes, your mind begins to numb because the professors talk so fast and use academic jargon, and don't seem to follow any kind of an outline in their presentations. As soon as you think you understand a point enough to write something down in your notes, the professors have already gone on to another topic. Neither do they seem to notice that you are struggling. There's no one else from "home" in the entire university, so you feel entirely isolated and powerless. People stare at you because you're obviously not "one of them" and no one takes the time to get to know you. The ability you thought you had to speak the language has evaporated because suddenly real people don't sound like your language teacher and there's too much input for you to process. You want to succeed and know you have the capability, but the language and culture barriers seem overwhelming (Loach, 2004).

It can be argued that a high percentage of international students in the United States would relate to the scenario above. Loach suggests that unless universities offer support in both academic and interpersonal areas, international students can become easily overwhelmed by the differences in language, culture, and academic expectations in the United States. As introduced by Loach, a variety of linguistic challenges can stunt the academic growth of international students. While discussing challenges and opportunities for international students, Janet Constantinides, Professor of English at the University of Wyoming asserts that international students who choose to come to the United States are some of the brightest and most highly

motivated among their peers in their home countries (McIntire & Willer, 1992). Despite possessing high levels of motivation and intellectual skill, it can be difficult for students to cope with the new learning environment if they are not fully prepared. Differences in education systems and teaching approaches can prove to be a significant hurdle for some students if they are not well prepared to learn in both a new language and a new environment.

International students might also struggle to adopt different learning styles while adjusting to the American education system (Wu et al., 2015). Learning methods and practices could create issues around academic integrity if some students are not familiar with the strict guidelines in academic settings (McIntire & Willer, 1992). While group work is permitted, it is allowed only to a certain point or for only specific assignments. Professors tend to encourage group work but also emphasize that group members still turn in individual assignments. While group work is allowed in the United States, learning is mostly geared to individual performance and competition among scholars. If not oriented to fully understand expectations and penalties around academic integrity, international students might unintentionally engage in academic dishonesty and face serious consequences.

To ensure that international students are socially immersed and supported during their stay in the United States, Najaf (2019) suggests an approach that encourages community. Establishing global community centers on campuses creates safe spaces for international students where they not only can connect with other international students, but also engage with domestic students who are globally-minded (Najaf, 2019). Such spaces allow students to maintain connections with other international students outside of those within their own academic disciplines (Melville, 2012). Najaf (2019) further asserts that international students can stay connected through trips, social events, and community excursions. Through these programming

opportunities, universities and colleges can help to enhance students' cultural and social connections. Along with a higher level of social stability, students also have increased support as they continue their academic pursuits, thus encouraging a holistic approach to student success.

### **Cross-Cultural Communication Competency**

There are numerous challenges that international students face when they decide to leave their home countries to study in the United States. Intercultural communication is one of the most common challenges that international students face during their stay in the country. Antonio and Ofori-Dwumfuo (2015) investigate how international and domestic students communicate within a global Living-Learning Community (LLC). Their study describes findings from a research case study conducted at a Living-Learning Community at an unnamed institution in the Southeastern United States. The authors focus on the dynamics of communication within the LLC and how those styles of communication impact the process of developing intercultural maturity among students (Antonio & Ofori-Dwumfuo, 2015). The authors identify some of the strategies university housing professionals and other staff can adopt to foster intercultural communication among domestic and international students at higher institutions of learning in the United States. These strategies include developing cross-cultural housing options for students and encouraging meaningful interactions among students from different cultural backgrounds.

Intercultural competence among university professionals is a critical component within areas of communication when serving international students. Such competence is of primary importance among university housing staff because they deal with students in less structured and more personal interactions. International students with no acquaintances or relatives near their school tend to struggle with isolation and loneliness (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). When international students do not have people who relate to their culture or who have a familiarity

with how they perceive the world, it can be difficult for them. Additionally, if these students are not given proper orientation, it is also challenging for them to transition to a new environment. Intercultural communication exchanges afford students an opportunity to cultivate their intercultural maturity and also allow international students to experience a much easier transition into a new environment (Antonio & Ofori-Dwumfou, 2015).

Understanding the most effective communication methods while serving individuals from different cultures is imperative for higher education professionals. As noted earlier, in recent decades, international student enrollment has increased in more universities overall. Consequently, the degree of internationalization of campuses across the country has increased. While discussing international student enrollment, Fanta Aw (2012), an international educator at American University in Washington, D.C., notes, "the level of intercultural competence of professionals engaged in international enrollment and international student programs and services continues to be a challenge" (p. 10). This challenge stems from limited cultural exposure and inadequate intercultural training for administrators working with international student services. Aw further asserts that cultural competence is a bigger challenge for smaller institutions with less infrastructure. She noted that smaller institutions often tend to have limited experiences with hosting international and exchange students (Aw, 2012).

While discussing challenges international students face after being enrolled, Ragouzeos and Wais (2012) stressed the importance of incorporating international students into all possible aspects of university life. They emphasize that involving international students in other aspects of university life should be intentional and implemented by university leadership. If university leadership opts to support programs that integrate international students, it is more likely that

staff who are charged with the responsibility to serve international students will follow through with the vision the university leadership casts.

Additionally, universities can enhance community programming and cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students through the creation of programming for international students to help alleviate the cross-cultural issues that they face. These issues often include language and cultural barriers associated with academic and social adjustment, as well as the emotional toll often linked with the processes of acculturation (Nilsson & Anderson, 2004). When international students connect with other students and are given adequate support from the university community, they are more likely to succeed (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011). In support of the previous assertion, high levels of social connectedness and social support networks lead to lower levels of acculturation stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). When international students are provided opportunities to interact with other cultures through orientation, social activities, and university programs, they are more likely to effectively communicate cross-culturally and transition to a new environment with less hardship.

### **International Student Cultural Differences**

Most international students come from countries whose cultural settings are different from those within the United States. The differences include food, mode of communication, and dress code, among others. Visiting a new place can be a challenge but moving to live and to study in a totally different culture has proven to impede success for some international students in the United States. Culture shock is characterized by feelings of bewilderment or anxiety induced by relocating to a new country with customs that differ from one's own (Killorin, 2021). Many international students find getting an education in a new country disorienting due to cultural shock, and it can lead to feelings of confused and anxiousness. Trying to learn when

overwhelmed with such emotions can be challenging, and it can eventually lead to poor academic performance.

### **International Student Social Challenges**

A student's social life is fundamental to their success in a college environment. A 2013 study by Elizabeth Gareis, a communications studies scholar, found that 40% of the interviewed international students did not have close relationships with their American counterparts (Ilham, 2013). The lack of interaction between international and domestic students does not offer an environment for international students to take part in social programs and activities that universities might offer. Many international students find it challenging to connect to other students on campus. At times, international students hesitate to get fully engaged in campus activities due to fear of being seen as different from their American peers.

### **Financial Difficulties**

Unlike their American counterparts, international students do not qualify for governmental financial aid since such aid is only reserved for American citizens. With limited options left, international students often rely on personal funds, support from family members, and scholarships offered by their colleges that are both rare and competitive. Completing an international higher education can be challenging with limited sources of funding. Additionally, international students at public institutions pay out-of-state tuition rates. Considering other expenses like health care, housing, and transportation, the price to get educated in the United States becomes very expensive. A 2006 study about the income security of international students in Australia found that international students face financial challenges as they navigate their education in an international setting (Forbes-Mewett et al., 2006) Financial worries coupled with

other challenges already discussed can hinder international students from academically succeeding as they otherwise would.

### **Immigration Challenges and Support Services**

International students face a variety of challenges when navigating the immigration process (Jibreel, 2015). These challenges stem from the fact that, in general, the United States' immigration system can be challenging for those without proper guidance in navigating the system.

As stipulated in the Code of Federal Regulations (8 CFR 214.2 (f)), every non-immigrant who decides to study in the United States must secure a student visa before traveling to the US (National Archives, 2021). The visa acquisition process can be stressful as applicants are never guaranteed visa approval. Despite no assurances of being given a visa, applicants still incur significant costs throughout the process. These costs include Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fees and fees for visa applications. Notably, even after an applicant has secured a visa, entry to the United States is never guaranteed. Granting entry in the United States is always at the discretion of the Custom and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port of entry, such as the airport or physical border in cases of Mexico and Canada entry points.

For institutions to adequately support international students concerning immigration advising services, they need to have the most up-to-date interpretation of, and guidance about, immigration regulations and policies issued by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). While there are multiple resources put out by DHS and other organizations such as the National Association for Foreign Students Advisors (NAFSA), there are times when immigration advisors and various institutions are not fully aware of how best to support international students. This lack of awareness often results from the way that some of the regulations lack clarity.

One of the most recent notable examples, when higher education personnel and their international students were stressed and confused, was during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic (Veerasamy & Ammigan, 2021). The federal administration at the time decided to impose a ban on online classes for all visa-holding students (SEVP, 2020). The mandate was for those international students who were in the United States and were directed that they had to be in face-to-face classes to maintain their immigration status. Similarly, all new international students who sought entry to the United States needed their universities to have face-to-face options; otherwise, they were to remain outside the United States. The policy guidance from DHS was challenging to implement since all institutions were grappling with how to deal with the present effects of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time. Many universities were implementing primarily online instruction to reduce the possibility of COVID-19 spread on campus. As a result, students and institutions alike did not have proper guidance on how to navigate the new policy guidance. Fortunately, the policy guidance was short-lived. It was rescinded by the government following several petitions and lawsuits. This change resulted in relief within the field of international education in the United States and elsewhere (Camilo, 2020). If the policy had remained in place, many international students would not have been allowed to continue their studies in the United States, and new students would not have been able to travel to the United States to pursue their studies.

### **Academic Differences**

A combination of cultural, social, and financial difficulties faced by international students can significantly affect how they perform academically. Issues of transition, language barriers, and different academic expectations from those of their home countries are proven causes of poor academic performance among international students. Importantly, international students



who struggle in the United States are often bright and fully capable people in their home countries. Heather Marie Kosur (2011), a linguist, affirms that the English language is one of the most challenging languages to learn and can intimidate even the most prepared student with challenges. At times, essays written by international students can contain distracting but minor mistakes even if the content is very insightful. The different styles of writing and presentation of facts by international students can affect the student's overall grade if their writing does not meet the professor's standard expectations of an academic paper.

There are various ways in which institutions can strive to reduce challenges faced by international students. Below is how universities can facilitate a smooth transition of new international students to American college campuses. Additionally, the suggestions below can be used to help international students integrate into the wider university communities.

### **On-Campus Involvement**

To socially support international students, universities can further develop programs and activities that connect international students not only to their fellow international students but also to the rest of the university community. Feeling socially connected to the larger community can help international students feel welcome and supported. Social programs universities can develop or grow include international student game nights, on and off-campus excursions, monthly coffee hours, as well as other similar networking programs. Such programs can afford international students an environment where they can make social connections in a less structured setting.

### **Diversify Financial Resources**

As earlier noted, most international students tend to face financial difficulty because they do not qualify for most of the available scholarships. International students must either have

funds upfront or they will face financial difficulties as they study in the United States. There are ways to alleviate this challenge. First, institutions can expand on-campus employment opportunities for international students. Since international students do not qualify for government loans, it can be helpful to ensure that international students are afforded on-campus job opportunities to help offset some of the costs they face as they study. Second, colleges and universities can create an emergency fund specifically for international students. By creating an emergency fund, universities would be able to help international students in case they find themselves in critical need of financial help. Finally, institutions can also guide international students on how to apply for available internal and external scholarship opportunities for which they qualify. Universities can help international students avoid dire financial situations by diversifying sources of funds.

### **Cross-Cultural Competence**

The challenge of academic difficulties can be solved by ensuring that faculty and advising staff are well-trained in matters of cross-cultural communication. Most international students find it difficult to adjust to American methods of academic instruction when they first arrive. Poor academic performance among international students can be reduced with cross-culturally competent faculty and a robust academic orientation program for international students. Additionally, universities can support out-of-class learning for international students by introducing tutoring programs, writing practice sessions, and one-on-one advising for those in need of extra attention. Such extra programs can increase the success of academically struggling international students.

## **Literature Evaluation**

The arguments outlined in the literature present a strong case in support of how higher education institutions need to support international students effectively and intentionally. When students choose to leave their home countries and travel to another country, a lot of changes occur. An individual needs to be well oriented in his or her new cultural environment to know how to identify and respond to challenges like extreme homesickness and lack of concentration on academics. The literature reviewed indicate, university campuses should have programs and services that comprehensively support international students. Merely making programs and services available for students would not suffice; it is also necessary to understand how students perceive those programs and the value of such offerings to international students.

While studies have been conducted on international student programs and services, there is limited literature available that explicitly talks about how international students perceive programs and services provided by their universities. This study attempts to contribute to the existing literature and investigate how international students perceive programs and support services that are offered to them by their respective institutions.

## **Theory of the Study**

The theory of this study is that if international student programs and support services are well-designed and well-implemented, they will have a positive impact on international students and that such programs and services are perceived well by the students. International students find value in programs and support services provided to them throughout their educational journey in the United States. Looking at various literature, one can see that for international students to successfully transition to the United States and pursue their academics successfully, they need support services that will facilitate that journey. For this reason, programs and support

services for international students should be designed comprehensively due to the diversity and varied backgrounds of the students.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This study utilized two theories as the theoretical framework to guide the researcher. These include Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's (2007) Advocacy Coalition Framework and Alexander W. Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement. The two theoretical frameworks were a guiding factor in the study concerning the policy formulation process and student involvement in university programs services for international students. The Advocacy Coalition Framework was helpful in the policy formulation aspect and the Theory of Student Involvement served as a guiding factor to fully grasp how student involvement was defined during the study.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) was used because it examines the policy process comprehensively (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). ACF looks at multiple actors, using various mechanisms to produce change over a long period of time (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). For this study, for universities to effectively examine the ways international student programs and services are developed and implemented, it is necessary to look at how policy formulation processes would bring about tangible benefits to international students. This framework also highlights the complex nature of policy-making processes (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). For example, because many stakeholders are engaged in institutional decision-making, programs and services required to provide effective programming for international students may take longer to be decided upon and implemented by responsible institutions.

Additionally, utilizing the instruments for various actors in ACF includes the use of direct participation in agency decisions. During this study, student involvement demonstrates direct participation to effect change. The students identified whether institutional programs were

beneficial to their academic journey. Student involvement included participants answering questions about the direct connection between student success and the types of programs and services institutions offered students. ACF is an appropriate framework because it looks at producing change within policy and decision-making processes. This framework comprehensively considers the policy-making process and provides a system to identify stakeholders whose role would be vital to formulate policies. The created policies would ensure that programs and activities that are deemed essential for international student success are protected not only from the operational aspect but also for budgetary purposes. ACF discusses the role of direct participation as a primary instrument in the policy formulation process and offers justification for the engagement of participants in offering policy recommendations to ensure that students have the appropriate resources vital to their success.

Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement was critical in this study as it emphasizes the need for students to feel connected to their campuses to succeed. The Student Involvement Theory demonstrates that it is not enough to create programs and services for students. In fact, after programs are in place, universities need to invest resources to ensure that students are participating in the created programs to achieve full outcomes. A study on the international student experience and institutional satisfaction showed that, while support services may be abundant at universities, international students may not always be aware of the full range of services offered (Ammigan, 2019). Furthermore, international students do not understand what these services are specifically for or how such services could be accessed (Ammigan, 2019). Student involvement is elucidated as the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience (Hunt, 2003). Astin (1984) asserts that an involved student is one who actively participates in student organizations

on campus, and regularly interacts with university faculty and staff, and other members of the university community. Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement provides a framework to distinguish between international students who are considered "involved" in the programs universities offer from their "non-involved" counterparts. As data was analyzed, it was helpful to categorize responses of these two different groups of international students to get a clear understanding of how student satisfaction was perceived by each group.

### **Chapter Summary**

International students face many challenges while they pursue their studies in the United States. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. Universities can be strategic in how they deal with the hardships that international students face. For international students to succeed, their cultural, social, financial, academic, and immigration status needs must be addressed. Universities must implement comprehensive programs such as new student orientation to facilitate a smooth transition, social events to connect international students to the university community, on-campus job opportunities to alleviate financial difficulties, and education for faculty and staff about intercultural competence. Since all these aspects of an international student's life are interwoven, it does not help to address one issue and neglect the rest. For international students to succeed, institutions must collectively address the comprehensive set of challenges facing international students. Chapter 3 will discuss the research design and methods of the study. The chapter will include research questions, data collection and analysis, sampling, and a discussion of the limitations of the study design.

### **CHAPTER 3: Research Design and Methods**

This study investigated international students' perception of programs and support services offered at two higher education institutions in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The study examined how students perceived such services and if they believed that the provided programs and support services had an impact on their overall success during their time as international students. This chapter outlines the research questions that guided the study and addresses the conceptual frameworks utilized in this study. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the data collection techniques used in the study and explains the reason behind utilizing random and non-random data sampling. Finally, the chapter discusses data analysis techniques used to answer the research question and possible limitations of the methodology.

#### **Research Questions**

As American universities continue to enroll international students, institutions need to continually cultivate programs and support services that ensure they are in the best position to comprehensively support international students' success. This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Do international students believe that services offered at their respective universities are beneficial to their overall success?
2. What types of services do universities offer to international students that are considered beneficial from the student perspective?
3. How satisfied are international students with the programs and services provided by institutions to assist them in their educational journey?

The findings from these research questions are significant because they reveal that services offered to international students effectively address their needs and can ultimately facilitate their overall success while enrolled at US institutions. Such confirmation would validate the resource investment universities make to facilitate such programs. The findings could also help universities prioritize and modify the programs offered to best utilize financial and personnel resources.

### **Data Collection**

The population surveyed included active international students in the F-1 or J-1 category and those who had graduated between 2015 and 2020. The students who had graduated were either participating in a post-studies employment program known as Optional Practical Training (OPT) or had just converted to the H-1B immigration category, which is temporarily employment for international workers in specialty occupations. This study defines the population of study as anyone who was an active F-1 or J-1 student in the student immigration category or had graduated in the stipulated time above. According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a student visa allows non-American citizens or nationals to enter the United States as a full-time student at an accredited college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, or other academic institution including a language training program (USCIS, 2020). As discussed in Chapter 2, students who desire to come to the United States must first apply for this specific visa before they can travel to the United States to pursue their studies. The study investigated student satisfaction and perceptions, making it important to accurately capture student opinions, as well as the rationale behind those opinions. Both quantitative and qualitative data needed to be collected to capture participants' opinions. To collect both qualitative and quantitative data, the study utilized a mixed-method



approach. A mixed-methods approach allowed for more varied data to analyze, which, in turn, reduced the threats to validity. While discussing the values of a mixed-methods approach in conducting research, O'Cathain et al. (2007) argue that a mixed-methods research design is deemed more desirable because it provides a more comprehensive approach to a study. While no design is error-free, a mixed-methods approach provides more validity due to the diversity of data collected. Data collection methods for this study included structured surveys and interviews, focus groups, and secondary data.

Data for this study was initially collected through an electronic survey (See Appendix A) sent via email to 201 students who were either actively enrolled at both study sites or at the time were engaging in post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) or had converted to an H-1B visa within the last five years. The response rate of the electronic survey was 25.3%. After electronic survey responses were submitted, participants who had opted to participate in a focus group or individual interview were contacted. The survey had four main sections. In section one, the survey requested demographic data including gender identity, age group, country of origin, and current institution. Section two included qualifying questions querying if participants were indeed the intended study population.

Questions within this section asked for visa types, length of time spent in the United States, and academic level. The third section aimed at collecting data on the student's perceptions of programs and services at the study sites. This section captured students' knowledge about and attitudes toward programs and services. Finally, the fourth section collected data concerning students' satisfaction with the programs and services at their institutions. Students were asked to rate programs and support services on a Likert scale, indicating whether they were very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied. The

participants were asked about the following programs: New International Student Orientation, Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) workshops, and on-campus social program such as student game nights, tea times; and off-campus excursions such as local and regional trips, picnics, and seasonal sports activities. The list of programs and services addressed in the survey included major initiatives of the participants' institutions.

### **Sampling**

The study utilized both random and nonrandom sampling methods to collect data. While formulating focus groups, the researcher used a random sampling method. While discussing sampling, Johnson (2015) explains that random sampling is where every unit in the population of interest has an equal chance of being selected to participate in the study. In this study, the researcher ensured that all international students at the two selected higher education institutions had an equal opportunity to participate in the focus groups. The use of random sampling helped the researcher eliminate potential bias in the selection of students who participated in focus groups. In addition to random sampling, the study utilized nonrandom sampling to capture data from respondents whose information needed further discussion and follow-up.

As discussed above, the use of a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups, increases the internal and external validity of the study. Additionally, quantitative survey questions allowed the researcher to objectively measure various indicators of student satisfaction. In considering the sample population, it was imperative to recognize for international students come to the United States from different cultural, educational, and economic backgrounds. The descriptor of "international student" describes an incredibly heterogeneous population, even though they all share the same non-immigration status. Some students enter the United States well-equipped to navigate a new environment while others lack

exposure and cross-cultural experience. Additionally, prior to entering university, some international students had previous experience in the American educational system. The non-random sampling in a portion of this study allowed for a deeper and more nuanced investigation into the experiences of international students who had accessed some of the programs and services that formed part of this investigation. Since the study looked at all international students, both graduate and undergraduate students were surveyed. The study was designed to capture data that would help identify how each category of the participating students fit into each variable.

### **Study Variables**

This study included variables in the following categories:

1. *Knowledge of programs.* Knowledge of programs was measured using a single item that asked students how they felt about available programs for international students. Response sets were Likert scale that included strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, and strongly disagree
2. *Perceptions of success.* Perception of contribution to success was assessed using a single self-reported question: the perceptions of students on how programs contributed to their success. This variable was measured by the Likert scale and responses included rating strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, and strongly disagree.
3. *Attendance of programs.* Attendance of programs was measured through a single question that students attended a program. Responses included strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, and strongly disagree.
4. *Programs.* Variables under programs included New International Student Orientation, Curricular Practical Training and Optional Practical Training workshops, On-Campus Social Programs, and Off-Campus Excursions.

5. *Services.* Variables under the services category included University Housing, Academic Advising, Career Readiness, and Mental Wellness/Counseling.
6. *Demographic.* The demographic variables included age, gender, country of origin, immigration status, and length of stay in the United States.

### **Data Analysis**

With a sample size of over 30, the central limit theorem was met, which allowed statistical data analysis to go ahead (Mascha & Vetter, 2018). Since data in the study was collected using the mixed-methods approach, the researcher utilized both qualitative and quantitative techniques of data analysis. A mixed-methods approach includes at least one quantitative method used to analyze numbers and one qualitative method used to analyze collected text (Creswell & Clark, 2011). As discussed below, descriptive analysis was used to illustrate the various data sets. In addition, independent sample t-tests, Pearson's correlations, and bivariate analysis were utilized to investigate the connections between participants and socio-demographic variables.

**Quantitative Analysis.** First, the researcher calculated summary statistics of the perception of international students toward the programs and support services provided, utilization and satisfaction of programs and support services, and socio-demographics. The calculations were done using means (M) and standard deviation (SD) for continuous variables, and frequencies and proportions for categorical variables. Second, the researcher used Pearson's Correlation to explore the associations between the perception of international students toward the programs and support services provided, and utilization/satisfaction of programs and support services. Finally, independent sample t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to explore how student perceptions on the utilization of programs and services may have

differed by socio-demographic factors of age, gender, education level, and the duration of stay in the US. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26, a software package used for statistical analysis.

**Qualitative Analysis.** To analyze qualitative data, the researcher first read through all notes from interviews and focus group interview transcripts. The analysis occurred in phases where the researcher first analyzed survey responses which informed the focus group discussions. Johnson (2015) argues that scanning through all available notes, write-ups, and other transcripts allows the researcher to get a better idea of what kind of data is collected before formulating a general framework for analyzing the rest of the collected data. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to develop a suitable model that can be analyzed effectively. Additionally, the researcher used excel spreadsheets to organize and identify any common themes from respondents. By using excel spreadsheets, the researcher organized data by type, source, and frequency. Johnson (2015) emphasizes the value of creating a “systematic and organized approach” when analyzing qualitative data (p. 163). To organize and understand collected data, the researcher utilized open coding at the start of the analysis. Open coding refers to the process of reviewing collected data for descriptive categories (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The use of open coding was valuable to this analysis because it helped the researcher code without closing out any categories that would emerge later as relevant to the study. Through analysis, participant responses were reviewed for categorical themes.

### **Participants’ Rights**

The study was conducted following approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB). It was approved as an expedited review study (See Appendix C). All participants were informed of their rights and that participation was voluntary. Each study participant signed a consent form

(See Appendix D) before completing the survey and participating in follow-up focus group interviews. All study stipulations were included in the approved IRB that made it possible to conduct the study. To protect the interview and participants' identity, each respondent was assigned a pseudonym (See Table 14).

### **Methodology Limitations**

There are multiple limitations to consider in this particular study. As this survey was voluntary, the sample size ( $N=51$ ) might not have represented the full diversity of experiences of international student populations at both institutions. Aside from the possibility that it may not have entirely represented the international student population's perceptions at both study sites, it also may have disproportionately expressed the experience of students from a certain subset of the international student population. In general, international students are more representative from China, India, and South Korea than students from other countries. As shown in Table 3, there are some inconsistencies in the balance of student voices based on region. The balance of student voices is also a consideration when factoring in the cultural backgrounds of the student respondents. This study could not accurately subdivide students with differing priorities and experiences. Also, there were social and cultural factors that affect student perceptions that were not able to be measured as part of the study.

Depending on students' cultural norms, they may or may not have been willing to openly express their opinions to a perceived authority. In this way, the authority of the researcher from Site A and the university's contact from Site B might also have created limitations. The perception of how students understand the survey, researcher, and/or international student staff at their university might have affected the way they responded. If there was a culture of mistrust or a misunderstanding of the purpose or utility of the study findings, students may not have been

forthcoming in their responses. Students may have chosen to censor their responses, either to provide responses they thought were “desirable” or out of a fear that the information they provided would be used against them. Any student skepticism would inevitably impact responses and curtail the study’s ability to accurately measure student perceptions. Finally, student perceptions may also have been affected by the timing of the study in each student’s academic experience. For example, some students might not have realized the value of an Optional Practical Training (OPT) workshop if they were in one of their first years of study and not yet considering options following the completion of their degree. Thus, the study accounted for these limitations or drew conclusions understanding the potential impact of these factors in all ways possible.

### ***Potential Bias***

The researcher had significant experience in the field of study. This is mainly due to the researcher’s experiences as an international student at the graduate level and present exposure to the field of international programs and services as a current administrator. While measures were put in place to ensure that experiences did not impact the study, it was difficult to rule out instances where the researcher might have inadvertently influenced the course of the study either during the data collection or data analysis stages. Since it is well understood that this could be an area that would limit the reliability of the study, the researcher aimed to be neutral as the study was being conducted. For example, while designing the data collection tools, the researcher sought additional help from individuals outside this professional field in reviewing the survey and interview questions. Checking the data collection tools by a third party ensured that questions were not designed in a way that would sway respondents. Additionally, to limit instances of bias, the researcher ensured that data was reviewed by additional individuals during

data analysis. It is worth noting that self-reported surveys are vulnerable to social desirability and response bias by the respondent because study participants tend to describe more desirable attributes rather than being honest (Tourangeau, 1997).

### ***Cross-Cultural Implications***

Since this study focused on international students in the United States, most participants in this study came from varying cultural backgrounds. Given the various perceptions some students have of the people in leadership and the authority they command, student respondents might have perceived the study in a particular way because the invitation to participate in the study came from either the principal investigator who had authority over the students or the leaders at their institution. Authenticity in responses from students might have been diminished on how they perceived programs and services offered at their respective universities. This might have been a strong possibility especially if they believed their responses could reflect on them personally and impact their relationship with the institution. The researcher also served as the main adviser for international students at one of the study sites that were part of the study. In wake of the adviser-advisee relationship, some students might have been hesitant in sharing their experiences with the programs and services. Not getting the true response might have hindered the validity of the study since some students might not have been open to sharing due to fear of retribution from the study site. For this specific limitation, the researcher clearly articulated his role in the study. While he had some authority over international students, the researcher made it abundantly clear during all the stages of the study that his role in this research project was purely academic and the study would not in a way impact the existing academic and professional relationship between the researcher and the study participants.



### ***Sample Representation***

While all international students enrolled at the two study sites had an opportunity to participate in the study, there was an over-representation of participants from some countries in comparison to others. This is because some countries tend to have more international student representation than others, a pattern that is true for the two institutions that participated in the study. Countries that usually have high numbers of international students enrolled at American Universities include India and China. The study saw over-representation from India in comparison to other countries. Having more students from these countries that chose to participate in the study, their views might have overshadowed the views of the rest of the international students. However, this may not have been a true representation of the varied experiences represented within the international student population at the two study sites. The researcher utilized convenience sampling to aim for a balanced representation when conducting follow-up interviews to reduce the risk of over-representation from particular countries, and to ensure there is a more accurate representation of the study population. Johnson (2013) describes convenience sampling where not everyone has an equal chance of being selected. This type of sampling ensured that no one country dominated the follow-up interviews thus increasing the credibility of the study.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the purpose of the study, which was to measure student perceptions of international student programming at their respective institutions. By measuring student satisfaction, the study hopes to guide universities as they create and prioritize programs focused on international student success. The research questions focused on the student experience, the programs offered by institutions to international students, the student satisfaction

in relation to those programs, as well as the international student perceptions around the programming they need to succeed. The study utilized a mixed-method approach to data collection in order to address these research questions. Through surveys, focus groups, follow-up interviews, and secondary data, the study sought to balance qualitative and quantitative data for a full understanding of student perceptions.

While there were limitations to self-reported data and voluntary survey participation, the study attempted to account for these limitations in study design and data analysis. The next chapter, namely, Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study from both qualitative and quantitative analysis. It will present the data in varied forms such as tables, figures, and narratives.

## **CHAPTER 4: Findings**

This study looked at international students' attitudes regarding programs and support services provided by their higher education institutions in the United States. The study sought to ascertain if international students thought that the programs and services made available to them were beneficial to their personal and academic success as international students. This chapter summarizes the responses obtained from research participants via an online survey and focus group interviews. Respondents gave their opinions on the programs and services provided by their institutions. While some students thought that most of the programs and services they used favorably contributed to their academic journey in the United States, others voiced reservations about the quality of certain programs and support services they received.

### **Sample Characteristics and Presentation of Data**

Table 1 shows the immigration visa status of respondents and the duration spent in the United States at the time of the study. 54.90% ( $n=28$ ) of respondents were still actively enrolled in school under the F-1 or J-1 visa category. University graduates who were participating in Optional Practical Training (OPT) represented 19.61% ( $n=10$ ) of respondents. This category of respondents was expected since it is common practice for students in the F-1 visa category to stay in the United States after they complete their studies to train with US companies under the OPT program. While students who are on OPT are technically still under the F-1 visa category, they have a different relationship with the university than currently enrolled students since they have already graduated and are working in their respective fields of study. The rest of the survey participants were either on H-1B or had transitioned to other non-immigrant visa categories.

**Table 1**

<i>Respondent Immigration Visa Status and Duration in the US</i>		
Variables	N	%
<b>Current Visa Type</b>		
F1/J1	28	54.90%
F-1 OPT	10	19.61%
Other	13	25.49%
<b>Duration in the United States</b>		
<1 year	4	7.84%
1 to 2 years	10	19.61%
3-4 years	19	37.25%
>4 years	18	35.29%

Table 2 describes participant demographics including age and gender. It shows that the age of participants was diverse for a participant group composed of university students. Most participants were 25 to 30 years old ( $n=21$ ) representing 41.18%, but ages ranged from nineteen to beyond 30.

Gender identification of participants was between male and female. Of the total number of respondents, 62.75% ( $n=32$ ) identified as female, while 37.25% ( $n=19$ ) identified as male.

**Table 2**

<i>Survey Respondents by Age and Gender</i>		
Variables	N	%
<b>Age Groups</b>		
19-20	2	3.92%
20-24	14	27.45%
25-30	21	41.18%
>30	14	27.45%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	19	37.25%
Female	32	62.75%
Other	0	0.00%

As shown in Table 3, most of the participants were from the continent of Asia with the countries of India ( $n=12$ ; 24%) and China ( $n=5$ ; 10%) representing the largest percentages of student respondents' country of origin. The higher number of participants from India and China reflects the larger number of students at American universities from the two countries. India and China tend to be the top sending countries of students to American Universities (Israel & Batalova, 2021). This data reflects that assertion and the international student population at study Site A. By the time the survey was complete, 15% of students at study Site A came from India and 10% came from China. While at study Site B at the time of survey completion, 39% of students came from China and 3% came from India. Overall, survey respondents represented 27 countries and 6 continents. Table 3 lists the country of origin and the respective continents of all the survey participants.

**Table 3**

<i>Respondents by Continent and Country</i>		
Continent	Country of Origin	# of Students
Asia	India	12
	China	5
	Indonesia	1
	Cambodia	1
	Malaysia	1
	Nepal	2
	South Korea	1
	Saudi Arabia	1
	Kazakhstan	1
	Nigeria	4
Africa	Ghana	2
	Egypt	1
	Kenya	1
	Malawi	1
	Mali	1
	Uganda	1
	Zimbabwe	1
	Norway	4
Europe	Germany	1

	Netherlands	1
	Mexico	2
North America	Jamaica	1
	Haiti	1
	The Bahamas	1
South America	Argentina	1
	Colombia	1
Oceania	Australia	1

### ***Knowledge and Attitudes toward Programs***

Table 4 illustrates student knowledge and attitudes towards programs at their institutions. Results below indicate, 72.55% ( $n=37$ ) strongly agreed when asked if they felt well informed about the programs and services their university offered. An additional 25% ( $n=13$ ) somewhat agreed to the stated assertion of feeling well-informed about the programs. This data indicates that among the study population, over 98% of the international students that responded to the survey at both study sites felt well-informed about the programs and services offered at respective institutions.

When asked if they believed the programs offered contributed to their overall success, 64.71% ( $n=33$ ) strongly agreed and 27.45% ( $n=14$ ) agreed. Of the respondents, 7.84 % ( $n=4$ ) remained neutral to the statement. Meanwhile, no respondent disagreed that the programs contributed to their success. These results reinforce the conclusions asserted by Arthur (2017) that the programs universities provide are of value to international students.

**Table 4***Participant Attitudes Toward Programs and Services*

Variables	N	%
<b>Felt Informed (n=51)</b>		
Strongly agree	37	72.55%
Somewhat agree	13	25.49%
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0.00%
Somewhat disagree	1	1.96%
Strongly disagree	0	0.00%
<b>Contribution of Programs to Student success (n=51)</b>		
Strongly agree	33	64.71%
Somewhat agree	14	27.45%
Neither agree nor disagree	4	7.84%
Somewhat disagree	0	0.00%
Strongly disagree	0	0.00%

*Access and Utilization of Programs*

The researcher aimed at gathering student responses to the programs that they had accessed during the academic program. Results from the survey were mostly positive, as shown in Table 5. Survey respondents were asked whether they were very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied. Table 5 shows survey responses about the satisfaction of students in relation to Student Orientation, Curricular Practical Training, and Optional Practical Training Workshops, and On-campus and Off-campus student activities. Overall responses show that students were satisfied with the programs they accessed.

*Student Orientation Programming*

In the case of student orientation, 60% ( $n=30$ ) were very satisfied with the program, while 36% ( $n=18$ ) indicated that they were satisfied with the overall programs of their orientation. Of the 50 responses, only 4% ( $n=2$ ) were dissatisfied with orientation. The 4% dissatisfaction was further investigated during the follow-up focus groups and interviews. During follow-up, some focus group participants noted that certain material provided during orientation

was not helpful since it seemed somewhat intimidating to international students in relation to their immigration status. A detailed discussion of these responses will be addressed in the interview and focus group analysis section.

### ***Workshops***

Survey responses indicated that students who participated in Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) workshops were either very satisfied or satisfied with the program offered. Among the students surveyed about CPT, 48.48% ( $n=16$ ) were very satisfied, while 51.25% ( $n=17$ ) were satisfied. While most of the responses about both workshops were positive, there was an exception in the form of 3% ( $n=1$ ), who indicated dissatisfaction with the OPT workshop.

### ***On-Campus Social Programs***

On-campus social programs that students were asked to rate included activities such as a student game nights, coffee times, movie nights, and similar programs. When asked to rate their satisfaction level, most respondents indicated they were either very satisfied, representing 34.09% ( $n=15$ ), or satisfied, representing 65.91% ( $n=29$ ).

### ***Off-Campus Excursions***

Students were also asked to rate their experience with off-campus activities that included trips to cities such as New York City, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and other local sites. Among those who responded to this survey question, 48.57 % ( $n=17$ ) indicated that they were satisfied with the trips, while 47.71% ( $n=16$ ) were very satisfied. Only two respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied with off-campus excursions.



**Table 5***Student Perception of Programs Accessed*

Variables	N	%
<b>Student Orientation Programming (n=50)</b>		
Very satisfied	30	60.00%
Satisfied	18	36.00%
Dissatisfied	2	4.00%
Very dissatisfied	0	0.00%
<b>Curricular Practical Training (CPT) Workshops (n=33)</b>		
Very satisfied	16	48.48%
Satisfied	17	51.52%
Dissatisfied	0	0.00%
Very dissatisfied	0	0.00%
<b>Optional Practical Training (OPT) Workshops (n=33)</b>		
Very satisfied	21	63.64%
Satisfied	11	33.33%
Dissatisfied	1	3.03%
Very dissatisfied	0	0.00%
<b>On-campus Social programs (Game nights, movies, coffee hours, etc.) (n=44)</b>		
Very satisfied	15	34.09%
Satisfied	29	65.91%
Dissatisfied	0	0.00%
Very dissatisfied	0	0.00%
<b>Off-campus Excursions (Trips, picnics, sports activities, etc.) (n=35)</b>		
Very satisfied	16	45.71%
Satisfied	17	48.57%
Dissatisfied	2	5.71%
Very dissatisfied	0	0.00%

*Students' Satisfaction with Services Provided*

In the fourth section of the survey, participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction toward a selection of services offered. Services included housing, academic advising, career readiness, and mental wellness and counseling services. Of all the services accessed by students, career readiness and academic advising had the most satisfaction rating. As shown in

Table 6, out of the 41 responses for this survey question, 68.29% ( $n=28$ ) said they were satisfied with the career readiness service while only 7.3% ( $n=3$ ) indicated that were dissatisfied.

Similarly, academic advising services were rated positively as 66.67% ( $n=32$ ) were satisfied.

Meanwhile, 10.42% ( $n=5$ ) indicated that they were dissatisfied with academic advising services.

A later discussion will address certain factors that might explain why some students believed that the services were not satisfactory.

**Table 6**

*Student Satisfaction with Services*

Variables	N	%
<b>University Housing (n=27)</b>		
Very satisfied	2	7.41%
Satisfied	13	48.15%
Dissatisfied	10	37.04%
Very dissatisfied	2	7.41%
<b>Academic Advising (n=48)</b>		
Very satisfied	11	22.92%
Satisfied	32	66.67%
Dissatisfied	5	10.42%
Very dissatisfied	0	0.00%
<b>Career Readiness (n=41)</b>		
Very satisfied	10	24.39%
Satisfied	28	68.29%
Dissatisfied	3	7.32%
Very dissatisfied	0	0.00%
<b>Mental Wellness/Counseling (n=30)</b>		
Very satisfied	10	33.33%
Satisfied	18	60.00%
Dissatisfied	1	3.33%
Very dissatisfied	1	3.33%

**Presentation of Bivariate Findings**

This section presents data using Pearson's Correlation. The researcher explored associations between the perception of international students toward the programs and support services provided and utilization and satisfaction of programs and support services

***Correlations between international students' perceptions of success from university programs, feeling of being informed, and their utilization of services***

Table 7 presents the correlations between international students' perceptions towards programs and their utilization of services. As expected, international students 'feeling informed about university programs had a significantly medium positive correlation with student's perception of success ( $r = 0.480, p < 0.001$ ), and a small positive relationship with their ability to attend the programs ( $r = 0.298, p < 0.050$ ). Also, findings show that international students' perception of success has a medium positive association with their ability to attend programs by the university ( $r = 0.498, p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 7**

***Correlations between international students' perceptions of success from university programs, feeling of being informed, and their utilization of services***

	1	2	3
1 Felt informed about the programs and services my university provides to international students			
2 Programs my university provides to international students contribute to my success as an international student	0.480**		
3 I attended most of the programs my university offered to international students	0.298*	0.498**	1

Note: \*  $p < .050$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

***Correlations between International Students' Perceptions of Feeling Informed and their Satisfaction with University Programs***

Table 8 presents the correlations between international students' perceptions towards programs and their utilization of services. As expected, international students 'feeling informed about university programs was significantly positively correlated with students' attendance of programs such as Optional Practical Training (OPT) workshops ( $r = 0.426, p < 0.050$ ), and on-

campus social programs ( $r=0.395$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The strength of the correlation was small to medium.

**Table 8**

*Correlations between international students' perceptions of feeling informed and their satisfaction with university programs*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Felt informed about the programs and services my university provides to international students										
2 International Student Orientation programming satisfaction	0.256									
3 CPT Workshops	0.097	0.542**								
4 OPT Workshops	0.426*	0.319	0.718**							
5 On-Campus Social Programs	0.395**	0.378*	0.632**	0.435*						
6 Off-Campus Excursions	0.254	0.126	0.083	0.231	0.304					
7 University Housing Services	-0.061	0.041	0.029	-0.121	-0.095	0.254				
8 Academic Advising Services	0.041	0.198	0.066	0.084	0.285	0.017	0.562**			
9 Career Readiness Services	0.157	0.259	0.334	0.304	0.176	0.174	0.098	0.438**		
10 Mental Wellness/Counseling Services	0.243	0.085	0.264	0.131	0.349	0.239	0.173	0.178	0.213	1

Note: \*  $p<0.050$  \*\*\*  $p<0.001$

***Correlations between International Students' Perceptions of Success and their Satisfaction of University Programs and Services***

Table 9 presents the correlations between international students' perceptions of success and their satisfaction with services. Similarly, International students' positive perception of how the programs contributed to their success was positively associated with programs such as Curricular Practical Training (CPT) workshops ( $r=0.426$ ,  $p<0.050$ ), OPT workshops ( $r=0.571$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), on-campus social programs ( $r=0.356$ ,  $p<0.050$ ), and services such as career readiness ( $r=0.503$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and mental wellness/counseling ( $r=0.520$ ,  $p<0.050$ ). Also, the new international student orientation programming was significantly associated with students attending on-campus social programs ( $r=0.378$ ,  $p<0.050$ ), and mental wellness/counseling services ( $r=0.458$ ,  $p<0.050$ ).

**Table 9**

*Correlations between international students' perceptions of success and their satisfaction of university programs and services*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Programs my university provides to international students contribute to my success as an international student										
2 New International Student Orientation programming satisfaction	0.22									
3 CPT Workshops	0.426*	0.542**								
4 OPT Workshops	0.571**	0.319	0.718**							
5 On- Campus Social Programs	0.356*	0.378*	0.632**	0.435*						
6 Off-Campus Excursions	0.263	0.126	0.083	0.231	0.304					
7 University Housing Services	-0.062	0.041	0.029	-0.121	-0.095	0.254				
8 Academic Advising Services	0.137	0.198	0.066	0.084	0.285	0.017	0.562**			
9 Career Readiness Services	0.503**	0.259	0.334	0.304	0.176	0.174	0.098	0.438**		
10 Mental Wellness/Counseling Services	0.52*	0.085	0.264	0.131	0.349	0.239	0.173	0.178	0.213	1

Note: \*  $p < .050$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

***Correlations between International Students' Attendance and their Satisfaction with University Programs and Services***

Table 10 presents the correlations between international students' attendance of university programs and services such as new student orientation, on-campus social programs, OPT and CPT workshops, and their satisfaction with provided university programs and services. The analysis in Table 10 shows that student attendance of programs and utilization of the services was positively associated with the nature of programing including new international student orientation programing ( $r=0.414$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and on-campus social programs ( $r=0.378$ ,  $p<0.050$ ), and services such as mental health/ counseling services ( $r=0.458$ ,  $p<0.050$ ). The strength of the correlation ranged from small to medium.

**Table 10***Correlations between International Students' Attendance and their Satisfaction with University Programs and Services*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 I attended most of the programs my university offered to international students										
2 New International Student Orientation programming satisfaction	0.414**									
3 CPT Workshops	0.294	0.542**								
4 OPT Workshops	0.156	0.319	0.718**							
5 On-Campus Social Programs	0.378*	0.378*	0.632**	0.435*						
6 Off-Campus Excursions	0.028	0.126	0.083	0.231	0.304					
7 University Housing Services	-0.107	0.041	0.029	-0.121	-0.095	0.254				
8 Academic Advising Services	-0.16	0.198	0.066	0.084	0.285	0.017	0.562**			
9 Career Readiness Services	0.109	0.259	0.334	0.304	0.176	0.174	0.098	0.438**		
10 Mental Wellness/Counseling Services	0.458*	0.085	0.264	0.131	0.349	0.239	0.173	0.178	0.213	1

Note: \*  $p < .050$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

*International Students' Perceptions of Programs and Support Services Mean Differences*

This section displays the results of bivariate analysis. This exercise aimed to look at the relationship between participants' socio-demographic characteristics and a variety of variables such as perceptions, satisfaction with programs and services offered.

Table 11 shows the results of the association between socio-demographic factors and international students' perception of programs and support services using one-way ANOVA and independent sample t-test. The researcher used one-way ANOVA to test how perceptions of programs and services differed by age group and students' duration in the United States. Results show that although there was no statistical difference, participants above the age of 30 expressed that they were knowledgeable about available programs and support services at their university campus ( $M = 4.77$ ;  $SD = 0.44$ ) compared to their 19-24 years ( $M = 4.73$ ;  $SD = 0.46$ ) and 25-30 years ( $M = 4.57$ ;  $SD = 0.75$ ) counterparts. Also, participants over 30 years old reported positive perceptions toward programs' contribution to their success ( $M=4.69$  vs.  $M=4.57$  vs.  $M=4.00$ ) and had the highest attendance average ( $M=4.62$  vs.  $M=4.00$  vs.  $M=3.93$ ) compared to the other age groups. Findings showed that international students' duration of stay in the United States was

significantly associated with being knowledgeable about programs and services but not their perception of contribution to their success and their program attendance. Participants who had lived in the United States for 3-4 years were more likely to be knowledgeable about available programs and services on their university campuses ( $M = 4.83$ ;  $SD = 0.38$ ) compared to their counterparts who had lived in the United States for less than 1 year ( $M = 4.75$ ;  $SD = 0.50$ ), 1-2 years ( $M = 4.20$ ;  $SD = 0.92$ ), and more than 4 years ( $M=4.76$ ;  $SD = 0.4$ ). It is also observed that new students tend to have a positive view on how programs may contribute to their success and also report the highest attendance of programs.

The researcher utilized an independent sample t-test to examine how perceptions of programs and services varied by gender and level of education. Female-identifying students had a lower mean assessment of how programs contribute to their success ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD=0.62$ ) than male-identifying participants ( $M=4.72$ ,  $SD=0.67$ ). While graduate students' program attendance ( $M=4.19$ ;  $SD=0.99$ ) was greater than undergraduates' ( $M=4.06$ ;  $SD=0.99$ ), no statistically significant difference was found between program attendance and academic level.

**Table 11**

*Bivariate analysis of the association between socio-demographic factors and international students' perception of programs and services*

	Informed about programs & services		Program contribution to success		Program attendance	
	Mean (SD)	t/f	Mean (SD)	t/f	Mean (SD)	t/f
Age group (years)		0.55		0.719		2.184
19-24	4.73 (0.46)		4.40 (0.63)		3.93 (0.96)	
25-30	4.57 (0.75)		4.57 (0.68)		4.00 (1.14)	
>30	4.77 (0.439)		4.69 (0.63)		4.62 (0.51)	
Gender		-1.459		-1.425		-1.352
Female	4.58 (0.67)		4.45 (0.62)		4.00 (1.07)	
Male	4.83 (0.38)		4.72 (0.67)		4.39 (0.78)	
Academic level		-0.682		0.781		0.409
Undergraduate	4.75 (0.45)		4.44 (0.63)		4.06 (0.99)	
Graduate	4.63 (0.66)		4.59 (0.67)		4.19 (0.99)	
Duration in the US		3.09*		0.684		0.115
<1 year	4.75 (0.50)		4.75 (5.00)		4.75 (0.500)	
1- 2 years	4.20 (0.92)		4.30 (0.68)		3.60 (1.43)	
3-4 years	4.83 (0.38)		4.61 (0.61)		4.39 (0.61)	
>4 years	4.76 (0.44)		4.59 (0.71)		4.06 (0.96)	

Notes: t=independent t-test; f=one-way ANOVA

### ***International Students' Satisfaction of Programs Mean Differences***

Table 12 shows findings of the association between socio-demographic factors and international students' satisfaction with programs. The association was analyzed using one-way ANOVA and an independent sample t-test. The researcher used one-way ANOVA to analyze how student satisfaction of programs differed by age group and students' duration in the United States. The results indicated that there was no statistical difference. However, the mean difference shows that participants who had spent less than one year in the United States ( $M=5.00$ ;  $SD=0.00$ ) indicated a higher satisfaction rate with new student orientation in comparison to those who had spent over a year to two in the United States ( $M=4.30$ ;  $SD=0.68$ ) and those who had spent over 4 years in the United States ( $M=4.44$ ;  $SD=0.63$ ).

To better understand if there were any differences in satisfaction of programs by gender and education level, the researcher used an independent sample t-test. The mean students' new student orientation for female-identifying students ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD=0.62$ ) was lower than that of



male-identifying participants ( $M=4.71$ ,  $SD=0.47$ ). In addition, the mean students' CPT of undergraduate students ( $M=4.50$ ;  $SD=0.55$ ) was higher than that of the graduate academic level ( $M=4.42$ ;  $SD=0.50$ ). However, graduate students reported a higher OPT workshop mean ( $M=4.58$ ;  $SD=0.50$ ) in comparison to their undergraduate colleagues ( $M=4.50$ ;  $SD=0.84$ ). The analysis conducted did not indicate any significant statistical difference (See Table 12).

**Table 12**

*Bivariate analysis of the association between socio-demographic factors and international students' satisfaction of programs*

	New Student Orientation	t/f	Curricular Practical Training Workshops	t/f	Optional Practical Training Workshops	t/f	On-Campus Social Programs	t/f	Off-Campus Excursions	t/f
	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)	
Age groups (years)		0.231		1.153		1.783		1.403		0.361
19-24	4.60 (0.51)		4.33 (0.52)		4.33 (0.82)		4.15 (0.38)		4.33 (0.50)	
25-30	4.48 (0.60)		4.36 (0.49)		4.50 (0.52)		4.44 (0.51)		4.50 (0.65)	
>30	4.58 (0.70)		4.64 (0.51)		4.82 (0.41)		4.38 (0.51)		4.30 (0.68)	
Gender		-1.465		-2.004		-1.488		-2.609		-1.159
Female	4.45 (0.62)		4.29 (0.47)		4.44 (0.51)		4.19 (0.40)		4.38 (0.59)	
Male	4.71 (0.47)		4.64 (0.50)		4.73 (0.59)		4.56 (0.51)		4.42 (0.67)	
Academic level		-.781		-.357		-.316		0.453		
Undergraduate	4.63 (0.50)		4.50 (0.548)		4.50 (0.837)		4.29 (0.69)		4.50 (0.53)	
Graduate	4.48 (0.62)		4.42 (0.50)		4.58 (0.50)		4.36 (0.49)		4.35 (0.65)	
Duration in the US		1.963		0.099		1.658		0.397		2.131
< 1 year	5.00 (0.00)		4.33 (0.58)		4.33 (0.58)		4.25 (0.50)		4.67 (0.58)	
1- 2 years	4.30 (0.675)		4.40 (0.55)		4.00 (1.00)		4.29 (0.49)		3.67 (0.58)	
3-4 years	4.67 (0.485)		4.45 (0.52)		4.73 (0.47)		4.44 (0.51)		4.53 (0.52)	
>4 years	4.44 (0.629)		4.50 (0.52)		4.58 (0.56)		4.27 (0.46)		4.33 (0.65)	

Notes: t=independent t-test; f=one-way ANOVA

### *International Student Satisfaction of Support Services Mean Differences*

Table 13 illustrates the results of the association between social-demographic factors and participants' satisfaction of services using one-way ANOVA and independent sample t-test. To test how satisfaction of services differed concerning age group and students' duration of stay in the United States, the researcher used one-way ANOVA. Although the analysis did not show any significant statistical difference by age group among all student support services, data indicated that participants who were within the age range of 19-24 years ( $M=3.89$ ;  $SD=0.60$ ) were more satisfied with university housing services in comparison to those within the range of 25-30 years

( $M=3.40$ ;  $SD=0.97$ ). In terms of academic advising services, participants who were 25-30 years ( $M=4.25$ ;  $SD=0.55$ ) were slightly more satisfied than participants who were over 30 years of age ( $M=3.77$ ;  $SD=0.60$ ). However, this difference was not statistically significant.

Applying an independent sample t-test, the researcher explored how satisfaction of services differed by gender and academic level. As shown in Table 13, the difference in satisfaction among undergraduate students ( $M=3.99$ ;  $SD=0.54$ ) was significantly higher than of the graduate students ( $M=3.31$ ;  $SD=0.79$ ;  $t(25) = -2.167$ ,  $p<0.040$ , two-tailed, 95% CI=-1.163,-0.030). This means that undergraduate students were more satisfied with the university's housing services compared to the graduate students.

**Table 13**

*Bivariate analysis of the association between socio-demographic factors and international students' satisfaction of services*

	University Housing	t/f	Academic Advising	t/f	Career Readiness	t/f	Mental Wellness/Counseling	t/f
	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)	
Age groups (years)		1.37		3.636		0.277		0.554
19-24	3.89 (0.60)		4.23 (0.44)		4.13 (0.35)		4.20 (0.45)	
25-30	3.40 (0.97)		4.25 (0.55)		4.22 (0.55)		4.31 (0.79)	
>30	3.56 (0.52)		3.77 (0.60)		4.08 (0.64)		4.00 (0.53)	
Gender		0.572		-.141		0.185		-.977
Females	3.63 (0.50)		4.10 (0.55)		4.17 (0.48)		4.11 (0.68)	
Men	3.45 (1.03)		4.13 (0.62)		4.13 (0.64)		4.36 (0.76)	
Academic level		-2.167*		-1.015		0.788		-1.147
Undergraduate	3.91 (0.54)		4.21 (0.43)		4.00 (0.00)		4.43 (0.54)	
Graduate	3.31 (0.79)		4.03 (0.61)		4.17 (0.56)		4.10 (0.70)	
Duration in the US		0.679		0.155		0.274		0.703
<1 year	3.67 (0.58)		4.00 (0.00)		4.00 (0.00)		4.00 (0.00)	
1- 2 years	3.17 (1.17)		4.20 (0.63)		4.25 (0.71)		4.14 (1.07)	
3-4 years	3.64 (0.51)		4.12 (0.49)		4.08 (0.49)		4.09 (0.54)	
>4 years	3.71 (0.76)		4.07 (0.70)		4.20 (0.54)		4.50 (0.54)	

Notes:  $t$ = independent t-test;  $f$ = one-way ANOVA

**Data by Sub-Groups.** This section shows data patterns of participant satisfaction with programs and services by subgroups of age and duration of stay in the United States. The significance of these patterns will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Figure 1 below shows participants' satisfaction with new student orientation, curricular practical training, and optional practical training workshops by age group.

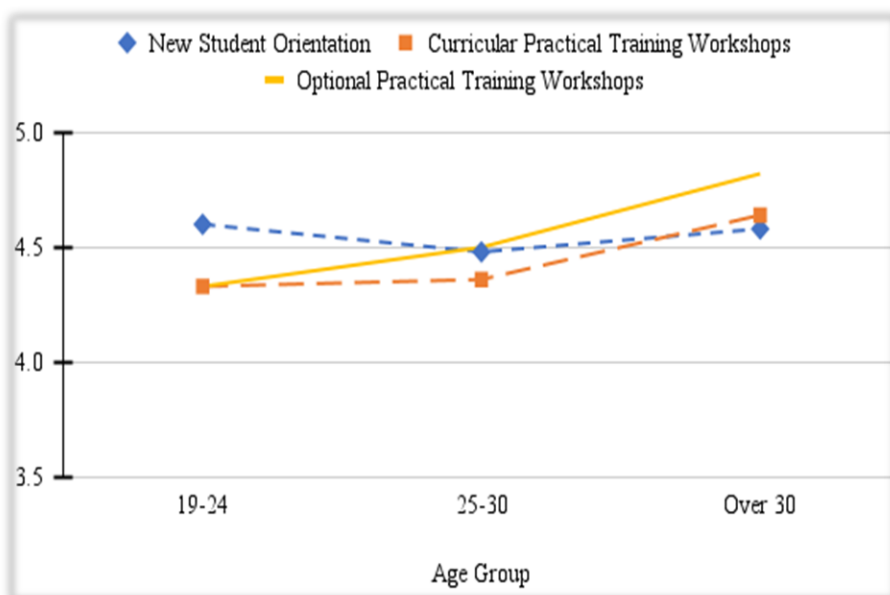
**Figure 1.***Support Programs Satisfaction by Age Group*

Figure 2 shows participants' satisfaction with on-campus social programs and off-campus excursions by age group.

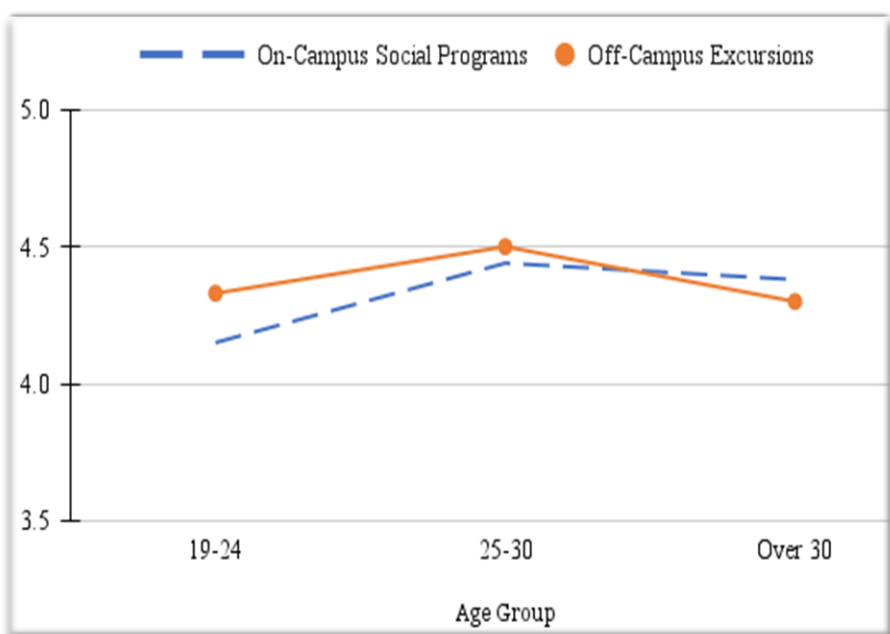
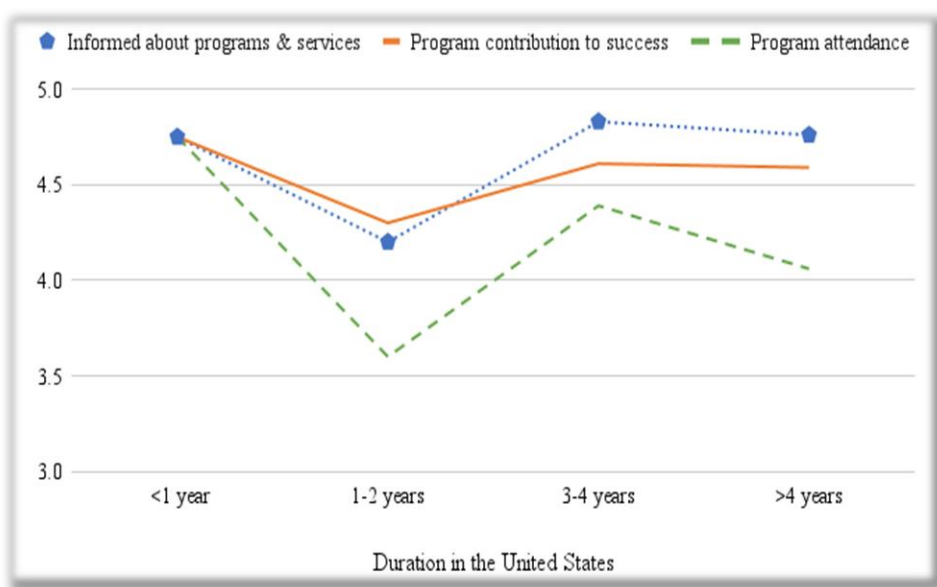
**Figure 2.***Social Programs Satisfaction by Age Group*

Figure 3 illustrates data of participants' perceptions in comparison by how long they had stayed in the United States by the time the study was conducted.

**Figure 3.**

*Perceptions of Programs and Services by Duration in US*



## Presentation of Qualitative Findings

### *Interview Participation, Responses, and Demographics*

To get a deeper understanding of how study participants perceived the programs and support services provided by their institutions, participants who completed the survey were invited to be part of a follow-up interview or be part of a focus group. Every survey respondent had the option to participate in a follow-up interview or focus group. Out of fifty-one students who responded to the survey, ten agreed to be interviewed as a follow-up to the survey. Table 14 presents respondents (R) by gender, academic level, country of origin, and continent. Of the focus group and interview participants, two of them had already graduated and were participating in Optional Practical Training (OPT) at the time of the study. The rest of the respondents were either at the undergraduate or graduate academic level (See Table 14).

**Table 14**

*Interview respondents by gender, academic level, country of origin, and continent*

Respondent	Gender	Academic Level	Country of Origin	Continent
Ann (R1)	F	UG	Germany	Europe
Rachel (R2)	F	UG	Cambodia	Asia
Mary (R3)	F	G - OPT	Bahamas	North America
Robert (R4)	M	G - OPT	Ghana	Africa
Vicky (R5)	F	G	Egypt	Africa
Aggie (R6)	F	G	Nepal	Asia
Clare (R7)	F	G	India	Asia
Katy (R8)	F	UG	Norway	Europe
Cathy (R9)	F	UG	India	Asia
Lina (R10)	F	UG	Indonesia	Asia

### **Focus Group and Interview Responses**

#### ***Orientation Program***

As expected by the researcher, among the programs accessed, orientation (ORTN) was perceived to be the most helpful according to the responses of those who were interviewed. Table 15 indicates that 32% ( $n=10$ ) of the respondents selected orientation as most valuable followed by off-campus excursion (OFF-CMPS EXCUSN) which was at 26% ( $n=8$ ) of responses. During the interview, respondents expressed how orientation was valuable to them as new students. Katy stated that “Having a student panel as part of orientation was very valuable for me because I was able to ask questions and receive answers from the student's perspective. Getting those answers made me feel comfortable since I was still new to the university and the United States.” In response, Robert said that “It was during orientation that I was able to understand my responsibilities as an international student on an F-1 visa. This program helped me keep my immigration status valid.” In agreement with Robert’s submission about immigration presentation during orientation, Lina from Indonesia noted that “The visa requirements were confusing at first but the orientation session [Immigration 101] was helpful to

clear all the doubts that would have kept me worried about making sure I keep my immigration status valid at all times.”

**Table 15**

*Programs most used per interview respondents*

Program	N	%
Sum of OPT/CPT WKSHIP	6	19%
Sum of OFF-CMPS EXCUSN	8	26%
Sum of ON-CMPS EXCUSN	7	23%
Sum of ORTN	10	32%

Table 16 illustrates how many respondents used a service at their institution. In addition to discussing which student programs were helpful, question 1a (See Appendix B) during the focus group asked the respondents to discuss specific services they recall were helpful to them as international students. Services identified as mostly used included immigration advising (IMMGTN-ADVSG), academic advising (ADMC-ADVSG), career services (CR-SVCS), and University Student Housing (UVST-HSNG).

**Table 16**

*Services Most Used by Focus Group Participants*

Service	N	%
Sum of ADMC-ADVSG	8	24%
Sum of CR-SVCS	8	24%
Sum of MNTL-HLTHSVCS	1	3%
Sum of IMMGTN-ADVSG	10	30%
Sum of UVST-HSNG	4	12%

***Immigration Advising***

Question 1 in the focus group provided respondents with an opportunity to talk about services that they found to be helpful. Although the respondents discussed many services, immigration advising was one of the services that stood out the most. As seen in Chapter 2, for

any non-American national or citizen to study in the United States, students must have a valid visa status as mandated by the Department of Homeland Security.

During the focus group, all participants expressed how having knowledge of staying in legal immigration status was critical to their life in the United States. For example, Mary (R3) from the Bahamas commented, "...I genuinely enjoyed the immigration advising services since I knew I could rely on the international office to offer current information on my visa status in the United States as an F-1 student." Evidently, all focus group participants strongly agreed with how immigration advising was important and certainly contributed to their success in the United States. Since students cannot legally stay in the United States without a valid status, logic dictated that services such as immigration advising would be deemed valuable for any international students.

### ***Accessing Programs and Services***

Participants were asked to discuss how easy it was to access programs and support services on their respective campuses. While some respondents found it easier to find services, other respondents noted how challenging it was to get used to the new system, especially during the first few weeks in the United States. For example, Clare from India said that she found it difficult to access some university support services simply because she lived far from campus. Clare stated that "While the university had the services that I needed, I found myself not being able to access them because I was living far from campus. I wish I had the opportunity to stay on campus so that I could enjoy the college experience like my peers."

In contrast to Clare's experience, while discussing how access to programs was easier for some respondents, Katy noted that "Staying on campus was very helpful and housing services were valuable. I had access to meals on campus and I could also get to the gym without a

problem. I was also able to attend most of the on-campus programs that the international office arranged. I took full advantage of being an on-campus student." The primary distinction between Clare and Katy's experiences was that one resided in university student accommodation while the other was a commuter student.

### ***Student Pre-Arrival Expectations***

One aspect of the focus group that the researcher found surprising was that all focus group participants did not have specific predetermined expectations of what programs and services they would receive after arriving in the United States. What was not evident is whether students simply were well prepared for life in the United States or students were open to whatever guidance would be available for them upon arrival. If the latter assumption is accurate, then it would reinforce the need for institutions to have an ongoing reassessment of programs and support services that cater to the needs of new and current international students. This could be achieved by conducting a pre-arrival assessment of student needs each semester.

### **Focus Group Participant Recommendations**

During the focus group, participants were given an opportunity to offer some recommendations for their institutions to provide support services for current international students and any new international students.



**Table 17***Recommendations from study participants*

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Program or Service Area</b>
Provision of airport transport for new students	Orientation Programming
Improving housing services for students	Housing Services
Arranging get to know sessions	University Engagement
Conducting wellness checks	Mental Health Services
Design and implement a peer mentoring program where new students connect with current students	Campus Connection
Add resources for health insurance and health care	General Health Services
Provide additional resources on tax Filing	Immigration Status Compliance

*Provision of airport transport for new students.* A participant expressed how airport pickups could have improved his experience during the first few days in the United States as a new student. While some institutions do provide airport pick up for international students at their initial arrival, others do not have this service available. As a case in point, Robert from Ghana expressed a desire to have been given such service to facilitate his arrival in the United States. Robert noted that “Arriving in a new country can be intimidating and knowing that you will meet someone at the airport upon arrival can make it easier and less worrying. If my institution had provided such service, I would have appreciated it and it would have made a difference in how I felt the first few days when I arrived.”

*Improving housing services for students.* This recommendation stemmed from a participant’s idea to have a program where new international students are given time to find housing either on-campus or off-campus. Aggie from Nepal noted that “The first weeks are always tough for new international students. Trying to navigate housing in a new country with a different cultural setting is never easy for students. Having a program that caters to the housing

needs of new students would be helpful to ensuring international students are well served during their transition to campus”.

*Hold get-to-know sessions.* Vicky suggested that institutions could arrange “get-to-know sessions” for students. These kinds of events would be hosted by the international student office in collaboration with the student organizations such as the International Student Association or similar student clubs. This recommendation was in response to the fact some of the respondents felt isolated as international students. Holding similar programs would encourage students to interact and expand their social network amongst themselves.

*Promote wellness check-in for students.* Katy recommended a well-thought-out program that promotes more wellness checks for all international students. She observed that some international students she had interacted with did not feel comfortable discussing their personal lives with other students or staff. Katy noted, “I felt like some of my fellow students were not able to access such services since some of them tend not to be open about their struggles.”

*Add resources for health insurance and health care.* While F-1 visa holders are not mandated to carry health insurance by the federal government, some institutions have a policy that requires all international students, regardless of visa type, to have health insurance. Because some schools require all international students to have health insurance, interview participants recommended that more clear resources should be provided for students to get a better understanding of why they must carry health insurance and how to access appropriate health insurance coverage.

*Design and implement a peer mentoring program.* Several of the focus group participants expressed the desire to be included in a peer mentoring program where new students connect with current students. They believed having a connection with another student who has more

experience with American university life would have been helpful not only during the transition phase into campus life but also after that. Aggie noted that “when I first came, I felt confused about some processes like navigating public transport because I did not have a car. Getting around was quite a challenge. If I had a peer mentor, I would have had direct guidance and been able to figure out my way around with much ease.” Most participants agreed with Aggie and provided examples of how a peer mentor program would have been valuable for them as international students.

*Provide additional Resources on tax filing.* According to the International Revenue Services (2021), all non-US citizens temporarily residing in the United States as students, trainees, scholars, teachers, researchers, exchange visitors, and cultural exchange visitors are subject to special rules concerning the taxation of their income. The International Revenue Services (IRS) mandates that all international students must submit tax paperwork to the IRS regardless of whether they are employed or not. This study’s participants noted that as with most government paperwork, tax filing can be intimidating for non-Americans. The idea of not properly filing federal paperwork can be more daunting for an international student on a visa because they would not know if improperly filed tax paperwork could trigger immigration status violations. In this regard, one participant recommended that at least each campus should provide tax filing guidance either through a qualified university staff or through a tax expert from the community.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the findings of this study, both statistically as well as qualitatively. The chapter discussed quantitative data such as Means and Standard Deviations and Pearson's Correlations. In addition, it explained how the researcher used an independent sample t-test and

one-way ANOVA analysis to explore relationships between students' social-demographic variables, attitudes about support services, and satisfaction levels with programs and services used. While there were few instances of statistically significant differences in the analysis run, mean differences were recognized, as shown in Tables 11, 12, and 13 above.

Chapter 5 will examine the findings of the study in the following section. The discussion will address each research question in connection to the study's findings, the existing literature in Chapter 2, and any other external studies on similar topics which have been conducted previously.

## CHAPTER 5: Discussion

As the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, more international students from across the world will again choose American universities for their studies. Institutions must be responsible for keeping their pledges to provide efficient services to every international student admitted. This dissertation investigated international students' attitudes toward the programs and support services provided by two public universities on the east coast of the United States. The study's findings identify the circumstances where international students appreciate programs and support services and begin a dialogue on how those services are fundamental to their ultimate success. According to the findings of this study, student success is essential not just in academics, but also in their personal and social lives.

This research intended to learn more about the kinds of programs and support services that international students found most valuable, and which they decided to utilize. The programs and services investigated varied from new student orientation activities to mental health services to workshops that prepare students for life after degree completion. Furthermore, the study looked at both on-campus and off-campus social programs. The findings derived from the study's guiding research questions will be discussed in the section below.

As indicated in the 2021 report released by the American Council on Education (ACE) titled *Toward Greater Inclusion and Success: A New Compact for International Students*, it is not enough to recruit international students if universities are unable to retain them (Glass, et al., 2021; Weissman, 2021). The report showed that while there are measures in place to boost recruitment, recruitment resources are often greater than those earmarked for international student support. Conversations about international students often center around the sector's economic impact, specifically focusing on the tuition international students pay and the money

that students end up spending while in the United States (Weissman, 2021). Such an approach oversimplifies a dynamic field and overlooks central elements of an educational institution's responsibilities toward its students. Thus, it is important to discuss and raise awareness of the resources international students need in order to be more successful in their educational journey in the United States. This study sheds additional light on some of the programs and support services that international students found to be valuable and provided additional recommendations.

### **Discussion of Study Findings**

This dissertation attempted to answer three research questions. The section below will discuss these questions in relation to the study findings and draw connections to literature external to the study. The following questions guided this research:

- (1) Do international students believe that services offered at their respective universities are beneficial to their overall success?
- (2) What type of services do universities offer to international students that are considered beneficial from the student perspective?
- (3) How satisfied are international students with the programs and services provided by institutions to assist them in their educational journey?

Addressing these questions is vital in contributing to evidence-based learning by amplifying international student voices. The experience of international students is key as universities craft enhancements to existing programs and support services.

Research Questions 1. *Do international students believe that services offered at their respective universities are beneficial to their overall success?*

There were various activities and services that participants considered valuable, which provided information to address the study's research goals. New Student Orientation, Immigration Advising, On-Campus Social Programs, and Off-Campus Excursions are examples of the programs identified by study participants as valuable. Several study participants also discussed the benefits of on-campus housing and mental health services. According to the results of this study, new student orientation was the most effective program offered, and will therefore be a primary focus of discussion. The study indicated its effectiveness resulted from the way it covered a wide range of topics related to student life. When discussing the salient elements of inclusion and success for international students in the 2021 ACE report, Glass and Helms poignantly encapsulate why institutions of learning need to be ready to support international students. The authors argue that “colleges and universities are not merely sites where students acquire knowledge, but they are dynamic social environments teeming with possibilities and opportunities for personal, interpersonal, and academic exploration” (Glass & Helms, 2021, p. 24). Programs like new student orientation offer international students the supportive space they need to start feeling like they are part of a new environment. When orientation group activities and sessions are done effectively, they foster an environment conducive to creating affinity. As discussed in Chapter 4, Katy from Norway noted that it was during the student panel at her orientation that she started to feel comfortable as a new international student because she could connect with other students. Thus, it is critical that all international students have social support networks to not only aid their transition, but also to feel ongoing support throughout their time in the United States (Bursting, Zachry, & Takeuchi, 2018). The findings of this study support the idea that new student programs such as orientation are critical to a student’s life and that such services need to be provided in a well-considered manner to ensure their efficacy. The data from

both study sites indicated that new international students found orientation to be valuable and that their respective universities conducted orientation in a way that was beneficial to the students. While the students found the orientation to be helpful overall, a few of them did not attach the same value to some elements of new student orientation. According to the participants, certain sessions provided information that felt too generalized to be relevant or provided details about the immigration system that was overwhelming at the time. However, overall, the students from both study sites agreed that orientation was one of the most beneficial programs during their time as a student in the United States and that it helped set a tone for their academic experience at an American university.

Research Question 2. *What type of services do universities offer to international students that are considered beneficial from the student perspective?*

This study's findings revealed that universities offer a wide range of programs and support services to students. According to the sample population, New Student Orientation was the most useful program, as described in the preceding research question. Other services offered to international students included immigration and academic advising. International students valued both on-campus and off-campus activities, according to the data. Student activities included game nights, movie nights, and local and regional trips. In discussing the on-campus and off-campus excursions, participants expressed how important these excursions were for their social life. Since most international students do not have close relatives in the United States, they communicated how student trips and other similar social programs allow them to make new friends and to expand their social networks. One participant noted that it was during her first trip to a nearby city that she made friends with another international student. Their friendship allowed both students to feel less isolated and homesick.



Aside from on-campus social programs and off-campus excursions, study findings revealed that career readiness services were critical to students seeking internships. These internships or training experiences were understood by students to improve their prospects of obtaining Optional Practical Training (OPT) after graduation. Research participants emphasized career preparedness as navigating the job search system in the United States can be especially difficult for international students. Résumé evaluation, cover letter writing, and practice interviews were just a few of the job-readiness services highlighted by the students. Participants who used the career readiness services stated that while they were comfortable writing cover letters and résumés before arriving in the United States, they found it difficult to manage the job search process in the country. They indicated that they benefited from receiving advice from career services that focused on their specific circumstances as international students.

For the off-campus excursions, participants who had spent less than one year in the United States were highly informed about programs and services. However, as participants got to the second year, their degree of being informed dropped (See Figure 3). Notably, of all the programs the students rated, off-campus excursions were the only category with responses that had a mean value below 4.0 (See Table 12). This mean value was for the subgroup of the length of stay in the United States. One could hypothesize that the participants who had taken part in the excursions during their first year were unimpressed by similar activities in comparison to their counterparts who had just arrived and were more excited about taking part in off-campus trips and related activities. This outlier in the data presented offers an area for further examination in future research.

Research Question 3. *How satisfied are international students with the programs and support services provided by institutions to assist them in their educational journey?*

Overall, the study's findings suggested that participants were satisfied with the programs and support services offered by their institutions. Data showed that students were most satisfied with New Student Orientation (NSO), Curricular Practical Training (CPT), and Optional Practical Training (OPT). As illustrated in Figure 1, data shows that participants within the age range of 19-24 were more satisfied by orientation. The satisfaction level slightly dropped for the participants within the age range of 25-30. However, satisfaction increased for participants who were over 30 years of age. The difference in the degree of satisfaction with orientation was expected since participants within the 19-24 age range would have typically needed those transitional programs and services more than students who were older and probably have prior college experiences.

As seen in Chapter 4, participants who were over 30 years were expected to benefit from both CPT and OPT workshops because that age range would typically fall within students who are either in the middle of their academic program or are about to graduate and need practical training opportunities. As seen in Table 10, there was a correlation between program attendance and program satisfaction. A higher attendance in both CPT and OPT workshops would account for a higher satisfaction level compared to younger students within the 19-24 age range. This means both CPT and OPT workshops were meeting students' expectations and needs.

Other types of programs that participants rated were on-campus social programs and off-campus excursions. On-campus social programs included activities like game nights, coffee or tea times, and movie nights. Off-campus excursions included local and regional trips to major cities, amusement parks, and local attractions. Like other programs that have already been discussed, male students were more satisfied by on-campus social programs in comparison to their female counterparts (See Table 12).

Student satisfaction ratings make it clear that students valued what the schools offered in terms of support programs and services. These data corroborate the notion advanced in Chapter 3 that international students value programs that cater to their particular needs. Students clearly articulated the social, academic, and professional impact of programming. They also offer strong support for the value of such university services in international student retention. As institutions continue to recruit more international students, it is vital to boost support for programs that improve international students' educational experiences in the United States and to therefore help facilitate student success.

### **Takeaways for Practice**

The findings of this study highlighted the need for programs and support services for international students in the United States. Data from this study showed that international students value programs that enhance their experience as students. It was clear that students will utilize programs if they are available. This section will discuss the implications of this study for three areas: (1) International Programs Offices, (2) International Students, and (3) the field of Public Administration.

**International Program Offices.** One of the areas offices of international programs and services might enhance relates to whether program design is intentionally inclusive. Based on the findings, it was evident that students who identified as male were more engaged in programs than their female counterparts. While it is not clear why there was this difference, it might be valuable to offer targeted advertising to female students since the male students were already more engaged. Higher participation of female students would elevate diversity in program participation among students.

Quantitative data indicated that while the age group 19-25 felt well-informed about the programs and services provided at each study site, that same age group was attending in lower percentages than their counterparts in the older age groups. While the information about programs and services was effectively communicated to younger students, perhaps those programs and services were not as appealing to them. Universities could investigate ways of fully understanding why this gap in knowledge versus participation within this subgroup of the international student population.

One of the ways in which international offices can make some of the social programs more engaging for all students is by involving students in the planning stage of these programs. As the data shows, some students were informed of the programs but did not have a say in what kind of programs were offered. Chapter 4 demonstrates that students are eager to contribute to the types of programs services the university can design for international students. The chapter showed that the students have insightful recommendations. It is arguably true and that student participation in programs and services would likely increase if these recommendations are implemented because students were actively engaged from program formulation to implementation.

**International Students.** Data showed participants within the age range of 19-25 had a lower appreciation of the programs and services provided. However as seen earlier, the same student group had a lower attendance rate of the programs and services universities offered. For this age group to fully appreciate the value of the available programs and support services, they would need to explore offered programs and services before deciding if they are worth investing time in. Some participants judged programs without participating in them, thus demonstrating that their perception was not based on personal experiences. Especially for international students,

there is a clear value in creating an appropriate amount of space outside their classroom experience for programs and services offered to them. As indicated in Chapter 4, some international students got an opportunity to make social connections while on student excursions. These connections helped them feel less homesick and contributed to their overall success. An important takeaway from this study for international students is that when institutions design programs and support services, students should know that their voice matters. They have valuable insight to offer as universities continuously examine how to best allocate resources in support of international student success. Self-advocacy will be key to ensuring that whatever programs and services universities offer can be shaped by international student needs.

**Public Administration.** It is imperative for government officials to develop policies that make American education appealing to students all around the world. While the United States remains one of the most popular locations for international students, several immigration rules continue to dissuade others. For example, Chapter 2 showed that the visa application procedure can be costly for some students, even as admittance to the United States is not assured. The more stringent visa restrictions grow, the less interested prospective students will be in studying in the United States. Once students receive the appropriate visa, there may be ongoing challenges in maintaining their legal status. While academic institutions endeavor to guarantee that all international students maintain legal status in the country, there are times when this is not the case. These cases can occur due to neglect on the part of the student or the advisor. While students can seek for immigration status reinstatement within the United States, the stress of not knowing whether a case will be accepted by USCIS can have a long-term detrimental influence on students' personal and academic life. Thus, the formulation of more student-friendly

immigration and public policies would contribute to the success of international students in the United States.

### **Limitations of the Study**

It is important to address any limitations that may have impacted the overall conclusions of the study. In the section that follows, the researcher will highlight some of the study's limitations and detail how those constraints might have influenced the study.

***Imbalance in focus group participants.*** There was an over-representation of those who identified as female in the focus group interview part of the study (See Table 15). This limitation is of greater importance when examining the quantitative data analysis that indicated that males utilized services and programs more than their female counterparts. Since males were more likely to participate, they may have offered unexamined experiential insights in follow-up and focus group interviews. While it was good to learn more about how study participants felt about programs and services, a deeper conversation from those who participated in the programs would have offered particularly relevant data during the follow-up interviews.

***Timing of Study.*** The timing of the study made it difficult to attract more participants for the follow-up focus group. Because in-person gatherings had to be discontinued due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the researcher depended on Zoom video conferencing technology, also known as Zoom, to conduct follow-up interviews and focus groups. The Zoom format presented an impediment because participants were constantly utilizing the same platform for class sessions, school projects, social meetings, and staying connected with their families. Participants expressed their feelings of “zoom fatigue” during each session. The researcher believes that working with already over-stretched students might have influenced their level of engagement

during the focus group. The researcher thought that if the focus groups had been held in person, the degree of participation would have been different.

***Limitations in Generalizability.*** Out of 201 eligible participants, 51 chose to participate in the study, thus resulting in a response rate of 25 percent. A greater response rate would have enhanced the generalizability of this study since it would have been a more accurate depiction of the demographic under investigation. While a 25% response rate is adequate for this type of study, the researcher feels that higher participation by international students might have improved the study's conclusions.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Data from this study consistently showed that graduate-level students engaged in social programs more than their undergraduate counterparts. This finding was both enlightening and surprising since one would have expected the undergraduate level students to be more involved in social programs provided by their institutions. As undergraduates are less likely than graduate students to have existing networks like spouses or classmates from a previous degree program or professional experience, the assumption would be that undergraduate students would be more likely to engage in activities to build those social networks. Additional research could be conducted to explore why graduate students were more actively engaged in social programs in comparison to undergraduate students. It would be valuable to look at motives and causes, behind higher participation rates by graduate-level students. Additionally, one could explore why a large number of undergraduate students were not as engaged in social programs as they were expected to. Such findings can guide institutions to design programs and services that cater to both academic levels to ensure students are getting needed services to build networks to support their academic journey.

Additionally, the findings showed that male-identifying participants had a higher participation rate compared to their female-identified students. It would be valuable to explore the reason behind this disparity in gender participation. During the study, it would be helpful to explore why males chose to take advantage of the offered programs more than females. Is this overrepresentation due to personal preferences relating to the type of programs offered? Finding answers to such questions can help institutions plan for increased inclusion and participation in future programs and services.

Due to the sample size of this study, a similar study could be conducted with a larger sample to compare findings and verify the generalizability of the study's findings. While a 25% response rate was acceptable, a higher response rate may illuminate some of the unanswered questions derived from the data. Questions that more participation might answer include those related to participation rates among students in the younger age groups. Also, it would be interesting to carry out the same study during a non-pandemic year to determine whether student participation would be higher and to investigate if they would highlight different programs and services offered by their institutions.

## **Conclusion**

As international student enrollment increases again after over eighteen months of uncertainty due to COVID-19, universities must continue to devise means to ensure that they have necessary services in place for international students who choose to come to the United States to pursue their education. Quality support services will not only enhance students' academic life but also enrich their cultural experiences throughout their stay in the United States (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011). While some institutions are striving to comprehensively internationalize their campuses, much more work needs to be done moving forward in



international student services. International students noted the value of New Student Orientation, a program that addresses their practical needs while incorporating elements of cross-cultural encounters. For programs to be truly effective and valued by students, they need to be practical for a student's current needs, as indicated by the high value of OPT and CPT workshops for students most likely to have an imminent need for such guidance. Additionally, programs will benefit by engaging international students as active contributors in the development and execution of what is offered. To accomplish these goals, universities need to invest more financial and human resources intentionally and deliberately in internationalization initiatives that can foster intercultural diversification of campuses. The findings of this study provide a direction for how universities can better serve their international student population thus fostering more personal, social, and academic success.

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## Appendix A

### Survey Instruments

#### Demographic Information

1. Gender Identity [Male, Female, Other]
2. Age group [under 20, 20-24, 25 and over]
3. Country of Origin
4. Current Institution [Site A, Site B]

#### Qualifying Questions

5. Are you currently on an F- or J- non-immigrant visa? [ Yes, No]
6. Are you currently enrolled full-time (minimum 12 credits)? [Yes, No]
7. Length of time in the US [Less than one year, 1-2 years, 2-3 years, 4 or more years]
8. What is your Academic Level
  - a. Undergraduate student
  - b. Master's Students
  - c. Doctoral Student

Perception to programs and services offered at your institution [Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, strongly disagree]

9. I feel well informed about the programs and services my university provides to international students

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

10. Programs my university provides to international students contribute to my success as an international student

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

11. I have attended most of the programs my university offers to international students

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Undecided
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

Please indicate your satisfaction with programs and services on campus [very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, not applicable]

12. New International Student Orientation

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied
- e. Not applicable

13. Curricular Practical Training (CPT) Workshops

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied
- e. Not applicable

13. Optional Practical Training (OPT) Workshops

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied
- e. Not applicable

14. On-campus programs (game nights, movies, coffee hours, etc.)

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied
- e. Not applicable

15. Off-campus excursions (Trips, picnics, sports activities, etc.-if applicable)

- a. Very satisfied

- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied
- e. Not applicable

16. University Housing services

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied
- e. Not applicable

17. Academic Advising services

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied
- e. Not applicable

18. Career readiness services

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied
- e. Not applicable

19. Mental Wellness/Counseling Services

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Dissatisfied
- d. Very dissatisfied
- e. Not applicable

20. Are you willing to participate in a 15-20-minute follow-up focus group or interview regarding your experience? [Yes, No]

## **Appendix B**

### **Focus Group Interview Guide**

My name is Charity Alinda, and I am a doctoral student at West Chester University. I am studying the Perception of International Students Toward Programs and Services offered by High Education Institutions in the mid-Atlantic Region of the United States. Your insight will be beneficial to the field of international education throughout the United States.

To facilitate accurate notetaking, I would like to record our conversation today. This was covered in the consent form that was signed when you participated in the online survey. As the consent form stated, I would like to “make clear” that all information discussed will be held in strict confidence and your participation is voluntary. Also, there is no intention of harm during this focus group. The focus group is planned for approximately 20-40 minutes. I have several questions related to your experience as an international student here on campus.

#### **Questions**

1. Could you tell me if you believe that your transition to the United States was well-supported by the university?
  - a. What specific services do you recall being helpful to you?
2. What would have been helpful as you transitioned to the United States as a student?
3. How have you navigated the international student services on campus?
  - a. How long did it take?
4. What types of services or programs have you used on campus to support your life as a student?
5. In what ways are the utilized services beneficial to you as a student?
6. How do you learn about the programs and services offered to you as an international student?
7. What kind of programs or services did you expect to have as an international student?
8. What advice would you provide to the university as it continues to design programs and services for international students?
9. How would you describe your awareness of the programs provided to international students on campus?
10. Of all the items we have talked about today, what is most valuable to you?

#### **Probes**

1. Would you explain further?
2. Would you give an example?

#### **Closure**

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences as an international student. The information shared will help university administrators evaluate programs and support to help international students. Feel free to contact me at any time with any

questions or concerns that you may have about this research. You are also welcome to review the completed dissertation if you desire.

Thank you again!



## Appendix C IRB Approval Notice



Office of Research and Sponsored Programs | West Chester University | Wayne Hall  
West Chester, PA 19383 | 610-436-3557 | [www.wcupa.edu](http://www.wcupa.edu)

TO: Charity Alinda and Kristen Crossney

FROM: Nicole M. Cattano, Ph.D.  
Co-Chair, WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)

DATE: 1/19/2021

**Protocol ID # 20210119A**

*This Protocol ID number must be used in all communications about this project with the IRB.*

**Project Title:** The Perception of International Students on Programs and Services offered at two Regional Public Universities

**Date of Approval:** 1/19/2021

☒ **Expedited Approval**

This protocol has been approved under the new updated 45 CFR 46 common rule that went in to effect January 21, 2019. As a result, this project will not require continuing review. Any revisions to this protocol that are needed will require approval by the WCU IRB. Upon completion of the project, you are expected to submit appropriate closure documentation. Please see [www.wcupa.edu/research/irb.aspx](http://www.wcupa.edu/research/irb.aspx) for more information.

*Any adverse reaction by a research subject is to be reported immediately through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs via email at [irb@wcupa.edu](mailto:irb@wcupa.edu).*

**Signature:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole M. Cattano".

Co-Chair of WCU IRB

WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
IORG#: IORG0004242  
IRB#: IRB00005030  
FWA#: FWA00014155

## Appendix D Informed Consent Form

**Project Title: The Perception of International Students Toward Programs and Support Services Offered by Higher Education Institutions in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States**

Investigator(s): Charity Alinda; Kristen Crossney

Project Overview:

Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Charity Alinda as part of his Doctoral Dissertation to investigate The Perception of International Students Toward Programs and Support Services Offered by Higher Education Institutions in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States. Your participation will take about 15 minutes or less to complete this survey. This research will help contribute to the findings that may be used by universities to develop effective programs and services that impact how institutions attend to the needs of international students. Understanding the perspectives of international students can help direct universities as they make decisions about limited resources informed by the priorities that are articulated by the students.

The research project is being done by Charity Alinda as part of his Doctoral Dissertation to investigate The Perception of International Students Toward Programs and Support Services Offered by Higher Education Institutions in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Charity Alinda any questions to help you understand this study. If you don't want to be a part of this study, it won't affect any services from your institution. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**
  - investigate the perception of international students on programs and services offered at two regional public universities
2. **If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:**
  - Complete this survey
  - This study will take 15 minutes or less of your time.
3. **Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
  - No
4. **Is there any risk to me?**
  - None
5. **Is there any benefit to me?**
  - Other benefits may include contributing to the findings that may be used by universities to develop effective programs and services that impact how institutions attend to the needs of international students. Understanding the

perspectives of international students can help direct universities as they make decisions about limited resources informed by the priorities that are articulated by the students

**6. How will you protect my privacy?**

- The session will **not** be recorded.
- Your records will be private. Only Charity Alinda, Kristen Crossney, and the IRB will have access to your name and responses.
- Your name will **not** be used in any reports.
- Records will be stored:
  - Password Protected File/Computer
- Records will be destroyed 10 years after study completion.

**7. Do I get paid to take part in this study?**

- No

**8. Who do I contact in case of research related injury?**

- For any questions with this study, contact:
  - **Primary Investigator:** Charity Alinda at 484-753-9079 or calinda@wcupa.edu
  - **Faculty Sponsor:** Kristen Crossney at 610-430-5838 or kcrossney@wcupa.edu

**9. What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?**

- Not applicable.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject/Participant Signature

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

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